

“Any time you have the opportunity to make a difference in this world and you don’t, then you are wasting your time on Earth.”

-Roberto Clemente

The Braintree Baseball Club has become a welcoming community center. It was opened with the mission statement to help develop skills but also create a fun atmosphere for those who walk thru the door. We have emphasized to the athletes in the facility that the place should be a facility where anyone can come work free of prejudice and discrimination. Also, that it begins with the athletes creating an environment accepting of all skill levels while at the same time pushing each other to excel. Our August Athlete of the Month is deserving of this award not just because of his athletic ability but also the attitude and leadership shown to his peers. Congratulations to Jackson Mazza, our August Athlete of the Month.

During the winter the Little League Hitting Clinic is one of our more popular classes. This past year it was filled with a very diverse group of players from 7-12 years old and all levels of talent and experience, from true beginners to all-stars. The group also included some boys with disabilities and due to the help of youngsters like Jackson, it was a huge success.

I asked Jackson for help with the clinics. He would be the one I would ask to set-up and demonstrate drills for the new players. I would put him in the group with new ball players and the players who were dealing with disabilities such as hearing loss and Autism, so they could see how to work and see how to perform, act and carry themselves. He had a natural patience and empathy with the kids, some of whom were 3-4 years younger than him and some who were hoping to play little league for the first time; Jackson was excellent. His work did not end in the winter as Jackson found out he was on a team at EBLL majors with one of the new players from the clinic who is challenged with Autism, Matt. Matt knew Jackson and trusted him from all the time in our club being grouped with each other. Jackson had befriended him during the winter. Jackson decided that he would continue to help and take a leadership role on the field as he had done all winter at the club. Jackson realized that because he is a good ball player and respected amongst his peers for his talent, that he could determine how the new players would be accepted and treated by their teammates. How he treated Matt would determine how everyone treated Matt. Jackson embraced the challenge and nailed it.

During their first game, Matt’s parents were very nervous; not sure Matt playing was a good idea. Jackson and the way he treated Matt had alleviated their fears. Jackson was in the on-deck circle helping Matt with his batting gloves, helmet, reminding him how to stand and grip the bat and patting him on the back. He was the last voice Matt heard before his at-bats. When Jackson was pitching, he would always look out to the field for Matt and make sure he was in the right position and ready for the action. Matt battled and competed throughout the game and the season, eventually catching his first fly ball for an out and getting his 1st hit, scoring his 1st run, etc. Jackson went on to have an all-star season, reaching his goals of making the all-star team; it was a great spring for many and fun for all. Matt’s Mom, sums it up better than any of us could as I asked her what she would want people to know about Jackson Mazza. She stated, “Great choice for Athlete of the Month. Jackson is a dedicated player, a great leader and a super role model. He helped my son with Autism on his batting stance, batting grip as well as tips throughout the games. He was encouraging, kind and so helpful in my son’s fun and successful baseball season. Congratulations Jackson!”

All the while Jackson was busy helping others; he was putting in a lot of work to develop his own skills. Jackson, during the winter, had set a goal to make the Bandits 13u team, a roster he had been pursuing to make for quite some time. We decided that Jackson would “live” at the baseball club for the next several months, attending clinics and taking private lessons. Jackson’s attendance was regular and consistent, he was determined with great focus. He was grinding and getting better. Jackson made the all-star team after a stellar Majors season. Jackson continued his fine play all summer pitching important innings and hitting his way into the middle of the line-up for the summer championship 12 A East Braintree Little Leaguers. Jackson, in August, made the AAU team, the number one goal he had set for himself.

His accomplishments on the field were tremendous and his goals that he set a year ago were all reached. That, in and of itself, is a great story and worthy of mention, but Jackson’s selflessness, leadership, empathy and kindness with many youngsters and peers throughout the past year are the greater story and worthy of recognition as our Athlete of the Month for August of 2016.

Truly one of your biggest fans,

Bill Berman