THE ART OF EVALUATING AND DEVELOPING YOUTH TALENT

By *Nathan Clinkenbeard*

KIDS ARE RECEIVING PROFESSIONAL INSTRUCTION AT YOUNGER AGES THAN EVER BEFORE, AND BASEBALL FACTORY IS LEADING THE WAY IN ASSESSING AND MOLDING THEIR ABILITIES.

Baseball Factory founder and CEO Steve Sclafani graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, where he was a second baseman, in 1993, and he was looking for that next step in his life.

He always loved baseball and helping kids from an evaluation standpoint, so it only made sense to take that passion and turn it into a career. Sclafani created Baseball Factory in 1994 and turned it from a one-man operation into one of the nation's leaders in evaluating and developing youth talent.

"Interestingly enough, some of the first few events we did were actually youth camps back in 1994," Sclafani said. "We continued to do youth instruction and stuff like that, but it was mostly just in Maryland. Then from a national perspective we jumped right into the 14-18-year-old age group in evaluating, developing and finding those kids college programs."

It wasn't until 2008 when they signed a deal to become Little League Baseball's official player development partner that Baseball Factory began to get big again in the youth market.

Now, besides the partnership with Little League, Baseball Factory hosts youth camps across the country with the most popular being the Under Armour Baseball Factory Tryouts.

These camps are held throughout the year in places across the country. Kids can attend, be evaluated and go through a number of developmental stages to learn how to improve their game.

"It's best to really start at one of our national tryouts so we can have an evaluation and a rating so the parents and the kids can have an idea of where they stand," Sclafani said. "From there we're able to speak intelligently to the family about what would be the best program for the kid to go into."

Baseball Factory scouts run the youth players through a number of tests, and these pre-high school kids (10-14) are graded on a 10-50 scale, as opposed to the 20-80 pro scale. Since kids at that age are not going to be able to rate well on the pro scale, the youth version was modified so it could be translated easily to the parent and player.

While rating the youth players on certain skills is an important step in the process, Sclafani believes the measurables are more for the parents. Baseball Factory does not dwell on the ratings with the kids because they would rather talk to them about what they do well and what they need to work on.

"We're able to give the kids their strengths, their weaknesses, what they need to work on, and give them what we call a true prescription for success to get better," Sclafani said. "Measurables are more for the parent to see where their kid stands from a nationwide perspective."

Baseball Factory has 55 full-time scouts and over 1,000 that work part time. Over the 18 years they have been around, Baseball Factory has developed a network of scouts throughout the country built from former college coaches, former pro players and scouts and some current pro scouts.

At the Under Armour Baseball Factory National Tryout, these scouts look at a number of different things including foot speed, arm accuracy, arm strength, bat speed and proper bat mechanics.

Above all of those tools, Sclafani thinks a youth player's athleticism is one of the top traits to look for when a kid comes to a camp. He likes to see good athletes because young kids have a lot of room for improvement when it comes to skill sets.

"We're looking for overall athleticism and body control, especially at that 10-12 age," Sclafani said. "Overall, what kind of athlete is he? Cause at that age you can really teach a kid and make them a lot better."

After the National Tryouts, youth players will get Baseball Factory's Instructional Video Program, where they get their personalized corrective video clips to work on improving their skills.

Said Sclafani, "Once you can evaluate a player, whether they're 11 years old or 14 years old, you can really write them the right prescription for success."

Thousands of prescriptions later, Baseball Factory is the go-to doctor for getting better on the field.

Want to see how your skills stack up on the diamond so you can become a better player? Log on to BaseballFactory.com/Tryouts to find an Under Armour Baseball Factory National Tryout near you!

BASEBALL FACTORY ALUMS

A number of big name Baseball Factory players have gone on to stardom in the majors. Have you heard of these guys?

Prince Fielder	*Detroit Tigers*
Roy Halladay	*Philadelphia Phillies*
C.C. Sabathia	*New York Yankees*
Mark Teixeira	*New York Yankees*
Justin Verlander	*Detroit Tigers*
David Wright	*New York Mets*