



Justin Toole comes from a baseball family. His dad coached his teams growing up, and his brother Eric just wrapped his sophomore season as a 2<sup>nd</sup>-team All-Big Ten outfielder for the Iowa Hawkeyes. His sister was a softball player. Watching Toole play the game, it's easy to see the influence that his baseball-oriented upbringing has had on his career as a player. Toole can play any position on the diamond (literally), and always knows what to do with the baseball anytime it is hit to him. He's a patient hitter at the dish, and is sneaky-effective on the basepaths. He's not a burner, but reads balls well in dirt and goes first-to-third quicker than some players with better raw speed. In short, he does all of the little things well, helping his overall package play greater than the sum of his tools.

Toole isn't a guy who is going to go out and hit 40 HR in a season. His strengths lie in his versatility and fundamentally sound play. A long shot to be an everyday player in a major league lineup, the former undrafted free agent is a career .247/.298/.293 hitter in 361 minor league games. He's appeared in 118 games at 2B, 54 games at SS, 53 games at 1B, 90 games at 3B, 36 games in the OF, 2 games on the mound and one game behind the plate. He has played at

nearly every level in the Indians system, from rookie AZL to AAA Columbus, with stops in Mahoning Valley, Kinston/Carolina, and Akron. Anytime Toole is needed anywhere in the system, he answers the call and fills the organizational need. When you're around a team that Toole plays on, it's easy to see the effect he has in the clubhouse. Everyone from the other players, the manager and coaching staff to the team's announcer talks about the impact Toole has on and off the field, and that is something that just can't be captured in a box score.



Toole made headlines around the country last year when he played all nine defensive positions in a single nine-inning game for the Mudcats. He started the game in RF and moved all the way around the diamond throughout the contest before pitching the bottom of the 9<sup>th</sup> in a 4-2 Mudcats victory. Pitching was hardly foreign to Toole, who was the Bob Feller Award winner as the top high school pitcher in the state of Iowa his senior year. It was a unique experience for the versatile utility infielder, one that gave him a chance to reflect on the lessons he's been able to learn throughout his baseball life.

Toole was a psychology major at Iowa, and uses some of the lessons he learned in sports psychology classes to coach young players in various camps during the offseason. In addition to the coaching, Toole has written a book based on his famous nine positions in nine innings game, and [that book is now available via Amazon](#). I got my copy this week, and it's an

excellent read. In the book, Toole relates how the nine positions he played for the Mudcats that night relate to nine different life lessons that can be applied to the mental side of baseball.

[This ties in nicely with a recent article from Baseball Prospectus/Grantland columnist Ben Lindbergh, who recently completed MLB's certified Scout School.](#)

Lindbergh is talking to a veteran scout about the mental side of the game, and the veteran scout tells him the following:

*According to Larson, 90 percent of prospects fail to reach their OFPs (overall future potential). Most often, he says, it's because of intangibles. It's much more common for a player's makeup to prevent him from making the majors than for it to propel him there. My guess is that assessing makeup will become an increasingly important part of scouts' responsibilities as PITCHf/x, biomechanical analysis, and other applications of motion-tracking tech permeate the lower levels of the minors and bleed into amateur ball. Watching a player work and collecting character references isn't something a computer can do, although refinements in psychological testing — not a new concept in baseball, but an increasingly popular one — may eventually offer an automated alternative.*

From spending as much time around Toole as I have, I know he'll never have a problem with the mental side of the game. His tools will always play up to their overall future potential (OFP), because he's head and shoulders over the vast majority of his counterparts when it comes to the psychology of the game. He's always a pleasure to talk to, and even though I've played and studied the game all of my life, I always learn something new about baseball whenever I have the pleasure of talking to him.

The book has nine chapters, each of which first recaps one inning of action at a different position and then explains how to apply that inning to life both in and outside of baseball. Toole teaches the reader about patience, perspective, expensive/inexpensive experience, taking advantage of your opportunities, hard work beating talent when talent doesn't work, believing in yourself, controlling what you can control, being comfortable when uncomfortable, and staying in the moment. He talks not just about the 9-in-9 game, but about his high school career, collegiate ball, and lessons learned on the road to playing professional baseball. His was not an easy road to becoming a pro, as he had to fight for his spot on the Iowa baseball roster, then had a quick stint in independent ball (after breaking his arm in a late-season game against Michigan State) before being signed as an undrafted free agent by the Indians. He was almost drafted in the 27<sup>th</sup> round by the Marlins, but was too honest with one of their scouts (see chapter one). He always had to outwork his competition, because he wasn't always the most talented player on the field, court or gridiron.



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