

Miller Pens Powerful Mind Training Guide

By **LOU PAVLOVICH, JR.**
Editor/Collegiate Baseball

SAN DIEGO, Calif. — One of the most remarkable books to come out in years is called *Intangibles* by Geoff Miller.

Miller is a partner in Winning Mind, LLC, a San Diego-based company that helps elite performers in sports, business and the military perform under pressure.

The majority of his time is spent as the Mental Skills Coach for the Atlanta Braves' organization. He also has provided mental skills coaching services to the Pittsburgh Pirates' and the Washington Nationals' organizations.

The ability to command positive thoughts and confidence at critical moments of competition are important to any successful athlete. But those athletes who struggle with confidence can't focus.

Intangibles is a personal training guide for the mind and goes beyond abstract concepts to draw on real-life experiences, practical examples and tools to help ingrain success and make it a repeatable process and eventually a habit.

The book features inspiring stories about professional players in various stages of their careers, as well as hands-on tips and questionnaires that will help players evaluate and improve the mental skills that are necessary for a competitive edge.

The following is a question and answer session with Miller about the exciting concepts this book brings forward that will help coaches and players across the nation.

COLLEGIATE BASEBALL: Why did you write the book, *Intangibles*? Obviously it is geared to baseball coaches and players.

GEOFF MILLER: For a long time, I have wanted to make a contribution to the game of baseball. I felt like I was doing that in my work, and I feel that this book can become an important tool to help coaches and players in the game.

CB: What are intangibles in the game of baseball? You touch on confidence, focus, will, desire and preparation early in the book. How does an athlete excel in all these areas? It is not easy to do.

MILLER: My explanation of intangibles involves a couple of parts. First, in baseball we are trying to measure performance in so many ways. The mental side of the game has been that one area that has been very difficult to define. Sometimes these intangibles get written off as not being coachable. People are either born with them or not. And there is debate on that. People are looking for this magic formula for how we measure and develop all of these characteristics in all our players. My contention with *Intangibles* is that they are very tangible when we measure them in ourselves. We know right away what it

feels like to be confident and what it feels not to have confidence. That's a tangible feeling. It's not measured on a scale. It's not something you can compare to someone else's confidence. But you can see right away when an athlete is

playing with confidence and when they aren't. Players don't need to compare their intangibles to Derek Jeter's. They need to know to understand their own intangibles and understand how to get to a place where they can be comfortable and confident so the focus, discipline and the will and everything they have been preparing for can come out when it matters.

CB: Later in your book, you discuss the Character Development Inventory that athletes can be graded by and is comprised of 95 items that measure 19 character factors in three primary categories. How valuable is this information to coaches when evaluating players?

MILLER: The Character Development Inventory can be useful in a lot of ways. First, it can help you pinpoint where you have been at your best. What I am hoping is that players discover that they do have some strong character traits and some leadership abilities, and here they are. So this is how I will lead. In the book, I mentioned the story about Jayson Bay. His teammates and coaches would all tell you that he is a leader. But he not the kind of guy that people stereotypically would call a leader. He is not outspoken and not a guy who stand in the middle of the clubhouse and deliver a speech. What I've seen is that there are a lot of players who have great leadership characteristics. But they don't have the ones that they feel are important. So they don't think they can lead. Step one with the Character Development Inventory is understanding your own leadership style and understanding if you are a leader how you will do that. Second, there are ways to use the inventory to pinpoint observable behaviors. There is a section on positive attitude that talks about being able to recognize and have your teammates and coaches recognize emotions on your face. If that's something you are able to pinpoint, it can allow you to improve your body language.



GEOFF MILLER

You can make an immediate impact by simply being aware of it and having that as a process to improve.

CB: If you are a college or high school baseball coach, how can you utilize the Character Development Inventory of each player? Do you have them compile the inventory at the very first meeting, or wait a period of time to complete it?

MILLER: It all depends on how well you know your players. There is some value in what you see of your players vs. what they see of themselves. If you do it right away, it might take a little bit of time to form your opinion on what that player is like to see how accurate of a self evaluation it is. For me, I would wait a little bit so you get a feel of your players. When you get to know them, then that is the right time for them to complete the Character Development Inventory.

CB: At what age can athletes start to learn about being a better mentally prepared athlete?

MILLER: That's a question I get a lot, and it depends. Some of the lessons should be taught as early as possible. Some of the concepts require more critical thinking and requires more life experiences. But by the time kids are in high school, it is perfect to start working on all the intangibles associated with baseball.

CB: The ability to command positive thoughts and confidence at critical moments are vital for the successful athlete. How can an athlete be confident during difficult times when everything is hitting the fan with no calls going your way as a pitcher, errors behind you and negatives thoughts difficult to keep out of your mind.

MILLER: I am taking a different approach to that these days. I am starting to teach players that they *don't* have to be confident in those situations. Here is what I mean by that. I think confidence is something that is great to have when you have it. When you don't have it, you probably should treat it as energy levels. I find that that especially during the baseball season on the professional level, whether it be the minors or majors, when you get to the summer and have played 100 games in 115 days, everybody gets tired. Everyone recognizes that people are tired. You hear this common thought process that they are tired and must go out and battle today. They seem to find the energy they need to get through the game. And they play with just enough intensity to be able to get out there and do what they do. Of course they are tired, and they recognize they are tired. But they summon the strength when they need to. To me, confidence is something that we all think we have to have in order to perform when it is much of a reality that we aren't confident the majority of the time when we are asked to perform. The problem is not that we are lacking confidence. The problem is that we think we must have it in order to perform. What happens is that we search for it and try to get it back. And it distracts us from just playing. What I am trying to teach people these days is that if you have confidence, that's great. It will be a good day. If you don't, then you will have to battle.

CB: What you say is so true about just going out and playing instead of being distracted from doing this. Players at times simply don't focus on the simple things such as this which allows performances to be better.

MILLER: This is what *Intangibles* is all about. It says that you don't have to have every single character

factor that we think is important to be a champion athlete. Because guess what? You don't have them all. Instead of spending your career trying to build all of this, figure out what you're good at and what you are good at on the field. Then work on those strengths and do your best. And we'll see where it goes.

CB: If things don't go well for athletes, fear begins to creep into their minds. And failure comes shortly after that. How do you try to suppress those thoughts during games because those speed bumps can become very tough to overcome for athletes?

MILLER: In my book, there is a formula for learning who you are, learning what you want and knowing what to do when you don't get what you want. In the meantime, have something that you can do while you are figuring that out. My approach is first of all to make them understand what they are afraid of in the first place. It usually is failure. It is usually not getting what they want. My first question is what do they really want, and why do they think that failure in this moment means they won't get it. To me, that 'What do you really want' question can really shed some light on where they are putting pressure on themselves. I see players all the time who are so focused on moving up a level in pro baseball. And they've got to get there by the end of the season. If they give up two runs, it means their ERA goes up over 4.00. Players get so worked up over this formula that they think will get them to the next level. And really what they want is to get to the big leagues. If I can show them that they can learn something whether they succeed or fail every time they play, then it takes some of that fear and pressure off of them. It helps them understand that they can still be getting closer to their goal even if they give up five or six earned runs today.

CB: What do you do for a pitcher who has totally lost his ability to throw strikes? They seem to put so much pressure on themselves to throw strikes when that happens that they struggle for a period of time and sometimes never get back to the accuracy that they once had. Is there any magic formula for helping pitchers who suffer from this who could throw strikes previously?

MILLER: Those are the hardest cases. They are the most painful as well because you see people who are talented and struggle on a very intense level. My experience with those kinds of issues is that usually it is based on losing feel. That takes place when you become too aware of what you're doing. It is getting ultra sensitive to evaluating every movement, every touch of the ball, every feel of the seams. The ball just doesn't feel right in your hand any more. Those are the kind of experiences I hear about a lot. That gets to a much more short term problem where people believe there is a crisis and have to do something right now to help. And that can be helped with more of the traditional techniques of focus, breathing and routines. At that moment, what's most important is to find something else to focus on so you aren't focused on how this feels whether it is in your hand or arm, shoulder, balance or any of those key mechanical parts that start to feel foreign.

CB: Understanding what is going on inside you mind during pressurized moments is vital. But even more useful is understanding why.

MILLER: Sometimes we don't want to know why. If you ask someone what's going on, they might say, "I don't know." Sometimes they really don't know. But other times they are afraid to know the answer. There is no magic formula to that. It is asking a lot of questions and being empathetic and making sure the player knows I am there to help him figure it out.

CB: Explain managing intensity. Can this help or hurt players if they are too intense?

MILLER: There are some pitchers who must have a high level of intensity to perform well. A lot of times you see those great closers who are sensational with 1-run leads. But when they come in down by four runs or up four runs, they aren't the same because it doesn't have the intensity they need. It starts with what my ideal intensity level is. Do I need to be a little bit pumped up? Do I need to be completely under control? Where do I need to be as a starting point to be most comfortable? And then how do I get to that place? The second part is intensity levels change a lot when we aren't meeting our expectations. There are a lot of traditional techniques of taking a deep breath and being able to slow yourself down which is fine. But when you get somebody who cares a lot about what they are doing, and they don't think they are doing it well, it isn't easy to take that deep breath and get that intensity level back down. I will approach it from a root cause level and get the player to understand how to keep his perspective on what he is doing so he can keep his intensity level manageable from the start.

CB: Can you talk about MAP (Mental Aspects of Pitching) sessions?

MILLER: The whole idea about MAP is for players to come together, such as pitchers, and share ideas in a group session. We did it through using movie clips and

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MAP Sessions Foster Sage Advice From Players

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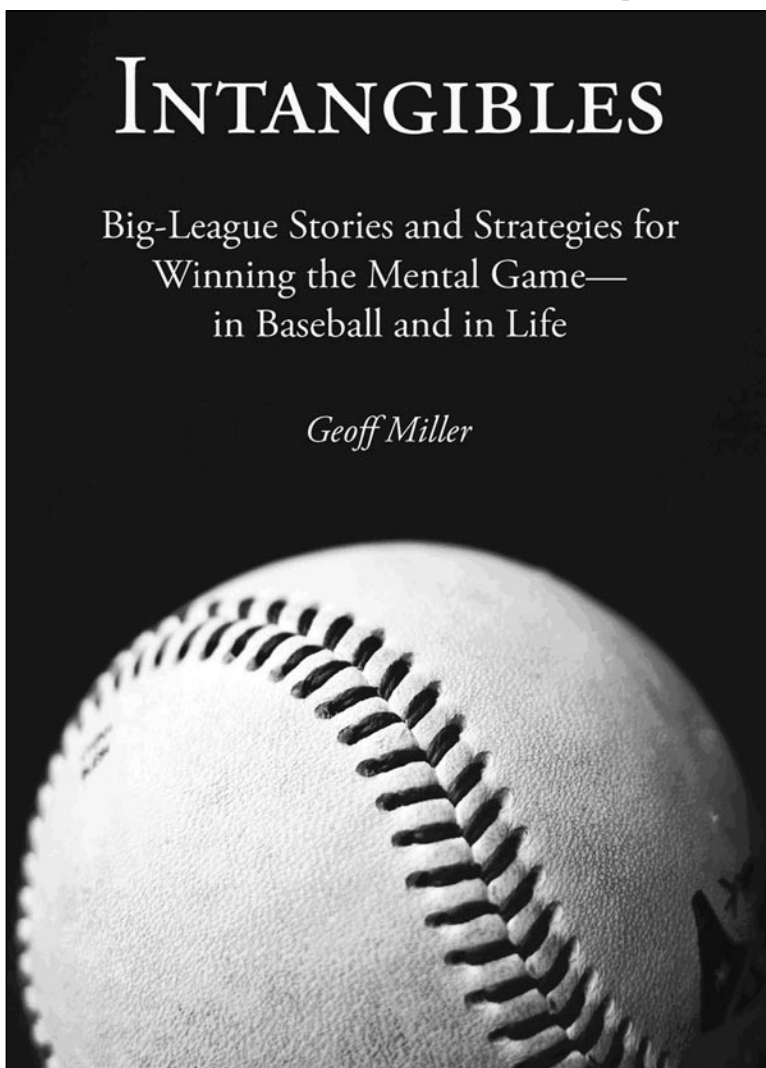
introducing topics. For me, the whole use of the movie clip is visual and something everybody has seen usually. And it is an easier way to connect with some of these topics which might be a little bit more abstract or complicated if they try to read what they are all about. For leadership, we used a clip from the movie *Saving Private Ryan*. The lesson there is so great in being able to tell people where you are coming from and having that explained in your behavior and decisions. For us, it was something we used early on to enhance the concept that we wanted all the pitchers in the room to share their ideas because it would make us better collectively.

CB: All of the personal stories players can share in a room must be amazing to hear for you. When these athletes open up on such subjects as competition, awareness, trying too hard, on being a team and other subjects that you bring forth, it must be pretty special.

MILLER: Absolutely. You might have a freshman who is feeling the pressure of making this team. And then he hears a junior talk about what it was like when he was a freshman and how he handled all the pressure to perform was extremely valuable to him. He might explain that he got a couple of Tuesday starts, and he started to settle in. I saw that I didn't have to try so hard. Hearing something like that from a veteran on your team makes everybody better.

CB: Is there a technique which allows MAP sessions to start off strongly? I'm sure many coaches will try this in the coming months are reading about this and purchasing your book.

MILLER: In one of the chapters, I talked about how we got a group of players together and asked them to discuss what they did when they were at their best during games. The initial goal was to find out when they struggled. But by talking about when they were at their best, it led to a very interesting conversation about what happened when they



struggled. We didn't even have to ask the question because the players brought it up themselves.

CB: For the topic of awareness with a group of pitchers, you showed a clip of *Men In Black*. How did this session work out.

MILLER: It was amazing how it illustrated the difference between pitching and throwing. Everybody has talent, and everybody can throw hard in pro baseball. But there is a difference between throwing hard and being able to change speeds and understand how to pitch. So that clip was very important when we got into that discussion.

CB: How about the subject of trying too hard as you showed the clip of *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*?

MILLER: The key phrase in that clip was digging in the wrong place. I see that so much and hear

players all the time talk about getting to the big leagues. I ask them what they will do to get there. They tell me they will work hard. Working hard is a prerequisite. You have to work hard to get there. What the clip of *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* shows is you can work as hard as you want. But if you aren't working in the right way, that hard work is not going to get you where you want to be. So you need to be able to evaluate yourself and listen to instructions so you are on the right path and digging in the right place.

CB: Another session was about trying too hard with the clip being played of *Me, Myself And Irene*.

MILLER: That was a session that gave me a lesson. I thought I knew what I was looking at in the clip, and the pitchers taught me

something that day. My thought was this was a time when the Pirates were starting to turn the corner a little bit. Some of the younger players were making it to the Big Leagues and starting to emerge. We really had the feeling that we were on the right track, and the train was leaving. We didn't want anybody to be left behind. So we wanted to make sure our players were there when the train leaves. Their point was that we were going to make sure we weren't going to leave anybody behind either. We are here for each other. That was great moment.

CB: Explain *The Matrix* MAP sessions.

MILLER: *The Matrix* was my favorite of all of them. I think that really shows the importance and the power that confidence has. It's really about believing in yourself. *The Matrix* is this movie that takes place in a mental world where everything happens in the brain but not necessarily in the body. Power in that world is based on believing you can do something. You can't fall into the trap of believing what your eyes tell you. Everything in that world is artificial and is created by a computer. Seeing what is real in your talent and your game was important to distinguish between believing all those external sources of pressure which make it difficult to go out and play.

CB: I was intrigued by your Baseball IQ program. Please explain how this works.

MILLER: This really helped us from a player development standpoint to take a step back and realize we need to be very specific on what we are teaching. That's another central theme in the book and part of my philosophy of teaching the mental game. The mental game is made up of knowledge and performing under pressure. When you hear about people talk about the mental game and say this player is strong in this area, a lot of times it means he knows what he is doing. That comes from experience and comes from learning the game and the details of the game. I really feel like

the Baseball IQ portion of the book is about making sure that whatever level you are playing at that you understand what is expected of you on the field. If you don't know what you're supposed to do, it's not easy to execute. We could take a deep breath, have a routine and be locked in and not have any idea what pitch we are looking for to hit. And it won't be real easy to hit if you don't have the right approach at the plate. A lot of the beauty of this game is in the details of learning. That's what the Baseball IQ is. They are important lessons which must be learned and be made permanent so we can do the higher level stuff.

CB: You talked about how valuable a kangaroo court can be in the clubhouse because it really draws the team closer together.

MILLER: It is one of those traditions in baseball that has been around a long time. Some teams use it very well, some use it for fun, and some teams don't do it at all. But as I was writing the book and thinking about leadership, I realized that some of the challenges in having your leaders step up in the clubhouse are solved by a kangaroo court. One of the things I hear a lot from players is that they don't want to interfere in a teammate's business by criticizing them. I wouldn't want them to criticize me if I make a mistake. I understand that. But it's funny in kangaroo court, that's the purpose. It points out to your teammates where they messed up along the way. Its fun and a joke a lot of the time. But it can also be serious.

CB: Is there anything else you would like to discuss about your book. There is so much more that I haven't even touched on.

MILLER: There are two big messages in the book. The first is getting a clear sense of who you are as a person and as a player. The second is to understand that trying too hard is just as big of a mistake as not trying hard enough. We, as a culture, have made it such an admonishment to have talent and not try hard enough. Usually when players don't make it today is because they try too hard.

Search For Right College Is Well Timed Race To Finish Line

By TOM KOVIC
Special To Collegiate Baseball

CHADDS FORD, Pa. — The college search for athletes is an enduring process with a definite starting and ending point. And just like a well run race, the successful student-athlete will remain focused until he breaks the tape.

Below are some simple tips to consider when heading down the homestretch in the college recruiting process that will assist families in remaining diligent in "closing out" a very important life decision.

Whether a prospect is looking for an athletic scholarship or support in admissions, it is important to remain committed to the relationship you have cultivated with the coaches.

By the time you reach this point, you will have likely narrowed your college choices down to a select few and trust me...so have the coaches.

Review Your "To Do" List

A key component of your college search organizing system will be a list of your target areas moving through each phase of the recruiting process.

Heading into the final turn you want to "sharpen the tool" and review your final target points for clarity and accuracy. By this

time, you have devoted yourself completely to a worthy and successful effort and now it's time to close out the experience.

This is the time to begin your final kick to the finish line.

Highlight important contacts you plan to make with the coaches and organize any additional information the coach has requested and mark it on your calendar and execute.

Student-Athlete Statement

One of the first things I attempt to get the boys and girls I advise to accomplish is to write a personal statement.

This is not only a great way to get a glimpse of how you see the college experience playing out for you. It shows self awareness in the eyes of the college coaches and in the current recruiting climate. Trust me...the best recruiters are looking at this component carefully.

It is a difficult concept to wrap your arms around, but I suggest taking three simple steps to reach this end. Firstly, take 20 minutes to simply become "introspective."

The first few moments will be turbulent, but when you settle down, try to envision your interpretation of how you would like your college experience to unfold.

From this point, simply write down "operatives" that define that experience. Moving forward, polish

the statement into no more than a one page document you can share with the coaches.

Remember, there are three primary attributes college coaches are looking for in prospects: Good students, strong athletes and self-aware, high character kids.

Outside Connections

College coaches attempt to cover every base they can in evaluating every prospect they recruit. If they happen to be in a "grey area" with a grouping of recruits, they will be looking for a "tie breaker" to solidify the rankings.

Your high school and/or club Coach can make a difference here and as long as you have provided the college coaches with the tools he has needed to do a thorough and regular evaluation (updated transcripts, test scores, video etc.) of your talent as a student-athlete, this would be a prime opportunity for your current coach to connect directly with the college coaches in an effort to support your commitment to a particular program.

Tough Questions

At this point in the process if you do not have a "firm" commitment from coach to where you stand on his recruit priority list, I suggest you find out.

There are several tough questions families and prospects encounter throughout the college search and the well prepared and organized prospect will have the best chance in reaching out to the coaches for straight answers.

If you practiced an honest, truthful and consistent recruiting effort, you can expect the same in return from the college coaches.

Whether you're hoping for that financial aid pre-read or feedback on where your application stands in admissions, do not be anxious about approaching coach.

It is his position and obligation to assist families.

That said, coaches and good recruiters are brutally honest and there may be cases where the answer you receive is not the one you were anticipating.

In closing, the family that approaches the college recruiting process with integrity, persistence and an organized approach will build mutually strong and respectful relationships with college coaches and position themselves best to navigate the college search.

And like a great race, game or competition, the best athletes remain focused and committed from start to finish.

The brass ring is out there and it is different for every prospect.

Focus on the process and remain diligent in your approach. Everything else will take care of itself.

Tom Kovic is a former Division I college coach and the current director of Victory Collegiate Consulting, where he provides individual advisement for families on college recruiting. For further information visit: www.victoryrecruiting.com.

Brosius Leads USA To Gold

SEOUL, South Korea — Linfield College baseball coach Scott Brosius, moonlighting as the skipper of USA Baseball's 18-under team, recently guided Team USA to the International Baseball Federation World Championship in Seoul, South Korea.

With Brosius at the helm, the Americans defeated Canada 6-2 in the gold medal game, clinching their first IBAF world title since 1999.

Team USA won seven of nine tournament games, avenging an early round 10-inning loss to Canada.

Last fall, Brosius guided the Americans to a gold medal at the Pan American championships in Cartagena, Colombia.