

## Players Can Change!

The MLB playoffs are my favorite time of year. People pay attention more, care more, and the pressure is greater. This year the stakes have become higher with the one game wild card format. Most would agree that the best team often wins out over seven games but what if you only get one shot?

Last night Joe Saunders of the Baltimore Orioles was chosen by his manager Buck Showalter to take the mound with his team's season on the line. While a left hander like Saunders seems like a viable option given the prowess of the Texas Rangers running game, many members in the media questioned Showalter's decision and considered it to be way to risky. Why? Saunders career record in Arlington, Texas was previously 0-6 with an ERA of 9.36.

There is more pressure on Showalter at this time of year too. He had one chance to make a right decision. How could he believe in Saunders when the numbers suggest certain failure?

"It's an opportunity," said Showalter during the afternoon press conference. "Joe has pitched well there at times too if you look at all the numbers beyond wins and losses. Players can change. Players change!"

Clearly, Saunders was shaky to start, perhaps jittery walking the leadoff hitter, and then fell behind 3-0 before allowing a 3-2 single to start the game. He had been acquired from Arizona in August after losing 9 of 12 starts but Joe had changed. In spite of allowing 8 baserunners he limited Texas, a team that had led the Major Leagues this season by scoring 800 plus runs to only one run in 5 2/3 innings. He maintained his composure, stayed in the moment by living in a pitch-by-pitch process, and consequently induced several double play balls at critical points in the game. He gave his team a chance to win by keeping it tight until turning it over to their capable bullpen. In doing so, he outdueled his counterpart Yu Darvish, whom the Rangers invested \$111.7 million in the off season.

What I want you as a young developing player to take away from Saunders performance last night is to consider how did he change? Did he continue to make improvements on a daily basis in spite of adversity? Was he able to recognize the power of the present moment? Was he willing to put his failures behind him, make adjustments, stay committed to a plan, and maintain a proper strength and conditioning regimen? Was he more committed to hard work and more focused on staying in the moment regardless of other's perceptions of him? Did he get caught up in the outcome and results or focus on the one thing that he can control- his effort? Mentally, did he view his start last night as a chance to fail or as his coach put it an opportunity?

"We view it as sudden life, not sudden death," said the optimistic Showalter afterwards. His team was more than 20 games out of first place last year at this time. Sunday they will host their first playoff game since 1997.

The experts knew that Joe Saunders and the Orioles were supposed to lose last night. His coach had one chance to make the right call. Why did his manager who has been fired in the past and can be fired again place such belief and faith in him? Why did his teammates believe in him even though they were on the road in front of a packed crowd? Most importantly, why did Joe believe in himself when the lights shined the brightest?

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