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Hello Friends,

Post-season games are great because often what separates the teams competing is not their physical skills, but their mental toughness. Baseball has last year's champions, the Philadelphia Phillies, going against the New York Yankees in their quest for an amazing 27th championship. Two teams with tremendous talent who know how to win.

But in Game 4, I saw the Phillies make a common mental mistake. **Brad Lidge played not to lose.** After Johnny Damon stole second and third (in *one* remarkable play), the Phillies pitcher became cautious. Instead of pitching his best stuff (slider), he went with fastballs. Tied 4-4 in the top of the ninth and needing the win to tie the series at 2 each, Lidge didn't want to risk a wild pitch and let Damon score. **He tried to avoid a mistake rather than play to his strength.** The result? He hit Teixeira in the arm and A-Rod blasted a game-winning double before Posada knocked in two more runs. Yankees 7, Phillies 4. After the game, Damon admitted Lidge's sinker "made me look silly on a couple of pitches." What would have happened if Lidge threw more sliders?

Fortunately for the Phillies in Game 5, they turned it around and played to win. The players put the loss behind them and played one pitch at a time. Manager Charlie Manuel preached throughout the season "The heck with yesterday. Just win today" and closer Ryan Madsen said "it was business as usual" for the team. They got back to focusing on their job and what they could control.

The Phillies responded the way mentally tough athletes do: with an increased determination to succeed. Reliever Scott Eyre said, "No one here wants to go home." Their determination was fueled by optimism and hope. Optimism is the tendency to expect the best possible outcome or to dwell on the most hopeful aspects of the situation. Hope can be described as the feeling that what is wanted *can be had* or that events will turn out for the best.

The Phillies were comfortably ahead 8-2 when the Yankees staged a come back in the 8th inning. So what did Madsen feel when the tying run came to the plate in the form of superstar Derek Jeter in the 9th? "I couldn't ask for anything more. He's one of the best hitters I've ever faced. It was fun." **Mentally tough athletes thrive on the pressure of competition** and view competition as a challenge, not a threat. This makes the game enjoyable rather than a hardship or anxiety-ridden. Such an approach freed Madsen's mind up to focus on his pitches, not the outcome ... they key for performance success.

Down 3 games to 1, how did the Phillies remain mentally tough? SS Jimmy Rollins may have said it best, "It comes from confidence ... It comes from a belief in our ability." **Hope, optimism and confidence come from being fully prepared, focusing on your strengths and using them.**

I look forward to game 6 and watching both these teams play to win. Enjoy the series.

References

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