

## A Lesson From Baseball's All-Stars

by Anna Wells, Editor, IMPO



As a baseball fan, All-Star week is typically a mediocre point in the season for me: My team—the Milwaukee Brewers—doesn't play for three days, our best talent risks injury in an ancillary ball game, and the American League *always* wins, this year being no exception.

But once the days leading up to the event reveal all of the associated marketing theatrics, I always get sucked in and wind up watching the game, the home run derby, the speeches and the montages... what can I say? I'm a sucker for America's pastime.

I think it can be difficult as a baseball fan to let down your existing alliances and rivalries and watch the All-Star game for what it is—a display of the most talented fan favorites in the game. How am I supposed to root against the St. Louis Cardinals and the Chicago Cubs (almost as important to me as rooting *for* the Brewers), when we are all playing on the same National League ball club for the night? I'm so used to hurling verbal insults at Albert Pujols (sorry, St. Louis fans...) that it's nearly impossible for me to get any pleasure out of him making good plays for the NL All Star-Team.

I watched the game with my brothers, we insulted the competition, ate pizza, and I woke up on the couch in time to see The National League lose its 12th straight. For the most part, it passed without event, but it did get me thinking a bit about success and competition, and what we *do* with it after we've reached our particular milestones—athletic, or otherwise.

I recently toured a facility in northern Minnesota for an *IMPO* article, and their

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unique approach to success really resonated with me. Mate Precision Tooling is a manufacturer of CNC punch press replacement tooling, and the interview was planned around the company's more recent accolade of being named Manufacturer of the Year by the Minnesota Manufacturer's Alliance. Mate's award was based on a number of criteria, but one of the most interesting was the fact that the company is very willing to share knowledge and best practices with other manufacturers.

When visiting Mate, we discussed some of their strategies, and the company management described plant tours where they learned as much as, if not more than, visiting companies simply through engaging in an open dialogue. The MN Manufacturer's Alliance often helped facilitate these plant tours, but kept all competitors out—meaning, once these folks were in an environment free of competition, they could really open up and share ideas without fear of compromising their businesses.

I'm not suggesting you start a softball league with your competitors, but I do think there is knowledge to be gained from an environment that allows for some transparency amongst those you don't compete with. As a baseball bat manufacturer, you might be able to gain something by asking questions about the 5S or Kaizen process of another manufacturer, even if they make plastic forks.

Yeah, it still burns me that the first time all season Albert Pujols is protected at the plate is because the Brewers All-Star Ryan Braun is batting behind him, but only because we've been battling out first place in the NLC all season. But as far as some of these other ball players go, I can respect guys like Derek Jeter and Josh Hamilton—*especially* because we almost never play them. All I'm saying is, we're not so different. And maybe we're not even so competitive. Is it so bad to go out there and swing a few bats together?

Think there are other lessons to be learned from the major leagues, or vice versa? E-mail me at [anna.wells@advantagemedia.com](mailto:anna.wells@advantagemedia.com) [1].

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