

Almost Spring, 2015

Dear Wahoos,

Even with the winter's chill still in the air, you can feel it.

Baseball is coming.

And even though the snow and ice are keeping us off the field, the most important decision you will make as a ballplayer can still happen right now—today. Last season is now a distant memory. It's time for you decide what kind of player you want to be *this year*.

And if you're looking to get the most out of the game, it's time for you to become a **grinder**.

What is a grinder? For some, that daily routine of a long baseball season can get to a point where it feels more like a job, or as it's also known, a "grind." That's where the term *grinder* comes from, but it's come to mean so much more in a baseball sense.

When a batter fouls off tough pitch after tough pitch to draw a walk or move the runner over with a productive out, that's known as "grinding out and at bat." In a SportsCenter era where the diving catch, monster blast, and power K are front-and-center, the art of the grind is often all-but-forgotten.

Often being a grinder is confused with being a "hard worker." Putting in that extra effort is great, but that doesn't make you a grinder. Instead it means that when you are on the field, and sometimes even when you're not, you are looking for ways to better your understanding, your attitude, and, most importantly, your team.

Baseball is a game made for grinders. It rewards those willing to see the value in the little things with a level of appreciation for the sport that no one else has. So before you pick up that bat or glove, take a look at this and consider whether you might be able to get more out of the game; not just more success, or understanding, but more *fun*. Because, more than anything else, that's why we play ball.

Looking forward to seeing you all back on the field SOON,

CoachN

Coach TJ

Coach Mark

Coach Steve

A Grinder's Guide

Grinders Win Every Inning: A grinder doesn't stare at the scoreboard. He starts each inning as if it were a 0-0 ballgame. *Win Every Inning* allows a player to push past that tough inning, or not get too caught up in that great one, and start fresh with a new goal. By keeping the focus small, the grinder gets the most out of every moment of the game; be it game-by-game, inning-by-inning, or even pitch-by-pitch.

Grinders Pick Their Teammates Up When They Fail: Everyone loves to high-five the player who made the big play. But it's that little pat on the back or fist bump to the player who *didn't* get the job done that defines a grinder. A grinder finds a way to let his teammate know that they can't wait to see them get back out there and help the team.

Grinders Lift Their Teammates Up When They Succeed: When it comes to celebrating success, a grinder also goes the extra mile. He's the one coming up with team handshakes or awards to make a player feel even more special. Whether it's "Bazooka Blows" where a great hit earns a player a piece of gum, or "Dirty Shirt" awards where a player draws a star with some dirt on another player's jersey to mark the good play the baseball way, grinders find ways to lift the player and the team to new levels.

Grinders Take Their Job in the Dugout as Seriously as Their Job on the Field: A grinder never sits—that "bench" thing is just a little table to put your glove and water bottle on. He's the one racing out of the dugout without the coach even asking to help warm up a pitcher or an outfielder who needs a partner. A grinder is also having *serious* fun. He's the player who comes up with the new chant for the player coming to bat—something that gives him a little grin to relax (but not distract) him in a big situation. A grinder can come up with the rally cap that everyone wears when the team is down, or the lucky song or gesture that gives the team the mojo it needs.

Grinders Are More than 'Fans on the Field': To the untrained eye, baseball looks like a very "stand-around" game, just waiting for the play to happen. But if that's the way you play, you're not really playing baseball—you're just a fan on the field. A grinder can make a great play happen *before the ball is ever hit*.

Grinders See the Whole Field: Seeing the field starts before the first pitch is ever thrown. A grinder is not only watching the pitcher warm up, but the fielders, too. Once he steps up to the plate, a grinder takes a look at where the fielders are positioned. While there's no doubt that even the best hitters will still hit lots of line drives right at a fielder, a grinder will scratch out a few hits others wouldn't.

Grinders Like it When the Game Gets Tough: We all want to succeed, but the *experience* of facing a difficult situation is something a grinder embraces, because the game is at its best when the challenge is the hardest. It is the only way to see what you can do and what you can do to get better.

Grinders Practice the Way They Play: A grinder knows there's plenty of time before and after practice to talk about Clash of Clans or SportsCenter highlights. Practice time *is* play time—but playing baseball. Grinders also love to practice not only what they're best at, but also what they're worst at. They see practice as the best time to try and *fail*.

Grinders Don't Fear the Whiff, They Learn from It: Unlike a grounder or pop out, a whiff gives you another chance to try again (unless there are two strikes—see foul ball section below for that one). Whiffs allow you to be aggressive early in the count, make adjustments, and force the pitcher to throw more pitches. And in the cage, the swing-and-miss gives you the chance to make the adjustments you'll need to make contact during the game. Grinders use the whiff, they don't fear it.

Grinders Don't Fear Outs, They Fear Being Unproductive: What motivates a grinder is not getting a hit every time up, it's having a quality at bat. In some situations, that might mean hitting a hard line drive that hopefully finds a hole or a gap. For others, it might mean running a 3-ball count on a particularly tough pitcher, or putting a good bunt down. There are victories to be had in every at bat, and they don't always rely on a hit (or even reaching base) to feel like a victory.

At Bat and in the Field, Grinders Value Quickness More than Power...: Unlike other sports, going "all out" in baseball doesn't necessarily produce results. Instead of *hard*, a grinder thinks *quick*. Quick feet on defense enable you to be in a better throwing position and able to more quickly release the ball. At the plate, when a grinder gets beaten on a good fastball, he doesn't look to swing harder. Instead he shortens up and maximizes his chances at contact. Because once the ball is in play, you never know what might happen.

...But on the Mound, Grinders Value Power More than Quickness: Quickness, however, can be a pitcher's worst enemy. The windup of a good pitcher often looks like it begins in slow motion, as the grinder focuses on repeating his mechanics the same way every pitch. The grinder knows that you pitch with your *entire body*; his legs, core, and chest are as important as his arm.

A Grinder Sees the Pitch Before it's Ever Thrown: Hitting a pitched baseball is the hardest thing to do in all of sports...period. As the pitching gets better, the ability to react after the ball is in the air evaporates. A grinder will never take a pitch without having stepped and loaded first. He uses his "Spider Sense" to see a strike before it's ever thrown. He expects to swing, not to take.

Grinders Love Foul Balls: A grinder knows that a nine or ten-pitch walk can have far more of an impact on an inning, and a game, than a first pitch home run. Having a "Spider Sense" mentality when hitting often helps to produce more foul balls and fewer called 3rd strikes. Anticipating the strike and adjusting to a tough pitch will allow hitters to make contact on balls they may have either taken or realized too late were too close not to swing at. More foul balls equal more opportunities to get the strike you see in your mind, and do some real damage when you get it.

Grinders Pause, Whiners Complain: When a good catcher catches a pitch he thinks is a strike and doesn't hear the umpire's bellow immediately, he simply holds the ball in place for another second or two. This little pause tells the umpire all you need to say without expressing a word. The grinder takes that same philosophy everywhere on the field. If it's a bad call or a big error by a teammate—and especially when he makes the big error himself—a grinder uses the pause *as* his reaction, he doesn't pause *then* react.

Grinders Always Want One More Rep: One more pitch. One more swing. One more play. One more inning. Once you've left the field, it's time to relax, but until then, a grinder hopes the game lasts forever.

Grinders Get Dirty: A grinder's goal is to make his mother squirm when she takes his uniform out of the hamper. Grass, dirt, chalk, holes, scuff marks, and even the occasional drop of blood are badges of a job well done. If a grinder thinks he might even have a chance to make a play in the field, he's diving. A grinder thinks he's going to slide unless a coach says otherwise.

Grinders Love the Position They Can't Play: Even if you're the shortstop now, there may be someone on your next team who is better than you over there. No matter what your size, speed, quickness, or strength, a grinder will always look for opportunities to play and improve at *every* position on the diamond. His answer to the question, "Where do you play?" is always, "Wherever you need me, coach."

Grinders Go With What Works That Day: We all have off days. It is on these days that a grinder separates himself. Whether it is slowing down to throw strikes, knowing that today you may get hit a little harder, or shortening that swing and just trying to put a ball in play, a grinder looks to help the team with what he is, not what he thinks he should be.

Grinders Love to Bunt: Grinders understand that sometimes a 30-foot bloop is actually more effective than a 300-foot bullet. Grinders see that just the threat of a bunt changes the way the infield has to play. A bunt gets into the pitcher's head, as they know they'll have to be jumping off the mound to make a play. Bunts move runners up. Bunts start rallies. Bunting brings in big runs late in the game. Though bunting is as much of a skill as hitting, and often players don't want to spend the time in the cages when they could be taking a few extra cuts. A grinder knows better.

It's the Style, Not the Volume, That Makes a Great Grinder: Grinders come in all shapes, sizes, and volumes. It's not whether you're the quiet kid or the class clown—it's about the attitude you have toward the game and your teammates.

Grinders Do Something to Get Better Every Day, Not Just Game Day: Even on off days, grinders still have baseball on the brain. They join a basketball team because they know that will help with their stamina and eye-hand coordination. Or maybe they do a few pushups and crunches during a commercial to get a little stronger. When they're watching baseball, it's not just to see who wins, but looking at a specific part of the game to pick up a tip. Those announcers are actually the *teachers* of your favorite subject.

So now it's your turn to decide. Hard work can make you a better pitcher, fielder, or hitter. But only the right attitude can make you a better *ballplayer*.

So what kind of ballplayer do you want to be?