

Staying In The Batter Box

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Posted by [Nathaniel Francis](#)

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Childhood Sport

I've played more baseball (and softball) than all other sports combined in my life. I started in my home town's midget league at the age of six and continued through the JV high school team and then on-and-off with community and church softball leagues until about four years ago. I enjoy playing, not necessarily watching the sport. The flow, strategy, and varied skills it takes to play baseball well are the early basis for my sense of competition (along with chess, but that's another story).

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admin/includes/ckeditor/plugins/showblocks/images/block_p.png"); background-position: left top; padding-left: 8px;">My mentor in my earliest stages of the game was the same guy that taught me how to ride a bike by throwing me into a tree, my dad (no kidding). He used the same intentionally aggressive approach to teach me baseball. Especially when it came to fielding aggressive hits and batting. /www.francaith.com/modules/contentbox-

admin/includes/ckeditor/plugins/showblocks/images/block_p.png"); background-position: left top; padding-left: 8px;">Self Preservation Is The Enemy! /www.francaith.com/modules/contentbox-admin/includes/ckeditor/plugins/showblocks/images/block_p.png"); background-position: left top; padding-left: 8px;">Self preservation gets in the way of good baseball. A hard line drive or erratically bouncing grounder can leave quite the bruise is mishandled. The fortitude required to put oneself in the ball's path and field it properly is the opposite of the natural human inclination of self preservation. Our brains are wired to keep us safe. /www.francaith.com/modules/contentbox-admin/includes/ckeditor/plugins/showblocks/images/block_p.png"); background-position: left top; padding-left: 8px;">This natural tendency is even harder to control when batting. Once I progressed from midget league to little league, the most important aspect of the game changed. Pitching went from my kind and gentle coach gently tossing the ball towards the plate underhanded while encouraging me to swing to a kid my age (and almost as awkward as me) throwing erratic pitches towards me as hard as he could muster with the hope that I would, in fact, **not** hit the ball at all! Add to that the completely natural inclination towards self preservation and you get a rather comical display of children jumping away from hard thrown pitches in what appears to be a staged game of baseball. Yes, in many ways little league was more awkward than midget league, even without the "pitcher's helper" role (which I still don't understand).

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admin/includes/ckeditor/plugins/showblocks/images/block_p.png"); background-position: left top; padding-left: 8px;">Master of Fortitude /www.francaianath.com/modules/contentbox-admin/includes/ckeditor/plugins/showblocks/images/block_p.png"); background-position: left top; padding-left: 8px;">My dad purposed himself to efficiently train me past the awkward stage of the self preservation of the batter vs the hyper incompetence of 10-year-old fastballs. Since I wasn't a pitcher (left-handed and quite the sprinter), all he had to teach me was fortitude.

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admin/includes/ckeditor/plugins/showblocks/images/block_p.png"); background-position: left top; padding-left: 8px;">So, we practiced the batter thing in a role play style. He played the pitcher and I the batter going through various scenarios. We talked about what to look for, what to be careful of, and most of all - staying in the batter box! Then, he actually pitched to me and things got real. That was the day I learned the hard way that the only significant difference between my dad and the hyper incompetent 10-year-olds I would be facing competitively was size. Well, and strength. I remember chanting the mantra "stay in the batter box, stay in the batter box" as that full-grown-man thrown fastball hit me square in my right hip (left-handed, remember?). Then the screaming started. It was mostly my mother screaming at my father regarding his "irresponsible" training technique.

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admin/includes/ckeditor/plugins/showblocks/images/block_p.png"); background-position: left top; padding-left: 8px;">There were two things that came from that experience. The first was a very large bruise on my right hip that smarted for the next few weeks. The second was a sense of fortitude I gained as a batter that carried with me even to today. Have I been hit? Yes. Have I seen stupid, crazy pitches? Yes. Am I skittish in the batter's box? Heck no. As far as I'm concerned, when I'm that batter box, you can bring it. I'm ready. (disclaimer - I have never played in any significant amateur or semi-pro fast pitch leagues).

/www.francaianath.com/modules/contentbox-admin/includes/ckeditor/plugins/showblocks/images/block_p.png"); background-position: left top; padding-left: 8px;">Sports Lessons In Real Life /www.francaianath.com/modules/contentbox-

admin/includes/ckeditor/plugins/showblocks/images/block_p.png"); background-position: left top; padding-left: 8px;">There is a known connection between certain sports skills and real life. Recent studies have drawn a strong correlation between distance runners and educational/career success because the ability to push through resistance and exhaustion to achieve a goal is widely adaptable and universally valuable. Chess training (Chess is a game, not a sport) is also shown to enhance an individual's ability to perceive relationships in complex systems and exert agency in cause-and-effect scenarios. Not surprisingly, it appears that the ways that we choose to compete individually and collectively relate to life and can bear more value than simply facilitating enjoyment.

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admin/includes/ckeditor/plugins/showblocks/images/block_p.png"); background-position: left top; padding-left: 8px;">In baseball, particularly fast pitch, the batter box provides the participant with the opportunity to take opportunities (pitches) as they become available. These pitches can be gentle and sent down the ideal path for the batter or they can tricky, erratic and hellish to try to manage. The goal, of course, is to hit the ball out of the park (literally), but the pitcher is the antagonist to that goal, not the assistant. As the the pitcher tries to prevent the batter from achieving his ideal goal, the batter must respond to each slider, changeup, curveball, and fastpitch as an opportunity to soar over the fence.

/www.francaianath.com/modules/contentbox-admin/includes/ckeditor/plugins/showblocks/images/block_p.png"); background-position: left top; padding-left: 8px;">This, to me, is life in so many ways. How many times and in how many ways

do situations, institutions, even individuals attempt to stand in the way of a person's goals in life. They may come in the form of red tape, paying one's dues, hidden fees, prerequisite college courses, menial tasks, and so many many more things. But while the ultimate goal isn't found in the hindrance, hitting the pitches that are in the strike zone is necessary to reach the ultimate goal of hitting it out of the park. It takes practice, and a lot of failure (just look at the batting average of professional batters), but at the end of the game, the good hits make the highlight reel.

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admin/includes/ckeditor/plugins/showblocks/images/block_p.png"); background-position: left top; padding-left: 8px;">Stay In There /www.francaith.com/modules/contentbox-

admin/includes/ckeditor/plugins/showblocks/images/block_p.png"); background-position: left top; padding-left: 8px;">My advice to all of us, especially those who have seen some very lousy

pitches lately is to grit our teeth and stay in there. Not every pitch is good, not every strike is able to be hit out of the park. But with some practice and perseverance, we can hit the good pitches better and overall see more wins in our games (in life - keep with the metaphor). It may take some weird bruises and a lot of strikeouts, but let's make some highlight reels. Stay in the batter box.

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