

# HOME RUN DILEMMA

*This story originated with Tom Peterson of Peterson and Paulson, Inc. Tom and his partner, Rick Paulson, are a couple of young millionaires who love to help people in unique ways. I've worked with them on numerous charitable projects, and Tom came to introduce me to the young man in this story.*

*Pastor Fred Anderson*

“Hey, Tom, since it’s a girls’ night out for shopping, how would you like to catch a ball game?”

“Well, Rick, I’d really rather go shopping with the girls, but if you insist, I guess we could go down to the ballpark ... You do insist, don’t you?”

“Yes, I insist, as a matter of male independence.”

“Who’s playing tonight, Rick?”

“The Wildcats are coming to town, and they’ve got that new kid that’s causing quite a sensation.”

“Sounds interesting.”

“Have you heard anything about him, Tom?”

“No, not really.”

“His name is Dexter Hawkins. He’s from a little farm town out in Nebraska. This will only be his third game of the year and he’s already hit six home runs.”

“Whoa. Six home runs in his first two games? That’s amazing.”

“Yeah, it could be exciting, but there’s already talk of moving him up to AA in a couple of days.”

“Man, the parking lot is almost full,” said Rick. “I’ve never seen it like this before. It’s got to be the kid bringing them in. We may end up in the bleachers.”

“That’s okay, Rick.”

The first two batters from the visiting Wildcats were quick outs on only three pitches. Then came Hawkins batting third. The hometown pitcher felt confident with the first two easy outs. His first pitch to Hawkins cleared the left field wall by twenty feet. The crowd went wild, even though it was the opposing team. When Dexter came up for his second bat, the home team had a new pitcher on the mound. The first pitch to Hawkins landed in the water behind the center field wall.

“Man, this is great,” said Rick. “What a rush.”

“Yeah, it’s something alright,” added Tom.

His next two at bats, Dexter was intentionally walked, despite the boos of the hometown crowd. The Wildcats came out on top in the end by a score of 6 to 5.

As they walked back to the car in the parking lot, Rick looked at Tom and said, “I know that look. You’ve got to find out more about this guy. Right?”

“That thought has crossed my mind,” answered Tom.

“There will probably be a lot of people ahead of you right now,” said Rick.

“In due time, my friend,” said Tom. “In due time ... Besides, you must have a connection somewhere, don’t you?”

Dexter Hawkins loved the game of baseball. An average pitcher and fielder in Little League, Dexter had an extraordinary ability to hit. His first four at bats as an eleven-year-old, he hit four home runs. Opposing teams pitched very carefully to him, trying not to give him anything good to hit, but he still managed a home run with every other at bat. Eventually, the other teams just began walking him, so he hit no more home runs that year. This pattern continued throughout high school and college. A major league team drafted him #1 when he finished college. He signed and started out in A ball where Tom and Rick first saw him. Within a month, he started for the Jaguars, the AAA team in the parent’s farm system. His second year of professional baseball, he attended spring training with the parent club.

During spring training, Dexter drew huge crowds just to watch him take batting practice.

Confident, seasoned major league pitchers saw the ball with every other at bat clear the outfield fence. Nobody had ever seen anything like it in the sport's history. The team owners could not contain their joy. You can imagine the hoopla in the sports media. Statisticians pointed out that he could hit 300 home runs a year.

A very quiet man, Dexter just loved playing the game and paid little mind to all the attention he received. Then came the opening game of the major league season. The ace pitcher of the visiting team looked a little nervous, pacing around the mound and talking to himself. When Dexter came up to bat, the crowd roared. The first pitch was a nasty curveball and Dexter swung and missed. The next two pitches had the same result and Dexter struck out. A hush fell over the crowd, but the roar returned for Dexter's second at bat. The cycle repeated three more times, as Dexter struck out all four at bats in his major league debut. Of course, the hoopla in the media equaled a level as if Dexter had hit four home runs.

Unfortunately, Dexter struck out every at bat for the first ten games. He also appeared befuddled in the field, making many mental errors. The team

sent him back down to AAA for a little more experience.

When Dexter got back to the Jaguars AAA minor league team, the fans didn't know quite what to think. His teammates weren't exactly sure how to approach him. His first game back, he hit four home runs. In his next five games, he hit two home runs every game, until the cycle of intentional walks began again. Attendance at the farm club games, home and away, shattered every record ever kept, which benefited the entire league.

The next season, Dexter continued to amaze during spring training with the parent club. Then came the first game of the season, and everyone eagerly anticipated his power at the plate. But it never came for Dexter, as he struck out four times and made three errors at first base. Management struggled for an answer. They sent him back down to AAA again, where he continued his home run production. Dexter played two more seasons in AAA setting records for home runs and walks that will probably stand forever. He retired from the game of baseball after those two seasons, never playing for the major league team again.

*Tom Peterson sat down with Dexter after his last season for a lengthy interview. Absolutely fascinated by Dexter, Tom called me and asked if I would meet with them one day. Tom saw a wonderful, gentle giant of a man succumbing to failure and struggling to decide what to do with his life. The rest of this story tells of my interaction with Dexter.*

*Pastor Fred Anderson*

The birds in the trees chirped loudly on a beautiful spring day when baseball fans across the nation were about to head to ballparks for the first games of the season. Three men and a walk in the park on such a fine day seemed only right for conversation. We soon came upon some members of my flock, Madelyn Jacobs with her new baby daughter and her son, Todd. They, too, were enjoying the beautiful day and the peacefulness of the park.

“Good morning, Pastor,” said Madelyn.

“And a beautiful morning it is, Madelyn,” I replied. “Madelyn, this is Dexter and Tom.”

“Nice to meet you, gentlemen,” said Madelyn.

Before either could reply, Todd said excitedly, “I know you. You played for the Jaguars, didn’t you?”

“Yes, I did,” answered Dexter.

“I have one of your broken bats,” said Todd. “I collect broken bats.”

“I wish I had known,” said Dexter. “I would have brought you another one.”

Reaching into the red covered wagon that he brought with him to the park, Todd pulled out an intricately carved wooden bat. It had just about anything you could think of about baseball on it.

As he looked at the bat that Todd showed him, Dexter asked, “Where did you get such a cool bat, Todd?”

“I made it,” answered the lad.

“You carved all this?” asked Dexter.

“Yes, I did,” replied Todd.

“This is awesome, Todd,” said Dexter. “You’ve got incredible talent.”

“I want you to have it, Mr. Hawkins,” said Todd.

“No, I couldn’t do that. You worked so hard on it.”

“But I want you to have it,” insisted Todd. “It’s your broken bat.”

Dexter looked at me and I gave him a thumbs up.

“Are you sure, Todd?” asked Dexter.

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, I’m going to hang this someplace special in my house. Maybe over the fireplace where I can always see it and remember you.”

As we walked away, I began telling Dexter and Tom a little bit about Todd.

“That is one special boy,” said Dexter.

“Yes, he is,” I replied. “God has given him some wonderful gifts, but they have come in a very shy package. That is the most I have ever seen him talk to a stranger. Of all the conversations I’ve had

with Madelyn and her husband about their concerns with Todd, I could sum it up in one thought, ‘Let Todd be Todd’. I know some will think that to be too simplistic and that I don’t know what I’m talking about. But I’ve seen him when he is left alone and loving what he’s doing.”

Dexter stopped and turned around. He stood there with an inquisitive look on his face, watching Todd working on another bat. Then he looked at the bat that Todd had given him, holding it up as if he were holding it up to a mirror.

I could tell you that my words to Dexter created such an impression that he completely changed his life and went back to professional baseball and became a world-class major-league player. But that’s not what happened.

Here is what did happen:

Rick Paulson of Peterson and Paulson, Inc. called on one of his real estate partners and they found a farm for sale in Jack Valley. Rick hired Dexter to run the farm, giving him a free hand. The farm turned a respectable profit during its first two years, but that seemed secondary in Rick’s mind. At the entrance to Diamond Farms stood a

regulation baseball field. At any given time, you might find a group of kids from all walks of life and all economic levels playing and learning all about the game of baseball. And there among those kids you will find Dexter Hawkins ... well, just being Dexter, sharing his love for the sport and for the joy of the unique life that God has given him and every kid there.

And hanging on the wall just above the fireplace in the farmhouse is an intricately carved, broken bat.