

Handout 1: Letter to my Younger Self

December 19, 2014

Dear Doc,

I'm writing you this letter from the future — many, many fastballs and curveballs from where you're standing now. It may seem farfetched now, but in the coming years you will achieve your greatest dreams and be forced to confront a lot of pain and darkness. I can't shield you from all the mistakes and errors — these are the things that will shape the man you ultimately become — but here's some guidance about the journey you're going to embark on.

When you're a 13-year-old in Tampa Bay, a man will tell you that one day you're going to play for the New York Yankees. His name is George Steinbrenner and you should listen to him.

If Mr. Steinbrenner offers you a small stake in the Yankees several decades later, maybe think twice before turning him down out of respect for your friendship.

On that note, your agent will approach you about becoming an early investor in a fast food chain called Checkers. At the time you might assume that it won't be able to compete with Burger King. Maybe reconsider that decision as well.

\$2,400 a month is not a good deal for an unfurnished, windowless basement apartment in Port Washington in 1984. Find a place closer to the stadium — you can afford windows, man.

I can't believe I have to tell you this, but the reason fans are following you to the grocery store is because you decided to put a strip that says Mr. Dwight on the windshield of your Z20 Camaro. You'll remember this car as the one with the bunny rabbits painted on both sides. Oh, and the big fuzzy dice. Try to practice a little discretion. The jheri curl, large medallion and gold teeth you're rocking won't do much to help you blend in either. Your teammates won't say anything to your face, but you better believe they're talking about you.

Take a moment to thank the Lord that social media will not exist during your playing career. The entire '86 Mets team probably would have been locked up.

You're too stubborn to listen to me on this, but your arm isn't indestructible. The damage you do to your body off the field will eventually catch up to your performance on the mound. Trust me when I say that those 150-pitch shut-outs will add up quickly, so try to take care of yourself.

There is one pitch that will forever haunt you. It will happen during the 1988 NLCS with your team up 4-2. In the 9th inning, you'll walk John Shelby on four pitches, and then face Mike Scioscia. The guy is not a home run hitter, but you should respect him as a veteran with a lot of experience. Everyone in the stadium, including Scioscia, knows that you're going to throw a

fastball. With your first pitch, your instinct will be to try to throw it over the middle to get ahead on the count with a quick strike. What you should do is throw it low and away. Read that last line again. Throw it low and away.

Everything will come much easier if you always remember that the media is not the sole judge of your successes and failures. If you think you pitched a good game, that's all that matters.

I should tell you that the biggest challenges you'll face in your lifetime will not relate to baseball. Baseball is something that will always come naturally to you. You'll struggle with the things that don't come as naturally.

Someday your father will pass away, and when he does, going to the ballpark will start feeling like a job for the first time in your career. At that point, take some time away from the game to reevaluate what's really important in life. If you don't allow yourself time to emotionally recover, the wins won't bring joy and the losses won't bring disappointment. That's when you know it's time to retire.

Eighty percent of your drive will come from your desire to make dad proud, while the other 20 percent will be for you. Do your best to flip those numbers around, otherwise his absence will cause you to spiral. There are steps you can take to stop this decline, but you'll have to discover them the hard way.

Your yearning to be liked should not define you as a person. Not everyone has your best interests in mind.

Drugs and alcohol are only a false sense of security. Neither thing will fill the void you feel. Unfortunately, it might take you a few missed Christmas Days with your family to learn this.

You will want to try to fix your issues on your own. This is how you think a man handles his problems. It isn't. Being a man is about reaching out for help when you need it. If your curveball isn't working, you'll know how to fix that. If the control on your pitches is off, you'll know how to fix that. But you will face a lot of hardship because of your inability to realize that you can't fix yourself.

Finally, please know this: I love you. It's going to take you a long time and a lot of pain to realize this, but accepting it will go a long way towards healing. The journey will be trying, but it ends in a good place.

Keep getting those Ks,

Dwight 'Doc' Gooden