

It was the second semester of my junior year of high school and the first week of scrimmages for baseball. Our first scrimmage would take place at Weatherford High School, which in recent years, has been known to produce a decent group of ballplayers every year. I was itching to get some playing time and have success.

Baseball has been my passion ever since I was four years old. My dad, Rick, had introduced me to the sport at a young age, putting me in camps and select baseball leagues. Baseball became second nature for me at that point. Though



my stature is far from overpowering, hopefully my production on the field would speak for itself. That may sound cocky, but I've understood that cockiness can guide your actions and sometimes enable you to achieve your goals in life.

Throughout the week, practice was segregated into three clusters of players. There were the freshman, JV, and varsity. Lucky for me, I caught the coach's eye and was awarded a temporary spot on the varsity squad instead of the JV, which stands for junior varsity. It consists of the players that are unable to make the varsity team.

Tommy Elliott, our head coach, had been coaching at the school I was currently attending, Arlington Heights High School, for thirty years and it looked as if he was never going to retire. He had coached both of my uncles, who are now forty and forty five, if that says anything. Coach Elliott has the classical "baby boomer" mentality, in which he is hard-nosed and firmly believes that the present era's technology has made teenagers sissified. He is so old-school that his truck isn't even equipped with a radio for Christ sakes! This personality brought a sense of tradition to the school. One of many traditions at Heights is that seniors will most likely start, unless there was a freak of an underclassmen that could outplay a senior. I was

praying that my junior year would be the year I make varsity. That being said, these upcoming scrimmages would dictate what team I would accompany for rest of the season.



The scrimmage did not end up the at all the way I planned. Pre-game jitters got the best of me and my playing ability. The playing time was there, but the production wasn't. I went one for four with two errors made at second base. For all you baseball illiterate folks, one for four means I had four attempts to accomplish getting a hit, but only had one hit out of the four attempts. While on the field, I could hear Coach Elliott screeching, "get a clue Balbo!"

When the scrimmage was over, the coaching staff preached to us about how some individuals were stepping it up and how some would be sent down to JV. Judging from the way I'd just presented myself, JV would certainly be in my future. The only thing I was capable of doing at this point was preparing me and my parents for the soul crushing news to come.

Coach Elliott pulled a few juniors and me aside to regret to inform us that we were being placed on the JV team. Even being prepared, the words still put a dent in my pride. All the hard work I had put into the sport I loved to play wasn't good enough for once in my life. My mourning eventually turned into anger. There were just three brief weeks until regular season games and I vowed to myself that I would meet the varsity team standards by that time.

Showcasing my talent to the best of my ability, I forced myself to be noticeable on the field; outhustling, outthinking, and pretty much outplaying anyone that stood in my way. Finally beginning to stand out, Coach Elliott approached me three weeks later with an offer to start on varsity. Till this day I can still recollect the rewarding words that arose from his mouth. "I

appreciate the work ethic you've been giving me at practice. How would you like to fill a starting spot on varsity?" He and I both already knew the answer to that question.

I ironically started over a senior at third base that year, deviating from the tradition. It turns out I was varsity material all along. **My fielding percentage at the end of the 2011 season**



was .800 and my batting average was a boasting .500, granting me the offensive MVP award for my

district. Popping a two-run homerun against

Cleburne High School in the third round of the

playoffs to win the game was an eye opener for

Tommy Elliott. We travelled four rounds deep in

the playoffs that year, before finally getting knocked out by Wichita Falls Ryder, who had several of their players moving on to Division 1 College Baseball after the season. Though the loss stung a bit, I couldn't have been more pleased with my triumphs. After all, there was yet another year of baseball ahead of me. Who knew what feats I would overcome in 2012?

You see, baseball is a game where a player can fail the majority of the time and still be victorious. That is what makes the game of baseball so unique. For example, my batting average of .500 meant that, out of 10 at bats, I was successful only 5 of them. These are odds I can live with.

When cleaning out our lockers the following week, Coach Elliott asked to see me in his office. He sincerely congratulated me on the successes that were unexpected of me on the baseball diamond. My reply to him was, "Even though I'm not a very big guy, I'm aware of my ability and never doubted myself."