

# Collegiate Baseball - May 2001

## Bubble Boys

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A teaching pro really has one goal – successful results. As in any business, there are various segments of the business, or in our case – students. Perhaps the most rewarding is what I call the “bubble boys”. These are those players who come to you, ask for help, and work hard at learning what you teach. They are not the most talented, but they believe in you and have a burning desire to learn and succeed. They do not have abundant talent and they probably have not received the best or any instruction thus far in their career.

Bubble boys always seem to be nice guys. Their parents are involved, and if are too involved they are reasonable with receiving criticism to relax.

In baseball schools we see various levels of skill and desire. We see hopeless cases that we confront with reality and prescribe another position or...suggest that their future may be on the soccer field. We have the recreational students who want to learn and do well...*if it is convenient*. Our school is a hard place for this student long term.

And of course, there are the Blue Chippers. Hard working or lazy, they succeed to the next level. Solid reputations, proven results, they receive support and training automatically and meet most everyone’s expectations.

Bubble boys don’t. They need more support, instructional training, self-esteem and a support system of people who believe in them. They seem to learn and improve consistently but slowly. So slowly that sometimes it’s hard to tell. But they always show up for practices, for games, for the team.

Bubble boys have many nervous moments in their lives.... Will they make Little League majors or stay in the minors? Will they make the All Stars or be in a game? Will they make JV as a freshman or get cut from the Varsity as a junior? What college can they play for? Blue Chippers have no doubts.

This past weekend many of our students were competing in high school tournaments. Some were receiving accolades in the media; two faced off against each other on TV in the CAA tournament. As you are well aware, in the baseball business our personal rewards are achieved by the success of our students. You also know they rarely thank us or take their time to express their appreciation for our part in building their careers. I guess we were no different at that age.

But I suggest to you that there is tremendous joy in knowing you were involved in sending a player off to play in college, who when he came to you years before, barely made the JV team.

I think we need to find more of the bubble boys – as much for our needs as for theirs. The industry's normal pyramid, where enrollment ranges from a broad base of little leaguers to a narrow point of collegians, I believe in each segment there are many bubble boy students. If you maintain professional integrity and candor, this is a consistent source of repeat business and enjoyable students to teach. Given the opportunity, he will motivate his friends to enroll in your program because there is hope, encouragement, respect, and – the bottom line – results. There is an absence of fear of failure and ridicule. There are no preconceived outcomes or historical pecking orders that students often fit themselves in to fulfill peer group expectations. They are in a positive environment - free to succeed.

There is room for this effort in professional ball as well. The need exists to develop the concept of personal managers (advocates). Agents choose who they represent solely and necessarily on a prospect's ability to play in the majors and produce revenue for the firm. It is reasonable and understandable. Agents generally charge 2% of the signing bonus and 4 to 5% of the total revenue after a major league contract has been signed. There is generally no fee for representation while playing in the minor league.

I suggest that the players who are struggling to get into the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of a draft, who sign as free agents after the draft, and those who are just trying to stay in the game, need our help. Yes, many of them don't know it. Many of them do and don't realize that we can help.

As an industry we need to develop our resource base and create an awareness of the service we can offer to this group as well. They have no agent, they have left their high school or college coaching mentor, and summer leagues are primarily transient and lack long-term dedication. Who is there to provide professional support? We are.

There are many valid ways to operate a baseball business from recreational day care to utilizing high tech components for elite players. But help a bubble boy fulfill his potential and it will be a lifetime memory for the both of you.