

Below you will find an essay that I wrote for admission to Villanova University, an Augustinian community. I believe it answers the question, 'How playing sports has taught me lessons of life and influenced my views of society.' Thank you for your consideration.

St. Augustine's powerful interpretation of Catholicism transformed his heart and mind. "The key to this conversion was the voice of an unseen child he heard while in his garden in Milan telling him in a sing-song voice to [take up, and read] the Bible" (Wikipedia). The key to one of my inspirational changes was the memorable voice of my American Legion Baseball Coach.

It was the Bux-Mont American Legion Baseball playoffs and my team, the Warrington A's, had been fortunate enough to qualify. One loss would send us packing. We knew our game against Hatfield was a must win. In the bottom of the last inning, Hatfield was up six to five. With bases loaded and two outs for the A's, the announcer bellowed, "Next up, leftfielder, Kevin Hanes."

I stared out at one of the best pitchers in the league. I fouled two pitches off and let three balls go. There I was—full count one pitch away from the win or the loss. I held my bat high, loaded my back leg and prepared for the pitch. Before I knew it, I was walking back from the plate, crushed and struck out. I wanted to be anywhere else in the world but that dugout where my teammates, grown men, openly cried. They had played together since Little League, and I had ended it. I reported to the team huddle and prepared for the first lesson of that night.

Retiring at the end of this season, my coach was a legend in Legion Baseball. In the midst of my teammates, he said, "Kevin, you gotta shake it off. Don't get down on yourself. If it wasn't for your bat during the season, we would have never even been here

in the first place.” His empathy allowed me to forgive myself—to learn not to hold on to my failures—to keep swinging.

The next lesson I learned is when I arrived home to my father’s disgruntled remarks that the last pitch was off the plate. Without a doubt, I could have easily shifted the blame to the umpire, but I did not. With two strikes against me, I wanted my dad to realize that the ball was close enough that I could have at least attempted to foul it off or put it in play. Thus, I learned accountability. Maybe the ball was outside; we will never know. Of course, not everything in life is fair, and I learned it is important to take responsibility for what I do or don’t do, regardless of the circumstances.

That night, as I took off my hat, I had another epiphany. A teammate, who recently lost his mother to cancer, had his mother’s initials embroidered on the back of our hats. Our season was dedicated to her, and as I looked at his mother’s commemorative sign, I viewed my strikeout with a more meaningful and reflective perspective. Yes, it ended our playoff run, but being part of that team clearly outweighed my error. In sports, the most important lessons come from both winning and losing, and these new understandings gave me a sense of clarity. Thus, ended a night where I struggled with my own values; it was a day to remember—a day of transformation.