

higher ground

with Bobby Simpson of Higher Ground

What To Expect...How To Adjust



In May of 2003, as Head Coach of the British Women's National Fastpitch Team, I sent the following message to our players and staff as we prepared for the Olympic Qualifier and European Championship tournaments in Italy in July. The comments are still very appropriate as you use the power of expectation and adjustment for your personal improvement and competition.

One of the critical skills for elite players involves expectations. Nothing you do can guarantee success, but expecting what you want to happen will certainly increase

the odds. You are familiar with positive self-talk and visualization (nothing more than using your imagination), but what you talk to yourself about and what you train yourself to see in your head are key issues in whether any of this is very helpful.

First, expect success. That's a general concept and it should be a constant, but I know it's not. Discipline yourself to expect to succeed. It has been obvious in training and games that many of you are often trying to perform while fearing failure rather than expecting success. Look for the good, think about the good, train to achieve the good, and quit focusing on what you do not like or what you do not want to happen. Many people seem to have a tendency to do just the opposite and look for the bad and/or expect the bad. You can increase your odds, and the odds of this team, by looking for what's good and expecting good to happen.

Let's look at some specific expectations. As a fielder, expect the ball to be hit to you on every pitch. Not just expect, but also want to get the ball. Expect to field it and complete the appropriate play successfully. It's pretty easy to do this at times. Average players can do that. Can you expect properly on every pitch, instead of just most of the time? The

is minimized.

In the same way, you must expect to be surprised. It may be a softball related surprise or a person related surprise. Either way, your job is to expect surprises and then adjust appropriately. If you cannot deal with change, surprise, and adjustment, then you should not be on this team. It's really just that simple. Surprise is an integral part of championship softball and your ability to deal with it is critical to your achieving the success that you expect.

We only have a few weeks before two very important tournaments, but you can improve your ability to expect and adjust. As you train, think about how you can adjust to a pitch you do not expect, a hop the ball should not have taken, an awful call by an umpire, a bad throw from a teammate, a comment you did not expect from someone, a decision we make about your position on the field or in the batting order, the time we decide to meet, eat, or be transported, or any of a thousand other surprises that may occur.

Develop techniques for coping, for adjusting. Maybe it's choking up and getting closer to the plate with two strikes, perhaps it's positioning yourself differently on defense, pitching a hitter differently, walking away from the box for 8-10 seconds after a bad swing so you can release the frustration before the next pitch, maybe it's self-talk or visualization, perhaps it's thinking about others for awhile instead of just yourself, maybe it's throwing some dirt or grass away, maybe it's walking away from a player or staff member that said or did something you don't like instead of popping off and making matters worse, or taking a deep breath and counting to ten or a thousand. I don't know how you have to adjust, but you do have to do it. If you cannot adjust and focus on what the simple goal is, if the team cannot adjust and focus on the collective responsibility, then your stated goal will simply become something that you



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one that you are not expecting may be the one that results in a hit or error instead of an out. It takes discipline and that comes from your attitude and your preparation.

As a hitter ahead in the count, expect the pitch and/or location that you want and know positively that you are getting it on this pitch and that you will smash it. With two strikes, expect something close enough that you have to hit it. Expect to be attacking anything that looks close. Expecting the wrong pitch or expecting a pitch to be wasted far too often leads to a called third strike.

If you are not in the starting line-up for a certain game, expect to be called on in situations that use your skills. Be ready to pinch hit, pinch run, pinch bunt, be a defensive replacement, or whatever role may be needed. Expect to hear your name called and expect that you will be successful in that role.

You also have to expect to be surprised. I fully expect that I will receive surprises while in Italy, or possibly before that. I expect there to be changes to my expectations. A bus will be late, a game time or field will be changed, an injury will occur, a meal may be missed, a player's performance will be better or worse than I am expecting, or a reaction to something someone says or does will be totally shocking. Any or all of these will happen. So, I expect to be surprised and then the surprise

wished for but would not do what is necessary to achieve.

Between now and the summer tournaments, work on expecting and adjusting better. All of us can improve these two very critical skills. By doing so, all of us can improve our odds for winning. You have said that winning is your goal, so now you can do something about it and increase the odds. It's your choice.

Contact us at Higher Ground, join our FREE Higher Ground Club, and get FREE instructional newsletters and special discounts. Attend our elite and advanced opportunities or bring us to you and we will help you Get Better Every Day. Learn about our internationally acclaimed softball instructional services and products, including camps, clinics, online instructional DVD subscriptions, books, elite vision training, pitching machines, and Custom Clinics for your group. Email bsimpson@friendlycity.net or call 229-386-9770. Check our [Camp Video](http://www.highergroundsoftball.com) and much more at www.highergroundsoftball.com.