

What's Your IQ?

The Worcester State College Lancers won the 2010 Massachusetts State College Athletic Conference tournament, part of 31-win season. But to Head Coach Dirk Baker, almost as impressive as the team's record and on-field performance was its mental approach to the game.

"The team's attitude was the best I had seen in my coaching career," Baker says. "What did we do differently this year? We added the IQ test."

Baker is referring to a 375-question exam he created

"The team's attitude was the best I had seen in my coaching career," Baker says. "What did we do differently this year? We added the IQ test."

to test his players' baseball knowledge. It's split into five sections on defense, pitching, hitting, base running, and "other," which consists mostly of history and trivia questions. Questions include: "Can a shortstop block part of second base without the ball on a pickoff throw?" and, "How does a pitcher add movement to a pitch?"

"For years, my assistant and I have been saying the kids play the game, but they don't know the game," says Baker. "I finally did something about it to help my players get ready for baseball over the winter."

Not surprisingly, most players weren't happy about taking an exam home with them over winter break. The Lancers were not allowed to start spring practice until they completed the test.

The team spent one day a week during the preseason in a classroom going over the questions, as Baker called on players to answer each one. They argued intensely about details such as a left-handed pitcher's pick-off move with runners on first and third, and even reviewed the proper way to rake the baseline.

"A select few really got into it," Baker says. "I thought it would be positive to educate them and get the juices flowing so when we got into practice, I wouldn't have to go over these things. It's little things, but any baseball coach will say that the little things add up."

Baker says the hardest part of creating the test was making sure all his questions regarding NCAA rules were correct. He solicited input from his staff, coaching colleagues, and an NCAA umpire, who also provided Baker with a copy of the umpires' exam. He recommends thoroughly reviewing the rules of your league, catering to your age group, and conferring with your peers.

Baker also received one slightly unexpected benefit from the IQ test. "My coaching style got better this year," he says. "When I discussed a call with an umpire, I said, 'Sir, what did you see? Explain the rule to me.' I wasn't out there to argue."

Next year, Baker plans to trim the test down a little, and would eventually like to start grading it. He was satisfied with the initial results.

"Am I going to say we won a championship because of the IQ test?" Baker asks. "No. I'd like to say it helped, but it's not the sole reason. If you can combine 25 talented, knowledgeable guys who will do everything in their power to win with a positive attitude, that's when you win championships."



Players at Worcester State College had some homework to complete over winter break last year. Before beginning their preseason practices, team members had to complete an exam consisting of nearly 400 baseball-related questions that were written by Head Coach Dirk Baker.

RICHARD ORR SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY