

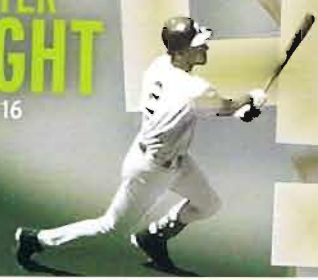
Boys' Life

FOR ALL BOYS

APRIL 2009

PLAY BALL

BUT DEREK JETER SAYS YOU BETTER DO IT RIGHT
FIND OUT HOW ON PAGE 16



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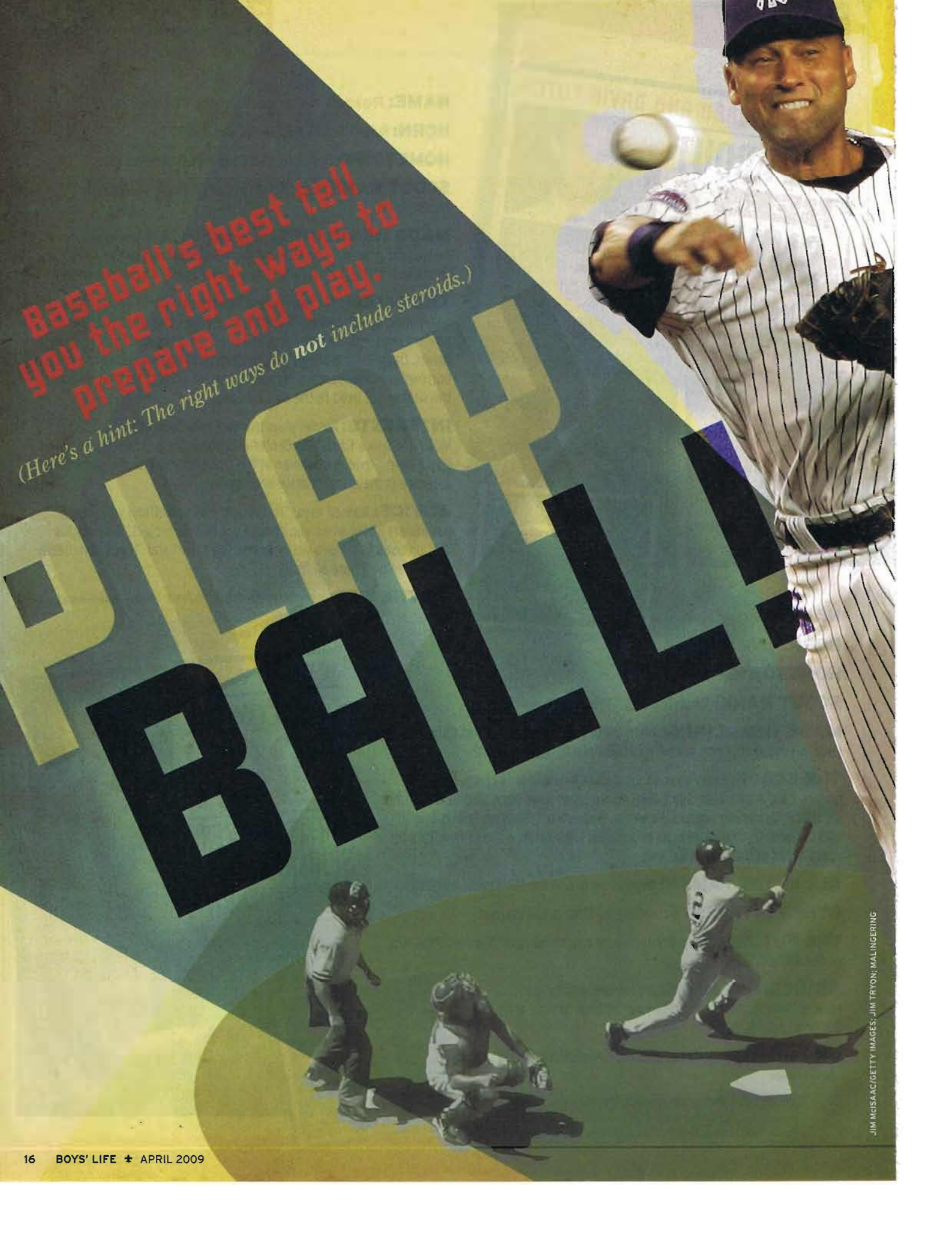
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Baseball's best tell
you the right ways to
prepare and play.

(Here's a hint: The right ways do not include steroids.)

PLAY BALL!

JIM MCISAAC/GETTY IMAGES; JIM TRYON/MALINGERING

"You have to take care of your body because you only get one. Cheating yourself for immediate success is only going to hurt you down the road." —DEREK JETER

There's a right way to play baseball and a wrong way. The right way involves hard work, consistency and mental toughness.

The wrong way involves steroids.

Boys' Life spoke with some of baseball's best, who offer tips on how to play the healthy way.

Keep in Diamond Shape

It might seem that players such as New York Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter were born with home-run power and unlimited fielding range. Nope. For Jeter, it was all about hard work when he was young.

"Play long toss," Jeter says. "That's the best way to strengthen your arm. Also play other sports. Nowadays, people sit around and play video games. You've got to move around and be active."

Arizona Diamondbacks pitcher Brandon Webb agrees. "Go out and play catch at a comfortable distance, nothing too far, nothing where you have to put an arc in your throws. Then you just build your distance up from there.

"Start where you feel comfortable, where you can have the same mechanics. You don't want to have to throw at max effort. Then you move

back



as you get used to it. You are not going to get your arm strength in a week or so. It's going to take a little while. But each week you can move back to a new goal."

New York Mets pitcher Johan Santana says that in addition to doing "long tosses to strengthen my arm, I run for endurance and to stay in shape. Even on days I don't throw, I run to keep my legs fresh."

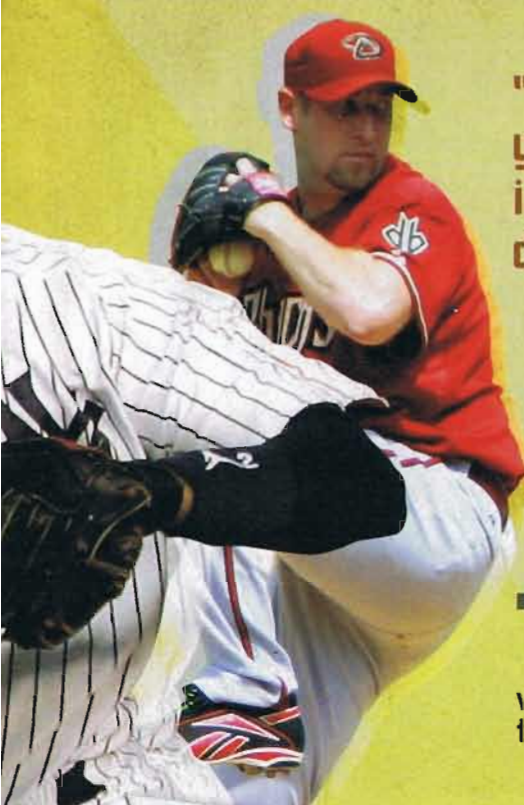
Detroit Tigers pitcher Dontrelle Willis says it's more about being consistent than being strenuous. "Do a lot of jogging and stretching in the off-season," he says. "It helps me to pitch longer into games early in the season."

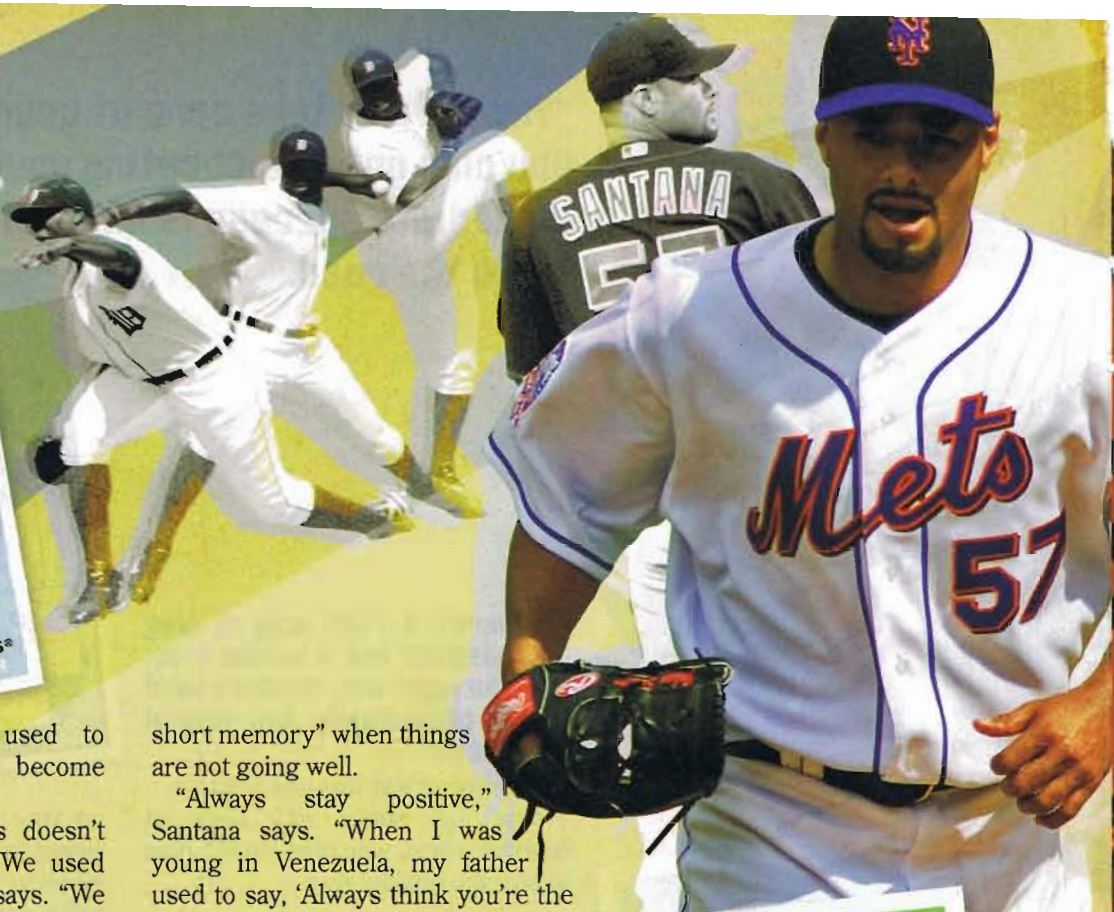
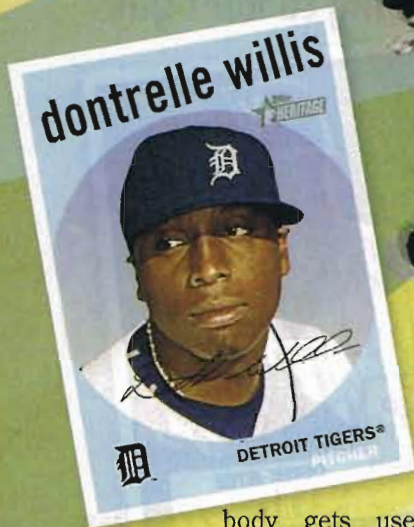
The Will to Drill

For improving, nothing beats actually playing games, but the little things can prepare you properly.

"You can hit off a tee," Jeter says. "I mean, anything you can get your hands on. You can do soft toss (performed with someone a few feet to the side of you, tossing a ball to your hitting zone). I don't think it really makes a difference what drill it is exactly, as long as you continue to do it. You want to get as many repetitions as possible so your

CONTINUED >





body gets used to the movements and they become natural.”

Practicing with soft toss doesn't even require a baseball. “We used to use Wiffle balls,” Webb says. “We used to hit marshmallows. We'd roll up socks and duct tape them and hit them against the side of the house.”

Webb also suggests “dry work,” in which “you look at yourself in the mirror going through your pitching motion (or your swing) and watch what happens. You can see what you are doing right and work on things that are not going well.”

Win the Mental Game

Hall of Famer Yogi Berra said, “Baseball is 90 percent mental—the other half is physical.” Although Berra's numbers don't exactly add up, the spirit of the thought does. Bottom line: If you're not mentally strong, you won't get far in baseball.

Jeter likes to keep the thought process simple: “Have fun. For any young player, you've got to enjoy yourself as much as possible.” Jeter encourages setting goals, but he warns not to take them too seriously or you'll play the game too tight. (Fact: Loose muscles swing the bat faster.)

Webb agrees that the game is supposed to be fun. Plus, “it's pretty easy not to forget bad games, but it's important to forget them. Have a

short memory” when things are not going well.

“Always stay positive,” Santana says. “When I was young in Venezuela, my father used to say, ‘Always think you're the best and nobody can stop you.’ So believe in yourself. Have a positive attitude, and you'll succeed.”

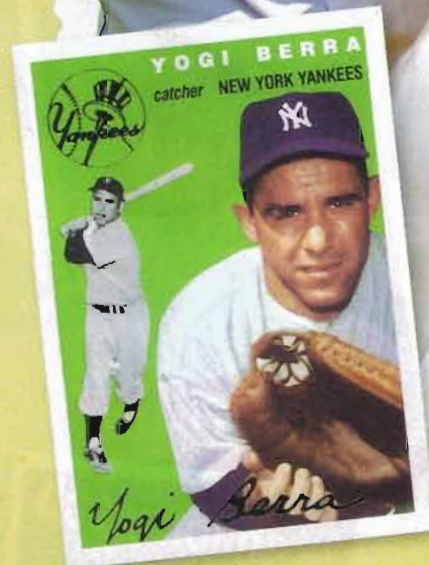
Willis says the best way to keep that edge is to remember someone else is training just as hard as you are. “Realize that when you are doing stuff other than working on getting better and staying in good shape, thousands of guys who will be your competition someday are eating right, working out a lot and getting a lot of sleep.”

Staring Down Steroids

There's a lot of talk in sports about steroids, illegal drugs said to improve athletic performance—but at a terrible cost. Steroids are drugs that can make some people look stronger on the outside, but they create weaknesses on the inside. Athletes who use steroids in an attempt to improve performance often experience uncontrollable anger and depression. Some have even killed themselves.

Bottom line: There's nothing good about these illegal drugs.

“It is going to hurt your body much, much more than it is going to help you,” Webb says. “It is bad for the body. You need to steer as far



away from that stuff as you can. The consequences are so big, there is no reason to do that.”

There are no healthy shortcuts. Santana says, “You must let your body grow at its own rate to develop your skills.”

Again, Derek Jeter likes to keep it simple: “You have to take care of your body because you only get one. Cheating yourself for immediate success is only going to hurt you down the road.”

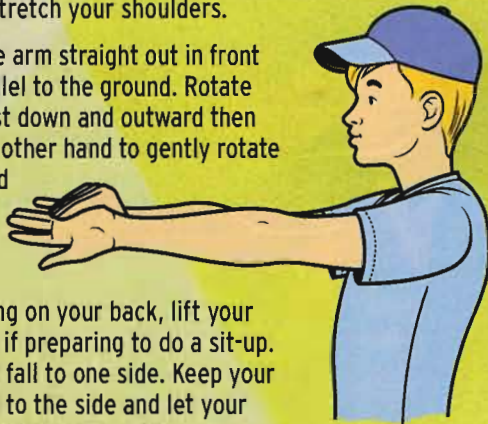
—Eric Butterman with additional reporting by Harold Goldberg and Jack Magruder

"My father used to say, 'Always think you're the best and nobody can stop you.' So believe in yourself. Have a positive attitude, and you'll succeed." —JOHAN SANTANA

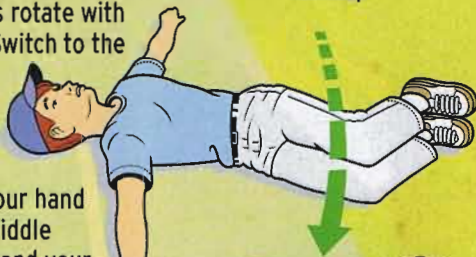
GOOD WAYS TO PREPARE FOR BASEBALL ...

- Strengthen your arm by playing long toss.
- Practice your swing by hitting off a tee.
- Touch your toes to stretch your hamstrings.
- Hold a bat behind your back and raise it up to stretch your shoulders.

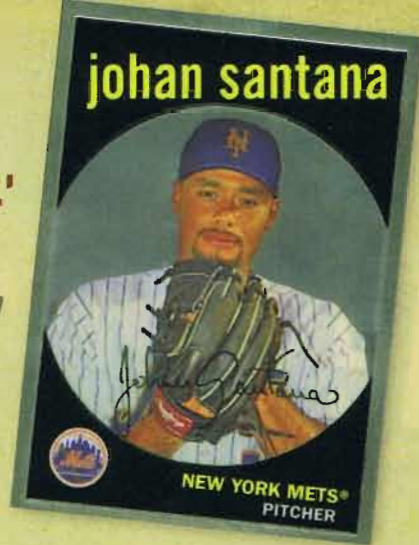
- Place one arm straight out in front and parallel to the ground. Rotate your wrist down and outward then use your other hand to gently rotate your hand upward.



- While lying on your back, lift your knees as if preparing to do a sit-up. Let them fall to one side. Keep your arms out to the side and let your back and hips rotate with your knees. Switch to the other side.



- Stand with your hand behind the middle of your back and your elbow pointing out. Reach over with your other hand and gently pull your elbow forward.



... AND ONE VERY BAD WAY

Illegal steroid use is a federal crime. (Doctors sometimes prescribe steroids to treat some types of disorders, but never to make athletes better.) Users often experience uncontrollable anger and depression.

Steroid users are branded as cheaters. Steroid use may lead to:

- High blood pressure
- An enlarged heart
- Stoppage of bone growth
- Liver cysts
- Cancer
- Severe acne
- Bad breath
- Baldness
- Ligament and joint injury



All Josh wants to do is play baseball and be great at it. But to be great, some people are telling him steroids are the answer. Find out what he does in **"Baseball Great,"** a new novel for readers 9 to 12 by former National Football League player Tim Green. \$16.99 softcover, Harper Collins, www.boyslife.org/links/harpercollins

