

Leadership in Catchers: A Look inside the Catching Position

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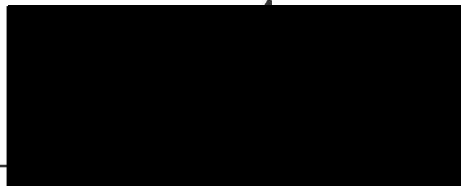
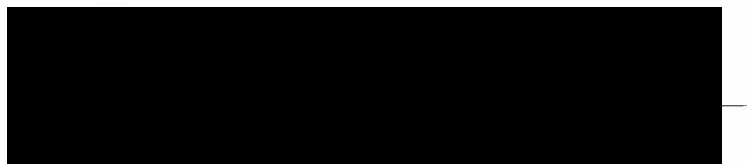
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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Leadership is an intangible tool. It cannot be taught; rather it is engrained in the individual. Leaders can be found throughout the world in various professions and walks of life. Each individual uses leadership to better themselves and those around them. As different as each leadership style may be, the purpose is to guide each person involved in the task at hand.

Baseball has been called America's favorite pastime. It is a unique game involving nine individuals attempting to work as one. Each individual or player does their part to ensure the team functions as a unit. Aside from the coach or manager, there is one member of the team that often associates himself with leadership: the catcher.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine desirable leadership qualities in baseball, more specifically, leadership qualities in catchers. Leadership and the catching position go hand in hand. This study showed the significance of the role of leadership when applied to the responsibilities of the catching position.

### **Background**

It is well known that catching is a physically demanding position. However, many are not familiar with the long list of responsibilities or duties that the position entails. These duties almost seem endless, and the catcher performs all these throughout the course of a game. Any one of these tasks would put the average person in a great deal of pain, but to the catcher, these are all part of the job. Vidic and Burton (2011) refer to something known as intrinsic motivation. This form of motivation directly correlates with self-leadership, something that is

crucial for catchers when dealing with their load of responsibilities. Weinstein (1997) agrees that it is vital that catchers are able to lead and motivate themselves. Without intrinsic motivation, leadership of others becomes an even more difficult task.

In addition to his personal duties, catchers are expected to lead their teammates and thoroughly understand what each position on the field is expected to do. In order to lead and earn respect, Burns & Martin (2010) believe in invitational leadership. Invitational leadership combines empathy and respect for those involved. The ultimate goal is team collaboration. This collaboration plays a crucial role in the team reaching its ultimate goal. The collaboration involved in the invitational style of leadership directly correlates with transformational leadership (Vidic & Burton, 2010). Transformational leadership uses the team's cohesion and capabilities to sell a vision for the team. The team's vision is something that the leader must sell. However, in order for this to work, the followers must believe in the leader. Chen (2010) discusses Leader Member Exchange (LMX). LMX is based on the relationship between the leader and the followers. In order for there to be success, there must be a strong relationship between the two. In the end, it is clear that catchers must adopt leadership qualities in order to be successful.

There is a direct correlation between leadership and catchers. Although it may not be highly recognized by the majority of the world, it is important to those involved in the game of baseball. Research showed an abundance of information on leadership and an abundance of information on catching. However, there had been minimal research done involving both.

Through this study, it was determined which leadership qualities are best suited for the catching position.

### **Setting**

This study was conducted on the campus of a Midwestern University. The participants were all members of the university's baseball team. The university is a division one institution and competes in highly competitive conference. In total, six individuals participated in this interview based study. This six included three coaches: the head coach, the pitching coach, and the defensive coach. In addition, three players were interviewed: a catcher, a pitcher, and a position player.

### **Assumptions**

Being a former catcher, I was intrigued by this study. Having played the position throughout my entire baseball career, ranging from little league to the collegiate level, and now coaching at the collegiate level, I wanted to discover how leadership abilities correlate with the position. I always assumed that great catchers were great leaders. I also assumed that a catcher would not be successful if he was not capable of leading. For me, leadership was a top priority when I was behind the plate. I feel this was directly reflected when I was named captain of both my high school and collegiate team. In my mind, this seemed to be expected or be the norm. However, after beginning my coaching career, I noticed a lack in leadership from catchers. There seemed to be a trend in players that I had watched. One of two things was happening, either the catcher was trying to lead and was not doing a sufficient job or he was not leading at all. With this said, I set out to find which leadership qualities a catcher must have in order to lead himself and his teammates.

## Limitations

Although this study was aimed to cover a wide variety of individuals who play the position, it was done with some bias. The individuals who participated in the interviews had their own biases. Additionally, the university in which the study took place only has four catchers. Therefore, some opinions reflected in the study may be based on those four individual's leadership qualities. To summarize a bit, this study covered what leadership qualities and forms are most desired by a catcher's teammates and coaches. However, this study did not discover the "best" way for a catcher to lead. It must be understood that this study reflected the opinions of six individuals, not the entire baseball world. With that said, it is important to not generalize or make broad interpretations from the results.

## Definitions

Below is a list of important terms that are discussed throughout this study.

- *Intrinsic Motivation/Leadership* - a critical factor in the long-term development of complex behaviors such as leadership that require knowledge, skills, and implementation experience to develop competency (Vidic & Burton, 2011).
- *Invitational Leadership* - leadership combining empathy and respect for those involved, and in the end, the ultimate goal is collaboration of the team or group (Burns & Martin, 2010).
- *Transformational Leadership* - leadership based on developing and selling a vision for what is possible. This form of leadership uses a vision to develop team cohesion (Vidic & Burton, 2010).

- *Leader Member Exchange (LMX)* – leadership based on the relationships between the leader and the followers (Chen, 2010).
- *Receiving* – The act of the catcher catching the baseball.
- *Blocking* – The act of the catcher stopping the baseball. This often occurs when a ball is thrown in the dirt.
- *The Battery* – The pitcher and catcher on a baseball team are often referred to as “the battery.”

### **Summary**

Leadership is something that is seen in all walks of life. Whether it be in the business world, the education system, or in this case, athletics, leadership is a must. In baseball, leadership is often associated with the catcher. In order for the catcher and his team to be successful, it is vital that he possesses leadership qualities. Throughout this study, various forms of leadership will be discussed in order to determine which forms (s) are best suited for the man behind the mask.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

This review of literature will examine the necessary tools for effective leadership. There are several studies that have examined the role of leadership and its various forms. This researcher will look to determine which form of leadership best suits a baseball team. More specifically, this review will focus on the leader of the field: the catcher. Catchers are expected to serve as a baseball team's leader; however, it is challenging to determine which form (s) of leadership enables the catcher and more importantly, the team to flourish. After surveying the literature, three topics have come to my attention: leadership in general, leadership in baseball, and leadership in the catching position. The position itself entails many responsibilities, several of which go unnoticed by the rest of the team. This researcher has come into direct contact with this while playing the position. Regardless, a catcher must quietly continue to carry out these duties. For when he does not, everyone around him will notice.

### Leadership

Leadership is a critical psychological skill in sports, and although the topic has seemingly not received the attention it deserves, coaches readily recognize the importance of peer leadership on successful teams (Vidic & Burton, 2011). Leadership, in this researcher's opinion, is a particular set of intangibles which enables a person (s) to direct a group of people. These intangibles vary from coach to coach, but it is certain that all teams, no matter the size or sport, require a peer leader. Throughout history, leadership has been apparent in all walks of life. However, leadership is not easy to come by. It takes a unique breed to serve in the role of leader. True leaders put the group or team before themselves (Vidic & Burton, 2011). In

essence, a true leader's goal is the team or group's goal. Obviously, these goals will differ from group to group or from place to place. Ryska, Yin, Cooley & Gin (1999) argue that leadership differs across nations because of discrepant aspects of their respective sporting cultures. This implies that styles of leadership are constantly evolving and are also constantly scrutinized by scholars, professionals, and in this case, individuals involved in athletics. However, one theme seems to ring true. There are leaders and there are followers. Baseball is no exception. The catcher is expected to be a leader by his teammates and his coaches. Many will compete for this position, but because of the responsibilities the position entails, the catcher is almost always the leader by default (Ortiz, 2010). This leadership can be seen throughout a practice or game, and is identifiable in several different forms and scenarios.

### **Forms of Leadership**

While surveying the literature, I have come across several forms of leadership. However, in this researcher's opinion, there are three forms of leadership that seem to be apparent throughout the world of sports. These include: intrinsic leadership, invitational leadership, and transformational leadership. Intrinsic leadership is directly connected to self-motivation. Vidic and Burton (2011) believe intrinsic motivation is typically a critical factor in the long-term development of complex behaviors such as leadership that require knowledge, skills, and implementation experience to develop competency. Leaders are expected to be intrinsically motivated. This is especially true of the catcher. With a wide variety of responsibilities, it is crucial that the catcher be capable of motivating or leading himself (Weinstein, 1997). In a recent study, Burns and Martin (2010) have discovered a new form of leadership known as invitational leadership. Although it has come about through the

educational system, it can still be applied to sports. This form of leadership combines empathy and respect for those involved, and in the end, the ultimate goal is collaboration of the team or group. This collaboration is believed to aid in the completion of the team's goal (Burns & Martin, 2010). In baseball, team cohesion can separate the good teams from the bad. This is a responsibility of the coaching staff, but can also be associated with the team and its field general. The collaboration of invitational leadership directly ties into the final form of leadership in sports: transformational leadership.

Transformational leaders believe in the team's capabilities and the team's cohesion. "Transformational leadership is based on developing and selling a vision for what is possible" (Vidic & Burton, 2010). Team cohesion is believed to be a necessity in today's sporting world (Ryska et al., 1999). Through team cohesion, transformational leaders use the vision of the team as a motivational technique. When a team has a vision, the entire group must believe that they can make the vision a reality (Vidic & Burton, 2010). It can be challenging to keep the vision in mind when the team is dealt many ups and downs. However, it is a job of the leaders to ensure that the team stays on the path of success. In the end, this responsibility breeds intrinsic motivation by the followers which is key to the completion of the goal or task at hand (Ryska, 1999). Through these three forms of leadership, there are several connections. Through these connections, this researcher believes that there is a direct correlation to the game of baseball and its leader: the catcher.

### **Leadership in Baseball**

Baseball has often been described as more of a game than a sport. It requires many skills that are developed over time, and relies on a group of men working as one to complete a

task. Ryska et al. (1999) describes baseball as an interactive sport in which a team relies on unique skill contributions within an interdependent context in order to produce a successful team performance. This implies that the game of baseball requires a unique type of leadership by its coaches and its catchers. Chen (2010) discusses a theme known as the leader member exchange (LMX). LMX is based on the relationships between the leader and the followers. No matter the culture, sport, or size of team, two things remain true: there must be a leader and there must be followers. Chen (2010) also discusses a form of leadership known as transformational/transactional leadership. However, it was determined that although the transformational/transactional form is sufficient for baseball, LMX provides better relationships between the leader and followers. In addition, LMX better caters to baseball's specific needs involved in team cohesion and development. LMX can be directly applied to the catcher's relationship with the players on the field, especially the pitcher.

### **The Catcher**

The catcher is a unique breed. "It's a grueling job full of ups and downs — coping with the heat, foul tips and jarring crashes, while massaging egos, calling a game and contributing offensively — but someone has to do it (Veltrop, Silverman & Sheinin, 2004)." The position requires a particular set of skills that are not limited to the field. According to Johnson (2000), a catcher must really love the position because catchers do not have bad days behind the plate. It is not allowed. A catcher is expected to be on his game at all times. This is but one of the many skills the catcher must possess. In addition, the catcher is expected to lead. He is commonly referred to as the quarterback of the field (Glavine, 2000). This leadership is expected to impact each player on the given team, including himself.

Today, it seems that catchers are looked at as successful if they can do two things: hit and throw. The average person does not understand that the position includes many more things. However, experienced professionals in baseball including: players, coaches, and scouts look for other skills in catchers. Johnson (2000), discusses this in depth. He believes that receiving and pitch calling is a part of the game that goes unnoticed. Ortiz (2010) believes the catcher's mental game to be the most important and Weinstein (1997), cites a catcher's leadership qualities to be the most crucial. As one can see, in a catcher's leadership role, catchers are also expected to do the following: receiving, game calling, blocking, and relationship establishing. In order to be capable of performing these skills, a catcher must be an intrinsic leader (Vidic & Burton, 2011). First and foremost, a catcher must have confidence in himself (Roberts, 2005). In addition, he must have confidence or be capable of establishing confidence in his teammates. LMX discusses leaders and followers (Chen, 2010), and in this case, the catcher must be the leader and his teammates must follow. In this researcher's opinion, LMX can be directly tied to the invitational style of leadership. The invitational style, when applied to baseball and the catching position allows one to see that the catcher must also show respect to his teammates in order to achieve team cohesion. On top of leading, the catcher also has to worry about his own game. This is why the position is so grueling.

### **The Physical Side**

Catching is the most physically demanding position in baseball (Weinstein, 1997). This means that a catcher must be in great physical shape. Below is a partial sample out of season workout for catchers. This particular workout plan is used by several division one baseball programs ("Weight Training Workout," 2010). As one can see, the workout includes several leg

lifts, core exercises, and flexibility routines. The leg lifts ensure that a catcher will be able to handle the work load that is put on his lower half. The core exercises are vital to the catcher's side to side mobility, throwing, and hitting. Flexibility allows the catcher to be comfortable in his squat and also aids in mobility and quickness. In the end, it can easily be seen that workouts like this are no easy task. With that said, the person doing them must be intrinsically motivated (Vidic & Burton, 2011). However, even workouts similar to this cannot prevent the inevitable fact that the position will wear down even the fit catchers. Buzz Bissinger, author of "3 Nights in August," a book that follows legendary manager, Tony La Russa, touches on La Russa's thoughts about the demands of catching and his catcher in particular, Mike Matheny. He states: "Matheny's job-catcher-is the most demanding in all of sports and maybe the worst. It's the equivalent of going both ways in football, because of the offensive demands of it and, in the eyes of La Russa, actually more important defensive demands of it" (Bissinger, 2003, p. 39).

| Monday                                                                                         | Tuesday                                                                                                                                       | Thursday                                                                                  | Friday                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Warm Up Routine                                                                                | Warm Up Routine                                                                                                                               | Warm Up Routine                                                                           | Warm Up Routine                                                                               |
| Squats<br>Rest:<br>30 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>45 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>1.00: ___x15 Rps                | Lat Pulldown<br>Rest:<br>30 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>45 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>1.00: ___x15 Rps                                                         | Squats<br>Rest:<br>30 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>45 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>1.00: ___x15 Rps           | Pull Ups<br>Rest:<br>30 sec ___x max<br>45 sec ___x max<br>1.00 ___x max                      |
| Hamstring Rolls<br>Rest:<br>30 sec: ___x20 Rps<br>45 sec: ___x20 Rps<br>1.00: ___x20 Rps       | DB Bench<br>Rest:<br>30 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>45 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>1.00: ___x15 Rps                                                             | Leg Curls<br>Rest:<br>30 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>45 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>1.00: ___x15 Rps        | STB DB Incline<br>Rest:<br>30 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>45 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>1.00: ___x15 Rps       |
| Step-Ups<br>Rest:<br>30 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>45 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>1.00: ___x15 Rps              | Tri Shoulder Raise<br>Super Set<br>DB Lat Raise ___x15<br>DB Front Raise x15<br>DB Bent Over<br>Raise ___x15<br>Rest: 30/45/1.00<br>Repeat 3x | Walking Lunges<br>3x Max Sets<br>Rest: 30/45/1.00                                         | DB Shrugs<br>Rest:<br>30 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>45 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>1.00: ___x15 Rps            |
| Single Box Leg Squats<br>Rest:<br>30 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>45 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>1.00: ___x15 Rps | Hammer Curls<br>Rest:<br>30 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>45 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>1.00: ___x15 Rps                                                         | FW Calf Raises<br>Rest:<br>30 sec: ___x20 Rps<br>30 sec: ___x20 Rps<br>30 sec: ___x20 Rps | STB Bent Over Raises<br>Rest:<br>30 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>45 sec: ___x15 Rps<br>1.00: ___x15 Rps |
| Core Training                                                                                  | Core Training                                                                                                                                 | Core Training                                                                             | Prone Holds                                                                                   |

Workouts like these are what Tony La Russa is hinting at when he describes the catching position. Aside from actual in-game play, a catcher must intrinsically motivate himself to be in top physical shape in order to succeed. He has seen several catchers neglect this and not perform up to standards because of it (Bissinger, 2003, p. 39).

### **Receiving and Blocking**

Nearly every catcher will tell you that the most important aspect of catching is stated in the name of the position: catching the ball. Johnson (2000), discusses this in great depth and goes on to say: "I take more pride in my 'receiving' than any part of my game." Therefore, it can easily be argued that a catcher must be capable of catching all pitches. He must anticipate each pitch, and be able to deal with the unexpected (Johnson, 2000). However, this part of the game is often not acknowledged. Johnson (2000) states: "Everything that goes into being a receiver is not something a catcher gets a lot of credit for. If someone hits a home run, everyone cheers. But if I stop a pitch in the dirt and keep a runner from scoring, maybe only my teammates appreciate that. But catchers often do more when they're noticed the least." If the catcher fails to do his main job and receive the ball, the team will lose confidence in him resulting in a disruption of the LMX. No matter the pitch or its location, confidence is not only lost by the rest of the position players, but more importantly, by the pitcher. When the pitcher loses confidence in his catcher, trouble will soon follow (Johnson, 2000).

## Throwing

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of catching is throwing or controlling the running game. This particular skill is acquired over many years of practice and training. While arm strength is important, the footwork process is more crucial (Weinstein, 1997). There are several steps that give the catcher the best opportunity of throwing a runner out while trying to steal. In today's game, speed is a premium, and this speed can exploit a catcher if he is not capable of performing the proper footwork (Bissinger, 2003). Xan Barksdale, author of "Catching 101" provides a process of footwork for catchers (Barksdale, 2011). They are listed below:

- Receive the baseball from the pitcher
- Step the right foot to where the baseball was pitched, the foot should be parallel to the mound rubber
- Step the left foot in front of the right foot, parallel to the mound rubber, landing about shoulder width apart, this will naturally happen due to momentum, when landing, weight should be distributed evenly on the feet or slightly more on the back leg
- Pull the baseball from the glove
- Throw and follow through

This is yet another task that a catcher must be capable of performing. As one can see, a theme is beginning to develop. Catchers must want to succeed, and this directly correlates with intrinsic leadership or motivation (Vidic & Burton, 2011). From the physical side to throwing and blocking and receiving, it is easy to see how demanding the position is. It is mentally and

physically draining (Weinstein, 1997). If the catcher is not that unique breed known as a leader, then the demands of the position will not be met.

### **The Pitcher, Catcher Relationship**

The relationship between the pitcher and the catcher or the battery is complex to say the least. With two often large egos involved, it is easy for this relationship to turn hostile. Communication is vital to the battery (Glavine, 2000). In baseball, the pitcher, catcher relationship is known as the battery. As one can imagine, the pitcher and catcher are the pace setters of the game, and if they are not on the same page, it can be guaranteed that failure is in the near future. Ultimately, the pitcher is the man who is in control of where the ball is going; however, the catcher decides what pitch to call, and where he believes the pitch should be placed. Undoubtedly, there are disagreements throughout the course of a game (Knisley & Hoffman, 2001). This is where the catcher's leadership ability comes into play. The catcher must know what makes each pitcher tick. In order to do so, he must have a relationship with each member of the pitching staff (Roberts, 2005). This establishes trust which is perhaps the most important aspect of the battery's relationship (Glavine, 2000). He must establish trust on and off the field. A pitcher must be comfortable throwing any pitch in any location (Johnson, 2000). This trust grows through the catcher's performance. If the catcher is capable of catching all pitches in all locations, the pitcher will gain trust and confidence in him (Johnson, 2000). Ultimately, this confidence will open up the lines of communication and result in success.

## **Managing the Game**

The catcher is often known as the coach on the field (Ortiz, 2010). In addition to the physical game, the catcher has to be aware of the mental game as well (Weinstein, 1997). These include: pitch calling, defensive positioning, in game strategies, opposing hitter adjustments, and offensive game planning. The ability to perform these mental tasks alongside the physical makeup of the game is a reflection of advanced leadership qualities (Weinstein, 1997). This form of leadership cannot be taught, rather it is intrinsic. Any one of the components of the mental game would keep the average player busy for quite some time. However, the unique breed of player known as the catcher, is fully capable to perform these in perfect unison (Veltrop et al., 1994). These capabilities correlate with the catcher's ability to lead intrinsically, invitationally, and also connect to LMX.

## **Conclusion**

Leadership can be seen in many walks of life. In the sporting world, leadership is abundant. Baseball is no exception. With many theories and forms of leadership, it can be challenging to determine which form best suits a group of people. Baseball is perhaps one of the most unique sports that involve an even more unique group of men. With this said, the relationships amongst these men are what help to determine that LMX best suits a baseball team and its leaders (Chen, 2010). LMX weaves its ways through a team, and eventually trickles down to the field leader: the catcher. The catching position requires a unique set of skills that only a select few are capable of performing. The relationships that a catcher forms with his teammates, primarily the pitcher are a key to success. These relationships connect to the outcome of a game. Mentally and physically, the catcher is responsible for more tasks than any

other player on the field. In order to ensure success, he must be intrinsically motivated (Weinstein, 1997).

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This interview-based study was conducted in order to discover the desirable leadership qualities in baseball, more specifically, the catching position. Based on the opinions of six members of a division one collegiate baseball team, I was able to determine what form (s) of leadership are desired in catchers. This chapter will first discuss the setting and the participants involved in the study. Next, it will discuss the development of the interview and its questions. Lastly, it will conclude with the process used to gather and analyze the interview-based data.

### Setting

This study was conducted on the campus of a Midwestern University. The university is located in the heart of the Midwest roughly 170 miles southwest of Chicago, IL and 150 miles northeast of St. Louis, MO. It is home to 5,000 undergraduate students, and 1,000 graduate students, many of them coming from the areas around the Midwest. Its students excel both academically and athletically. Academically, the university boasts an 89% retention rate as well as a 76% graduation rate (University Facts, 2013). Athletically, the teams compete at the NCAA division one level and are members of a highly competitive conference.

### Participants

Six individuals participated in this anonymous, interview-based study. These six individuals are currently members of the university's baseball team. Interviewed were the head coach, the pitching coach, the defensive coach, an outfielder, a pitcher, and a catcher. Participants were selected by this researcher in order to collect data from several different

perspectives. By interviewing coaches currently working in three different positions, the questions were answered from three different perspectives. This was also true of the players.

### **The Coaches**

Each participant came from a unique background that provided depth and validity to the study. The head coach has been involved in division one baseball for twenty-seven years, coaching at four different institutions. Additionally, he was born in Cuba and spent most of his life in Miami, FL. His perspective contributed great diversity to the study. The pitching coach has been involved in division one baseball for fourteen years, ten as a coach, and four as a player. Additionally, he played professionally for three years. The defensive coach has been involved in division one baseball for thirteen years, nine as a coach, and four as a player.

### **The Players**

One of the players interviewed is currently the team's catcher. He is a junior and was recently named the top defensive catcher in the Conference. In addition, he was also named to the Johnny Bench award list which is given out to the nation's top collegiate catcher. Another interviewee is currently a junior, pitcher for the university. He is currently on the top of many of the MLB area scout's draft lists. Lastly, a senior, outfielder was interviewed. He also serves as team captain and is a defending All Conference outfielder.

### **Research Design**

This study was conducted using interviews with six participants. More specifically, these interviews were conducted in the standardized open-ended fashion (Turner, 2010). With that said, all of the questions were asked in the same fashion. This allowed for open-ended, detailed answers from each participant. "This open-endedness allows the participants to

contribute as much detailed information as they desire and it also allows the researcher to ask probing questions as a means of follow-up (Turner, 2010).” Additionally, this style of interview was conducted in order to observe and collect any themes that may appear. Consequently, the use of the standardized open-ended interview made differences in opinion apparent.

### **Data Gathering and Analysis**

The interview process consisted of each participant being asked five questions. However, due to the nature of the open-ended style of interview, there were some additional questions asked to various individuals. Upon conclusion of each interview, notes were taken on key points and answers that were revealed in the interview. This was done in order to monitor any themes that would appear. When dealing with leadership, it was vital to note whenever a various type or form of leadership was discussed. In addition, specific skills pertaining to the catching position were touched on. With that said, it was equally as vital to note any particular opinions on how these skills are affected by the ability to lead or lack thereof. These particular areas were continuously reflected upon throughout each interview in order to monitor the reoccurrence of any themes.

### **Summary**

Throughout this study, leadership was examined. More specifically, leadership in catchers was the main point of interest. Looking inside the minds of six individuals involved in baseball at the division one level allowed this researcher to gain thorough insight on a relatively low-researched topic. Through the open-ended interview based study yielded some apparent themes. By interviewing individuals with six different perspectives, there were also some

differences in opinion that became evident. These themes and opinions will be discussed thoroughly throughout the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Introduction**

Leadership in baseball is crucial. It is especially important for the catcher to demonstrate and practice effective leadership qualities. With that said, this study was conducted to determine what forms of leadership are vital to catchers. Without leadership it is difficult for a catcher to be successful. Additionally, it is difficult for the team to succeed. Through interviews with six different individuals involved in division one baseball, leadership in catchers was discussed in great depth. Each individual brought their own perspective to the study, and through these perspectives some great insight was gained.

In this chapter, the results of each interview will be discussed on an individual basis. Furthermore, the interviews will be discussed as a whole in order to connect themes and other various findings. Many of the interviews correlated directly to pre-existing literature pertaining to the topic. This will also be a topic of discussion.

### **Results**

Each interview brought different opinions and perspectives forward. While each participant discussed leadership and how it pertains to catchers, it was evident that each person believes that leadership is important in different areas. Each coach interviewed thought that catchers needed leadership in order to be capable of performing multiple tasks. In addition, each coach discussed a different area of the position and how leadership ties into it. This was also true of each player that was interviewed.

### **The Head Coach**

The head coach provided some great insight to this study. While he is in charge of the entire program including thirty-five players and three other coaches, he fully understands the importance of leadership qualities amongst his players. When asked how leadership in catchers correlates to success, he said “I have been coaching division one baseball for twenty-seven years. I have been a part of some great teams, and some not so great teams. All of the great teams have had a great leader behind the plate.” He continued to discuss the great teams that he has been associated with and how each of these great teams was like a puzzle. Each player was a different piece of these puzzles and the center piece of these puzzles was always his catcher. He went on to say, “Each team is unique. A true leader understands this and also understands how to make each player compete at the highest level. All of the good teams I have coached had a catcher who understood how to do this.”

### **The Pitching Coach**

The pitching coach discussed how a catcher must influence his pitchers. Without a good catcher, a pitching staff often struggles. Much of his interview was spent on discussing the pitcher, catcher relationship. Pitchers rely heavily on their catcher. If the catcher and pitcher do not have a good relationship or do not communicate well, there will almost always be a lack of success. He went on to say, “My pitchers understand how important a good catcher is. If they have a guy back there that they can trust, they are much more likely to succeed.” He also talked about how he looks for leadership qualities when he recruits catchers. “Leadership is one of the first things I look at when I recruit a catcher. Can he lead his team? More importantly, does he lead himself? If I cannot answer yes to these questions, then I know he is

not our guy.” Clearly this interview touched on some great points, and brought great insight to the study. Through this discussion on the pitcher, catcher relationship, it was clear to see some of the themes that were discussed in pre-existing literature.

### **The Defensive Coach**

The defensive coach has spent several years working with team defense at multiple institutions. He has an extensive background dealing particularly with infielders. The catcher rarely is referred to as an infielder, but throughout the interview he referred to this theory several times. He said, “A catcher may not be an infielder, but when I coach defenses, I make sure that our catcher knows the jobs of each infielder.” Additionally, he discussed that a catcher must also know exactly what his job is. This idea brought us to a key point in the interview. After discussing how a catcher must be capable of performing his own duties and be capable of understanding everyone else’s, he talked about how a catcher must earn the respect of his teammates in order for them to respond to him. He said, “In order for a catcher to lead his team, he must earn their respect, and only then will his teammates follow him.” Again, this statement correlates directly to some of the pre-existing literature pertaining to this topic.

### **The Outfielder**

The interview with the outfielder went slightly different than the rest. He had some very strong opinions on leadership and how it pertained to baseball. However, with that said, he did not believe that it was solely the catcher’s responsibility to lead. This may have something to do with the fact that he is an outfielder and is the captain of the team. He believed that people are born leaders or born followers. He stated, “I don’t think that catchers

should be the only guys leading the team. I have been a leader on and off the field my entire career and I am an outfielder.” He also went on to say, “Does it make everything easier when a catcher is a leader? Sure, but I believe that others are capable of doing it as well.” It was interesting that he brought this point up because he believes that everyone, in order to be successful, must be able to lead in one form or another. He went on to say, “Talent only gets you so far. Every guy on a team must be able to lead himself or else he will get nowhere. A team needs leadership from top to bottom, and this includes each and every guy.” Although this interview went a little differently than expected, valuable information was contributed to the study.

### **The Pitcher**

The pitcher brought a great perspective to the study. He made it clear that he has had several ups and downs as a collegiate pitcher. He stated, “One day I’m on and feel like nobody can hit me. Sometimes, the very next day, I feel like I shouldn’t even be on a mound.” After discussing that, he went on to talk about how crucial it is to have a good catcher behind the plate. He said, “When I trust the guy behind the plate, it makes things that much easier. Being on the mound can be a lonely feeling sometimes, but when you have a guy working with you that you can trust, it helps out so much. Our catcher does a good job of this.” This idea that he discussed is one that has been a crucial piece of the game forever: the pitcher, catcher relationship.

## **The Catcher**

The final interview of the study was done with the team's catcher. Needless to say, he had some great thoughts on the position that he has come to adore. He began the interview by saying, "Nobody truly realizes how tough the position is. I do so many things throughout the course of a game that go unnoticed. I catch the ball, block the ball, throw out runners, and call and manage the game." While these things may go unnoticed, it is important to note that he would not be capable of performing these tasks if he was not intrinsically motivated. Additionally, he must be in great physical shape. When asked how leadership has influenced his play, he said, "I learned a long time ago that I had to be a leader in order to catch. I am involved in every pitch. If I don't know what I'm doing or what my teammates are supposed to be doing, we are going to have problems." He was exactly right. This, and many of his other ideas, correlated directly to the ideas of others who have played the position.

## **Discussion**

Upon conclusion of the interviews, it was clear to see that some themes had developed. Additionally, many of these themes correlated directly to pre-existing literature pertaining to leadership or catching. First off, every person interviewed talked about how crucial a catcher is to the team. This was discussed by nearly every piece of literature in which this study was based on. Secondly, the idea of intrinsic motivation was an evident theme. Vidic and Burton (2011) discuss this idea in great depth. They believe that intrinsic motivation is crucial to those involved in team oriented activities. These results supported this research. Third, the idea of having a leader and having followers was discussed. Chen (2010) discussed something known as Leader-Member Exchange (LMX). LMX is a form of leadership based on the leader and its

followers. Again, the results supported this research. Next, the pitcher, catcher relationship was discussed. Glavine (2000), Knisley and Hoffman (2001), and Roberts (2005) all agree that the pitcher, catcher relationship is both difficult and important. The results from these interviews also supported this research. Another theme that is supported by the research was found in the catcher's interview. He believed that many things he does often go unnoticed. Johnson (2000) supports this claim. Lastly, there was one piece of information that the study revealed that does not support the research. Ortiz (2010) believes that the catcher often becomes the leader by default. However, the outfielder's interview yielded different results. He argued that, while it does make things easier when the catcher is a natural leader, that should not be the case. He believed that all are capable of leading.

### **Summary**

The interviews conducted were both informative and interesting. Upon conclusion of the study, it was evident that many of the themes that became apparent during the interviews directly correlated with previous research. This study provided an in depth look into the position. By interviewing six individuals with extensive baseball backgrounds, this research is not only accurate, but credible. Many of the previous literature was written by people who have not had a first-hand experience within the game of baseball or the catching position. With that said, this study provides just that.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This study was done to discover what forms of leadership are best suited for a catcher. In the past, this particular subject had been studied sparingly. It may be true that leadership had been studied and researched quite thoroughly; however, as for the direct correlation between leadership and the catching position this is not the case. This study was conducted for that exact purpose: to tie the two together.

### Significant Findings

When researching leadership as well as catching, there was some clear cut information discovered. However, it was not until after the study that this information seemed to make total sense. It is easy to see something on paper and understand it, but it was the interview-based study and the participant's first hand experiences that brought about some significant findings.

First and foremost, it was pointed out by all the interviewees that team success is often directly correlated with success of the team's catcher. This finding is supported by several researchers including: Bissinger (2003), Barksdale (2011), and Ortiz (2010). Secondly, it was found that intrinsic leadership is a must have when it comes to playing the catching position. This idea is greatly supported by Vidic and Burton (2011). Third, and perhaps the most certain piece of information to take from this study is that LMX (Chen, 2010) can and should be applied to the game of baseball. It is also important to note that LMX can be applied to the relationship between the catcher and his teammates and also to the pitcher, catcher relationship.

On the other hand, there were several forms of leadership that had been discussed in the review of literature. Through the information collected only two forms were discussed in the interviews: intrinsic leadership and LMX. Not directly discussed was transactional/transformational leadership (Chen, 2010). It was previously known that this particular form of leadership was not common in baseball. This seems to remain true. Transformational leadership (Vidic & Burton, 2010) and invitational leadership (Burns & Martin, 2010) were also not directly discussed. Transformational leadership is based on the leader selling a vision to the team and using that vision to create team cohesion. While it was not discussed directly by any of the interviewees, it can be assumed that team cohesion and the ability to sell a vision is something that good leaders do. Invitational leadership is based respect and empathy amongst the leader and his teammates. Like transformational leadership, the end goal is team cohesion. With that said, along with intrinsic leadership and LMX, transformational leadership and invitational leadership should also be considered desirable leadership forms in catchers.

### **Educational Implications**

Leadership is something that is a center piece of our society. It is constantly discussed, analyzed, researched, and criticized. In any successful operation, whether that be in the business world, the education system, or in athletics, leadership is involved. It is undeniable that leadership is prevalent in today's world of athletics. More specifically, it is especially crucial in team sports, and when it comes to team sports, none rely more heavily on the team concept than baseball. With that said, a team cannot succeed without leadership. In baseball, the most consistent leader on the field is the catcher. While his performances often go

unnoticed to the general public, this is not the case in the baseball world. Veltrop, Silverman and Shenin (2004) may have said it best, "It's a grueling job full of ups and downs — coping with the heat, foul tips and jarring crashes, while massaging egos, calling a game and contributing offensively — but someone has to do it." In addition to that, the catcher is also expected to remain calm and collected and lead his team.

This study was not conducted to show the world how tough of a job catching is. Rather, it was done in order to better understand how leadership qualities are the driving force for whoever dares to try and play the position. Anytime that catching is discussed, the words hard, strenuous or difficult come into play. However, leader is not always a word that comes to mind. By binding the catching position and the word leader together, people may see the man behind the mask in a different light. Not only that, but people may gain respect for catchers, the game of baseball, and perhaps even athletics as a whole.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study was both successful and informative. First-hand accounts of dealing with the catching position were recorded and used to great advantage. The interviews allowed for great interaction that yielded interesting and valuable information. However, with all that said, there is always room for improvement.

First off, there were only six participants. While these six individuals were informative, a larger group of interviewees could have yielded more thorough results. Surveys could possibly work with a study similar to this, but they may not allow for the in-depth answers that produced useful information. Secondly, all six participants were members of the same team

and same university. While each person has his own unique background, using participants from different places or even levels of baseball may have bettered the study. Lastly, only one catcher was involved in the process. He provided informative and experienced discussion to the study. Perhaps the inclusion of more catchers would have provided similar results to the one catcher who was interviewed.

### **Summary**

Leadership is vital to success. There is no better way to sum things up. It is used in everyday life, and this includes everyday life in the world of athletics. In athletics, there are always natural born leaders. This list includes: quarterbacks, point guards, goalies, and many others. Included in that list are catchers. Catchers are baseball's version of a natural leader. But, with so many styles and forms of leadership, it is tough to say which are best suited for baseball's natural leader on the field. Through countless hours of research, studies, interviews, and writing, it has been narrowed down to four forms. Whether or not one of these is the best form or all four of them provide a great overall hybrid package of leadership remains to be seen. However, it is safe to say that intrinsic leadership, invitational leadership, transformational leadership, and LMX are all overly sufficient leadership styles for catchers. Through the use of these styles a catcher will be capable of performing up to expectations. After all, catchers need something in their arsenal when they are playing the "toughest position in all of sports (Bissinger, 2003)."

## **Appendix**

The IRB: Human Subjects Committee determined that the referenced study is exempt from review under federal guidelines 45 CFR Part 46.101(b) category #2 SURVEYS/INTERVIEWS; STANDARDIZED EDUCATIONAL TESTS; OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR.

**Study Number:** 1305E35021

**Principal Investigator:** Kyle Trewyn

**Title(s):**

Leadership in Catchers: A look inside the catching position

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