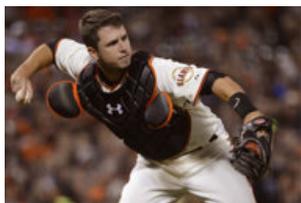


Is There Such Thing as a Role Model in Baseball?

By [Charlene Prince Birkeland, Lifestyle Editor | Healthy Living](#) – Tue, 28 Aug, 2012 5:43 PM EDT



When my oldest son was five years old, he quickly scanned the front page of the newspaper over morning breakfast and saw a huge photo of his then-favorite baseball player, Barry Bonds. In a suit. In a courtroom. The caption included the words "steroids" and "investigation," which led to lots of questions that my husband and I tried to answer as simply as possible -- "He's in big trouble because it looks like he took drugs that made him faster and stronger." Eyes furrowed, my son processed the information and clearly understood it was bad news for Bond. The kid

asked his final question: "But is it okay if I still like him?"

Breakfast discussions about steroids and baseball are at an all-time high in our household. We live in Silicon Valley and between the San Francisco Giants (our favorite team) and [the Oakland A's](#), we have enough fodder to last us the season. But now my kid is a tween with more baseball knowledge in his young life than most adults. And his opinions of baseball players using Performance Enhancing Drugs (PEDs) is clear: You're a cheater, plain and simple.

[Melky Cabrera's 50-game suspension](#) for taking PEDs stunned fans, including my son. As details emerged about a botched [cover-up scheme](#), Cabrera's saga turned absurd. Andrew Baggarly, Giants beat writer for CSN Bay Area, [described Cabrera's actions](#) as having a "level of deception too deep to forgive." It's true. My kid has written Cabrera off, no second chances, no matter where he ends up after his suspension.

Kids who are baseball fans want players they can believe in. "Like in the old days," my son says. Parents of said kids want players their children can admire and use as motivation to power MLB dreams. Forget the pedestal. No idolatry allowed. Just give them a pro who truly loves the game, plays clean, works hard, and plays clean. Did I mention someone who plays clean?

Enter [Buster Posey](#).

As a baseball junkie and die-hard Giants fan, it's near impossible to not love Posey. Besides the fact that the 23-year-old catcher -- in his first major league season -- helped lead the Giants to their first World Series in in fifty years, Posey's numbers say it all: .328/.404/.535. Add in All Star, NL MVP contender and 2010 NL rookie of the year. Also? Let's not forget how he took the nastiest crunch behind the dish -- so nasty it still makes me cringe -- and returned to kick some serious tail. *Hello.*

But I'm not *just* a baseball fan. I'm a mom with a tween son who dreams of playing major league ball. When my kids' favorite players do something stupid like take PEDs, my heart breaks a tiny bit. Again, I'm a fan. I'm also tired of cheaters. And pitchers who [whine about how they hate taking BP](#) because they have to shag balls in the in the outfield? So over you. Players who throw [toddler-esque fits on called third strike](#)? *Please.* Who's the clown?

You want a baseball player your kid can admire? Buster Posey is your man.

Here's the thing: Posey's stats are obviously impressive. But his success on the field is driven by his intense work ethic and an ingrained belief that you can always be better. Period. He says things that you want to print out and frame in your kid's room, like "You should shoot for high standards, and believe they're obtainable."

In 2011, my family met Posey at a spring training event hosted by the Giants. We'd spent many a night watching him play in the minors, and both of my sons were already dedicated fans. During a group Q&A session, I asked Posey to talk about his work ethic, **not just in baseball, but in life**. I explained to him that we wanted our boys to understand that you can't focus on just sports, that motivation and effort are a large part of success. Posey has always been a star player, but he was as dedicated to his academics as he was baseball. I liked the fact that Posey didn't just finish college, he excelled on and off the field. At a time when tween and teen baseball hopefuls are paying attention high schoolers getting drafted and/or opting out of college to play in the pros, the message that "there are no shortcuts in life" becomes increasingly important.

Posey, in a serious and authoritative voice, spoke directly to my boys and said, "First, I'm going to tell your sons this: Listen to your mom and dad." Posey also talked about his mom and dad and how they raised him to always work hard. He told my boys, "If you're not giving 110 percent, why bother?" My oldest son nodded and took this advice in as if he'd just learned the catcher's secret. And really, he had: Give 110 percent. Too bad Cabrera wasn't around to hear it, too.

It's easy to spot Posey's 110 percent motto in action, be it **his road to recovery** after his season-ending ankle injury in 2011, or when he played at the start of the 2012 season...**with shingles**. I feel pretty confident that the only time Posey will ever break my kid's heart (okay, and mine, too) is if he ever leaves the Giants.

And yet, *what if?*

Time has shown that we, as parents, need to be cautious about elevating athletes, or anyone else for that matter, to the status of "role model." Players make mistakes. They can make really horrible choices. Still, I'd like to think there are honest players who are gifted on the field and make their mark by sheer effort and determination.

So I'm putting other baseball players on notice. Let kids see how much you love the game. Play with passion. Play hard. And for the love of all things holy, play clean.