

# How To Think Like a Hall-of-Famer

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## 'So home drew Odysseus.' Homer

*You might think a quote by "Homer" is from some team mascot, or even the cartoon superstar, but I actually mean THE Homer, the one who wrote the book we were supposed to read in high school.*

Former Commissioner Bart Giamatti connected The Odyssey with baseball in Take Time for Paradise, a poetic, philosophical look at the game. But in recent coaching conversations with profes-

sional players I have been using an episode in the Odyssey in a more practical way to illustrate what I believe is "Hall of Fame" thinking.

You might recall (from your Cliff's Notes) how the hero of the story, Odysseus, is on a long, lost journey on a ship. Like many base runners, Odysseus has a variety of adventures as he tries to find his way home. One such adventure features the Sirens. As I recall the story, the Sirens were a bunch of indescribably beautiful women whose great looks were only surpassed by the beauty of their singing. The Sirens were perched on the shore of the sea, and whenever a sailor heard their song he fell hopelessly in love and was compelled to sail over to them.

But the Siren's whole gig was a big trap. The sea near their shore was filled with treacherous whirling water and deadly jagged rocks that sucked the ships in as they came near and smashed them into tiny pieces, sending every love-struck man aboard to meet his maker.

No man had ever heard the Sirens and lived to tell about it.

Odysseus wanted to experience the Sirens without being killed. So he got his men to tie him to the mast of their ship and instructed them not to untie him under any circumstances until the ship had sailed long past the Sirens. He then had his crew fill their ears with wax so they could not hear the Sirens' song.

Sure enough, Odysseus heard the Sirens and begged his men to sail to them. The song was truly irresistible and Odysseus went wild trying to get his men to untie him. But his loyal crew stayed true to their instructions and held their course past the Sirens. In the end Odysseus was grateful for their help and his trick of tying himself to the mast enabled him to withstand temptation, stay alive, and continue his pursuit of something greater than immediate gratification.

So, how does this relate to baseball? The Sirens can represent a number of things

for today's player. Junk food, alcohol, video games, and the pressure to live up to expectations (yours and others) all can pull you off course. One of the most seductive elements in the game, particularly the professional game, is boredom. It is easy to fall into a numb mind state as you seemingly do the same thing day after day after day. Most players do only what they are told to do and just go through the motions of preparing for play and in doing so, create an energetic "gravity" that pulls players who want to be exceptional down to the "average" effort level. Average players are Sirens to those who want to be great.

Perhaps the most tempting "Siren" is statistics. I've seen many players smash on the rocks because they were a "stat rat" - calculating their ERA or BA between pitches instead of preparing for the next pitch.

So what is the solution? Tie yourself to the mast: Your "mast" is your mental approach. Who are you as a player? What do you stand for? How do you prepare for a game? How do you prepare for an at-bat? How do you respond to adversity?

Develop a clear plan.

Develop a plan that you come to the park to execute every day regardless of your stats, how your team is doing, the weather, what the coach does or doesn't do, how you happen to feel, or any other circumstance.

Staying focused on your approach helps you stay on course despite the many storms and temptations the game throws at you. This is what I find Hall-of-Fame-level players do: They focus on their approach to the game rather than being at the mercy of the day's circumstances. They play the game, whereas most players let the game play them.