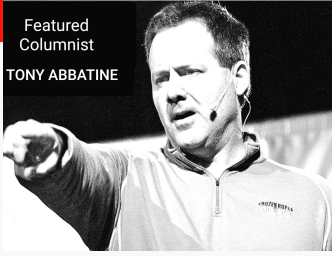


Deeper Runways Helped The Red Sox Win The World Series

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Columnist

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By Tony Abbatine on November 7, 2018

There are so many reasons why the Red Sox are on top of the baseball world today. It starts with great starting pitching and relief work, versatility of roles, clean defense and players that appeared to like each other.

It goes deeper, though. The Red Sox hitters appeared to be seeing the ball better and had better command of the strike zone than the Dodgers, especially during high-stress at bats and down in the count situations.

Call it good two-strike hitting or a planned two-out approach, the Red Sox controlled the Runway (the lane in which a pitch travels) and lengthened the Go Zone: the point where hitters must decide when and what will arrive to the plate.

Put another way, the Sox hitters saw ball flight longer, which allowed for better prediction skills. They also pushed the Go Zone closer to the plate which allowed for more information prior to deciding to swing or not to swing.

Don't confuse this strategy with "Punch-and-Judy" swings. Look how many Red Sox home runs went to the opposite field or straight-away center. The best hitters in the game control the Runway to better estimate speed, space and spin data. This imaginary Runway that sits in the mind's eye of all good hitters and between the mound and home plate acts as markers during ball flight that helps in the prediction process. Remember, we don't hit what we see, we swing at what we think we see. The best hitters control and check in with this "visual landscape" often to give their eyes the markers needed to control and gauge ball flight.

Guessing and sitting on pitches, at times, is dangerous. Did you know notice how many times the Dodgers were caught looking for a pitch and then frozen on middle-of-the-plate strikes or misfired badly on breaking balls outside the zone? Contrast that to Boston's hitters that stayed in read mode longer and trusted their eyes to lead the barrel to collision point by keeping all hitting lanes open.



- Hitters that understand or stumble into Open Focus ("I see more when I look at nothing") demonstrate better plate coverage and guess less. Sure, predicting what's coming can be a high-reward risk-when you're ahead in the count and not much is on the line. But it's too risky with runners in scoring position or with two outs in a tie game.
- Were the Red Sox hitters getting early intel on what pitch was coming? You would have to ask them directly. As a whole, how do you think hitters at times, pick up pre-pitch movement patterns from opposing pitchers? Pitchers at every level are getting hacked by the hitters. Hitters that avoid the laser or fine focus strategy of seeing hard will have a better opportunity to see "clues" before ball flight that is invaluable at all levels and is sometimes accomplished at the subconscious level and difficult to share with others.
- Perhaps this years Sox hitters took the advice of one of their past brothers, Manny Ramirez who's surreal statement, "When I look at nothing, I see everything" first introduced Open Focus to baseball's elite coaches. As eye docs have confirmed and great hitters demonstrate, the harder you focus in your visual search strategy, the less you will see.
- Did you notice how "ugly" some of the Sox swings looked like during the Series?
- Let's define ugly. Not textbook, kinetically, sequentially perfect swings. "Ugly" in that they didn't resemble home run derby swings or showtime BP rounds.
- A few observations we all witnessed from the Sox sluggers as they grinded through at bats and made high stress at bats look like fun:
- No full back-side rotation; less exit velocity and more eye-barrel control.
- Swing finishes that were low and flat; The finish was a non-priority.
- Back foots that resembled walking zombies with heavy, flat ankles.
- Front knee flexion on contact that violated the "hit off a stiff/strong front side.
- Terrible "swing sequencing" in that the barrel lead the swing instead of the kinetic chain absolutes.
- Those weren't picture-perfect swings. But they were committed to trusting their eyes to deliver the barrel to the ball. Those were high-caliber swings in high-stress at bats. And they were an excellent example of a team putting on a visual hitting display in the Series.

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