



# Tutoring Tater

Story and Photo by Andrew Cooke

Last fall I coached a team from Capital Park, an urban baseball park located in the south side of Tallahassee. Historically, Capital Park was a baseball park marred by segregation, allowing only white children to play baseball. This changed in the early 1970's when integration allowed the black children to play. Since then, Capital Park league has gradually transformed into a league predominated by African-American children. It was at this small park with a sad history that I learned about the strength of a person's spirit when given hope.

Before becoming a coach at Capital Park I spent my days

studying feverishly. The library was my home and the studying was my only hobby. This constant focus on school left me frustrated and depressed. As a result, I decided to return to the one part of my childhood that had given me solace, baseball. After calling many different parks I was approached by Lewis Thurston, the park president of Capital Park, about coaching. With the support of fellow students and friends I took the reins and signed up as head coach of the Capital Park Angels unaware of the impact that this would have on my life beyond sports.

I arrived at Capital Park nervous and unsure about how my coaching experience would be. When I arrived, a child, Tadarus 'Tater' Hall, sitting on his bike waiting for practice to start, met me. This shy child was the first player to arrive and was almost always the last child to leave. He always needed a coach to follow him home, so the car light could show him the road on the way home. "Tater" was the youngest player on my team as well as the largest. He was unsure

of his skills and very sensitive about his weight. As a result he often refused to run with the team because of his reluctance to be surpassed by his older teammates. Through this season, I developed a relationship with Tater beyond baseball, where he would tell me some of his problems with school and the neighborhood kids.

Even though the team played ball across town, and Taters' mother worked late, he was the one player that I could always count on for showing up on time. He was one of my passionate players with a desire to play baseball. Tadarius could be relied upon; he always came to play.

One day, in the middle of the season, Tadarius did not show up to a game. During the game one of his teammates told me that his mother had pulled him off the team for cheating on a math test. I immediately called Lewis Thurston, for advice about how to handle this situation. He told me that without baseball many of the children would just be playing in the streets. He advised me to call the mother and try to get Tadarius back on the team. I knew that most of my coaches were medical students and all of my coaches were qualified to tutor this child.

I called Ms. Hall and offered to personally tutor her son before every practice if she allowed Tadarius to return to the team. She accepted and thanked me for trying to help her son. He had been a straight A student the previous year and now he was making C's and D's. Before the next practice, Tadarius and I talked and I told him that he would have to bring his homework to every practice and every game. If his homework was complete when practice started, I would reduce his running by 2 laps. I wanted to positively reinforce his good behavior. I also expressed my disappointment with his actions because I knew he was smarter than his actions showed. With help from my classmates and fellow coaches, Tadarius had a tutor before every practice. We continued this routine until the end of the season. Though I did not know Tadarius' grades I believed that we were truly doing a good thing.

Recently, when I was calling the children for spring baseball, young Tadarius picked up the phone and in almost a shout he told me that he had made straight A's this past semester. I told him that I was proud of him and that I knew all along that he could do it. His mother picked up the phone and personally thanked me for helping her son with school. I know that I cannot help everyone, but I do believe what Lewis Thurston told me, "Even if you help just one child you have done something great."



## Old

By Jordan Rogers

**In my younger years  
Talkin' way, way younger years  
Talkin' strong muscles long lean arms and  
living for the life years  
I was more awake  
Less tired**

**In my older years  
I mean, old years  
I mean old as a tree can be when it seems  
to connect with the ground and you wonder  
Which was there first?  
I was quiet  
More refined  
Taking it all in, not rushing past,  
Like in my younger years**

**For it seems when we are young we want  
time to  
Speed up, hurry on  
We are always movin' on to the next week  
and month and year  
And before you know it man  
You're a tree**

**But what youth can rob you of  
Is a past  
That teaches you  
To savor that moment,  
Smile at the sunrise  
And quit moving towards the older years  
They come on too fast  
Anyway**

**Before you know it  
You're smiling at the sunrise  
Through wrinkled eyes  
And you know how to savor each day  
Finally**

**So don't you wait  
Until you're skin is bark  
And your legs, they're roots  
To give in  
To that sunrise**