



## Week 4 Legends Life Lesson: Having an Attitude of Gratitude

In light of the passing of Major League Baseball player Jose Fernandez, I have selected a slightly deeper life lesson this week, but one that I feel is extremely important. If you have not heard yet about the death of the Major League pitcher Jose Fernandez, please just look up his name. (I found a detailed account of his escape attempts here and summarized below his story below: <http://grantland.com/features/marlins-rookie-pitcher-jose-fernandez-journey-cuban-defector-mlb-all-star/> )

Jose grew up in Santa Clara, Cuba and despite living in a modest home and sharing a bedroom with his mother and grandmother. Finding baseball equipment in Cuba was near impossible. Jose would often look for dried tree branches, which he would use as a bat, and rocks, which he would use as a baseball. Jose often flipped up rocks to himself – he would hit them past a patch of dirt and round imaginary bases. He liked to dream and thought that if he worked hard he could one day make it to the Cuban league.

His stepfather tried to escape Cuba thirteen times before finally arriving in America. His goal was to settle in America in so he could make enough money to send for Jose and the rest of his family. At the age of 14, Jose began his attempts to defect and make it to America in hopes of escaping his mandatory military duty. Escaping Cuba meant taking a tiny boat from Cuba to Miami. Many Cubans refer to the stretch of water between Havana and Miami as the Caribbean's largest cemetery. If the current doesn't flip the boat, then there's always the threat of a leaky boat, a soldier's bullet, or, in some cases, an aggressive shark. Each of Jose's 3 failed attempts resulted in a prison term – sometimes lasting a few months. He was a 14-year-old boy cramped into prison cells with grown men who were being locked up for murder! On his successful attempt, his boat was struck by a huge wave, which threw a passenger 60 feet from the boat. Jose jumped in the water and saved this person's life – this person turned out to be his mother.

Jose finally reached America and was introduced to a coach that would change his life. At the start, his coach didn't let him touch a baseball – he worked from 8:00am to 1:30pm 7 days a week stretching, doing plyometrics, flipping tires and throwing medicine balls. He had no friends, no money and spoke very little English. Eventually his coach let him start throwing and bought him a \$13.99 Wilson Glove from Walmart. That fall he showed up at high school and threw the ball 94 miles per hour. The next year Fernandez took a sharpie and wrote 98 on his mirror, as his goal was to hit 98 miles per hour (he got there soon enough). He worked everyday for hours – on Christmas, he practiced, on New Years Eve he practiced – sometimes starting at 5:30am and sometimes going past 9pm at night. Jose never complained; he just loved baseball.

As a sophomore Jose pitched his team to a state title in Florida. His senior year he did it again. In 2011 the Marlins selected Fernandez as the 14<sup>th</sup> overall pick in the 2011 draft. He dominated in the minors where his coaches mainly worked on his body language – he was so passionate about the game he would argue with umpires, throw his gear and yell at people he struck out. These are things top ball players cannot do. In 2013 Jose received a phone call from the Marlins General Manager while he was in his car in a shopping mall parking lot. When he learned he was being called up to the major leagues he sat in his car and cried his eyes out. From that day forward, Jose became one of the best pitchers in all of baseball. He was named the 2013 National League Rookie of the Year. During the 2014 season he tore his Ulnar



Collateral Ligament and had to undergo Tommy John surgery. He was having an amazing 2016 season leading the MLB in strikeouts per 9 innings.

On the morning of September 25, 2016, Fernández was killed in a boating accident off Miami Beach, Florida, that also killed two others. The U.S. Coast Guard found the boat at about 3:00 a.m., overturned on a rock barge and found three victims. A Florida Wildlife Commission official confirmed that Fernández had not been driving the boat, and that he had been killed from the impact of the crash. Jose will always be remembered for his incredible story, his smile and his incredible love and passion for the game of baseball.



### **Lessons of the Week: Gratitude**

We all have so much to be grateful for. Living in America, having freedom, having baseball gear, and our friends and family nearby... We often take these things for granted. These are things, which Jose didn't always have. He worked as hard as he could and never complained. He risked his life for his freedom and the ability to play baseball in America.

Practicing gratitude makes us appreciate how lucky we are. The more we practice gratitude the less stressed we will feel and the happier we will be. Studies prove it! We will have better relationships, we will be more optimistic and more satisfied with our lives in general. Practicing gratitude also helps us show everyone around us how much they mean to us and helps us appreciate how fortunate we are.

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### **Lesson of the Week: Having an Attitude of Gratitude**

1. Write down 3 things you are grateful for in your Legends Ledger
2. Write 1 handwritten thank you note to 1 person in your life (this can be a parent, grandmother, friend, teacher, coach). *3 sentence minimum. Thank them for being a supportive friend, a positive teacher and great grandmother. Thank someone in your life who means a lot to you!*
3. Write in your Legends Ledger who you wrote your thank you note to (kids are on the honor system)

**\*\* Bonus\*\*** Listen to my podcast episode on 7 strategies to incorporate gratitude into your life!  
<http://www.menloparklegends.com/2016/09/29-hit-a-home-run-with-gratitude/>

