

STRIKING OUT 5,113 TIMES

On Aug. 6, 1999, a Major League Baseball player stepped up to home plate in Montreal and made another out – the 5,113th of his professional career.

That's a lot of trips to the batter's box without a hit! If a player made all of those outs consecutively, and he averaged four at-bats per game, he would play eight seasons (1,278 games straight) without ever reaching first base.

Was the player discouraged that night? No. You see, earlier in the same game, in his first plate appearance, that player reached a milestone that only 21 people in the history of baseball have ever achieved. He had made his 3,000th hit. That player was Tony Gwynn of the San Diego Padres.



During that game, Gwynn got on base with hits four times in five tries. But that was not the norm for him. Usually, he failed to get a hit two times out of every three attempts.

Those results may not sound very encouraging, but if you know baseball, you recognize that Gwynn's ability to succeed consistently only one time in three tries made him the greatest hitter of his generation. And he understood that to get his hits, he had to make a lot of outs.

The left-handed hitting Gwynn won eight batting titles in his career, tied for the second-most in Major League Baseball history. He was considered one of the best and most consistent hitters in the history of the game. He was a 15-time All-Star, recognized for his skills both on offense and defense. He was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 2007. He died on June 16, 2014, of salivary gland cancer.

Commenting on Gwynn's amazing accomplishments and his strike-outs, John C. Maxwell, author and internationally recognized expert on leadership development, said that one of the greatest problems people have with failure is that they are too quick to judge isolated situations in their lives and label them as failures.

"Instead, they need to keep the bigger picture in mind," he said. "Someone like Tony Gwynn doesn't look at an out that he makes and think of failure. He sees it within the context of the bigger picture. His perspective leads to perseverance. His perseverance brings longevity. And his longevity gives him opportunities for success."

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In Life Care and Century Park, we are engaged in careers far more important in the impact on the lives of others than a baseball game. But let's apply the understanding to keep our failures within the context of the bigger picture – in both our personal and professional lives.

In the spiritual realm, God understands our weaknesses – after all, He made us – and He forgives and provides the capacity to move forward with confidence.

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever (Psalm 73:26 NIV).

– Beecher Hunter