

## **With the Start of Football, Let's Talk Baseball!**

Last January, the BCS National Championship game pitted Alabama against Notre Dame. Each team had more than four weeks to prepare for the game- to review hours of film, take hundreds of practice reps, heal nagging injuries, and pound the weights. But when it came time for Alabama coach Nick Saban to motivate his team to repeat as National Champions, he didn't talk about football. Instead, he talked baseball!

And who was Saban's source of inspiration? None other than New York Yankee closer Mariano Rivera. Saban showed members of the Crimson Tide a video of Rivera while pointing out the times he struggled because he was trying to be a perfectionist. The lesson Saban was teaching his players was all about the importance of focus and the mental side of the game.

*"When he's in the bullpen, he sees the crowd, he hears the crowd, he knows sometimes that he's been getting a lot of positive self gratification for what he does and sometimes getting a lot of negative self gratification for what he does," Saban said. "But when he runs out and they hand him the ball, he's got one focus; he's not worried about the crowd, he's not worried about any of the external factors. One focus: Three outs; how am I going to get three outs?"*

Saban's lesson about the great Mariano Rivera highlights the dramatic difference between an athlete who is *process* oriented in their thinking as compared to an athlete who is *result* oriented in their thinking, and just how much an athlete's self talk and thought process can impact their performance. In fact, Saban even hung a sign in the Alabama locker room that reads:

### **Process**

### **Outcome**

Process over outcome! If you want to be a pro, focus on the process. If you want to be out of the tournament then focus on the outcome!

In addition to Rivera, an example of a process oriented baseball player would be for a hitter to first clear their mind and breathe thinking only about the present moment. Then, become sharply focused only on seeing the ball clearly, trying to separate ball from strike, and ultimately put a good swing on the ball without trying to do too much.

Conversely, a result oriented player would be telling himself, "I have to get a hit," "I have to drive these runs in," "If I get two hits today, I'll be batting .300" This player struggles to relax and grips the bat too hard. His mind is working so fast that he is completely distracted from recognizing the pitch. In a desperate attempt to achieve a result, he tries to do too much and fails to stay within his own capabilities.

University of Texas coach Augie Garrido once told his players, *"Get the results out of your head! The game doesn't give you what you want. The game doesn't give you what you need. It's just there, giving you an opportunity."*

Justin Dehmer, creator of the 1 Pitch Warrior system designed to enhance mental conditioning places an enormous emphasis on focusing only on "the moment." He constantly reminds his baseball players to, *"Win this Pitch!"*

I would venture to say that come this weekend Nick Saban will be telling his players to, *"Win this Play!"*