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# How Shohei Ohtani Visualized His Baseball Success

The Japanese two-way sensation turned to a personal-growth technique called the Harada Method to help him achieve his goals



Following the Harada Method, Shohei Ohtani identified eight key areas in which he felt he needed to develop, both as an athlete and as a person. PHOTO: JOHN CORDES/ZUMA PRESS

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By

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As a sophomore at Hanamaki Higashi High School in the Iwate Prefecture of Japan, Shohei Ohtani set a goal for himself: to become the nation's premier baseball prospect by the time he graduated.

To achieve it, he turned to the Harada Method, a personal-growth technique created by Takashi Harada, a former middle school teacher in Japan. Following the method's guide, Ohtani identified eight key areas in which he felt he needed to develop, both as an athlete and as a person. From there, he narrowed his focus even further, pinpointing eight specific ways he believed would allow him to make the necessary improvements, all in service of his larger aim.

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Some were obvious: He wanted to increase his fastball velocity to 99 mph by strengthening his shoulder, bolstering his lower extremities and adding weight to his wiry frame. He hoped to refine his control by stabilizing his windup and finding a consistent release point in his delivery.

Others were a bit more esoteric. For instance, Ohtani thought he would have better luck if he read more books, cleaned his room better and picked up litter. He wrote all of this down on an 9-by-9 grid that Harada calls the 64 Chart.

Ohtani wasn't alone in following Harada's teachings. Over the past two decades, Harada has trained more than 90,000 people in his method, working with managers from companies like the clothing retailer Uniqlo and the Japanese brewery Kirin. He also taught Hiroshi Sasaki, the high-school baseball coach who passed it on to Ohtani.

Shohei Ohtani, 12/6/2010 - Sophomore in High School

Care the body	Take supplements	FSQ 90kg	Improve in-step	Strengthen the body core	Stabilize the pivot	Create an angle	Hit the ball from above	Strengthen the wrist
Flexibility	Physical	RSQ 130kg	Stabilize the release point	Control	Get rid of uneasy feelings	Do not tense up	Precision	The lower body leads
Stamina	Range of motion	Meals Dinner: 7 Breakfast: 3	Strengthen the lower extremities	Don't open the body	Control mental	Release the ball in the front	Increase the number of rotations	Range of motion
Have clear goals and purposes	Do not swing joy and sorrow	Cool head and hot passion	Physical	Control	Precision	Turn at the pivot	Strengthen the lower extremities	Gain weight
Be strong at pinches	Mental	Don't sway by atmosphere	Mental	Draft #! 8 teams	Speed 160km/hr 99 mph	Strengthen the body core	Speed 160km/hr 99 mph	Strengthen around the shoulders
Don't create ups and downs	Tenacity for victory	The heart to care team mates	Personality	Luck	Curve balls	Range of motion	Catch liner balls	Increase pitching
Sensitivity	Worthy to be loved	Plan ahead	Greetings	Picking trashes	Clean the room	Increase count balls	Perfect fork balls	Precision of sliders
Caring	Personality	Gratitude	Use the tools with care	Luck	Attitude for judges	Curve balls with speed and drop	Curve balls	Decisive balls for left batter
Well-mannered	Worthy to be trusted	Sustained efforts	Positive thinking	Worthy to be supported	Read books	Pitch with the same as straight	Control from strike into ball	Imagine the depth

Born: July 5, 1994, Joined the Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters March 29, 2013, First pick in the major league draft, pitcher. Batting average = .257, home runs = 13, win-loss = 14-4, earned run = 2.61, strikeouts 225 - Speed of pitch = 99 mph, 160kph, (11-16-14)

A 64 Chart filled out by Shohei Ohtani in high school. PHOTO: NORMAN BODEK

Since then, the 24-year-old Ohtani has accomplished considerably more than he outlined on his first 64 Chart eight years ago. He has emerged as a sensation in his rookie season with the Los Angeles Angels, establishing himself as a potentially historic talent capable of doing something unseen for a century: thriving simultaneously as a starting pitcher and an everyday hitter.

Before an elbow injury sidelined him in June, Ohtani posted a 3.10 ERA in his first nine outings, striking out 61 batters in 49 1/3 innings. The health issue hasn't slowed him down at the plate, where he entered Tuesday with a .294 batting average, a .970 OPS (on base plus slugging) and 19 home runs in 262 at-bats. Ohtani will likely undergo Tommy John surgery after the season, which would keep him from returning to the mound until 2020, but the Angels expect him to serve as their designated hitter next season.

Before Ohtani, no major-league player had thrown 50 innings and blasted 15 home runs in a single season since Babe Ruth in 1919. Now, Harada considers him one of his greatest success stories.

“I believe this was a big pillar for Ohtani to become what he is now,” Harada said in an interview. “And he’s still continuing to use it.”



Japanese pitching and hitting star Shohei Ohtani during a workout in Japan. PHOTO: ISSEI KATO/REUTERS

Harada devised the method while working at Matsumushi Junior High School in Osaka, where he served as a physical education teacher and a counselor. He was inspired by a trip he took to Europe in 1994 as part of an educational delegation, where he saw the teaching philosophies of countries like Finland.

At that time, he said, Japan’s educational system “heavily focused on memorization and testing memory,” whereas Finland “focused more on visualizing your future and working toward that visualized goal.” That became the basis of the Harada Method,

which he used to help transform a struggling school in a poor neighborhood into a track and field powerhouse, before opening the Harada Education Institute in 2001.

“This is a method to become a self-reliant person,” Harada said.

Angels officials confirm that Ohtani practiced the Harada Method. But the extent to which he still does, if at all, is difficult to nail down—because almost nobody will talk about it. Ohtani declined to comment for this article, sticking with his season-long policy of turning down one-on-one interviews.

Sasaki, Ohtani’s old high-school coach who first introduced him to the method, refused an interview request. So did Yukio Motomura, who instructed Ohtani in the Harada Method on his Japanese team, the Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters. (In an email, a member of Harada’s staff said, “We have no idea why Sasaki sensei declined an interview,” adding that, “Director Motomura has taught Harada Method not only to Shohei [Ohtani], but every single player in Nippon-Ham!”)



Shohei Ohtani delivers a pitch during a game on Sept. 2. PHOTO: JUAN DELEON/ZUMA PRESS

Harada said that Ohtani filled out about 15 more 64 Charts after his initial one, to reflect his updated goals. Ohtani was even more captivated by the Harada Method Long-Term Goal Form, which has students come up with tangible and intangible reasons for pursuing a goal, both for one's self and for society. It also has sections to write daily tasks and routines to achieve the goal, as well as a place for anticipated obstacles and potential countermeasures.

For now, the Harada Method remains mostly unknown outside of Japan, though one man wants to change that. Norman Bodek, a disciple of Harada who initially shared Ohtani's first 64 Chart with The Wall Street Journal, is currently working to create a smartphone app dedicated to teaching the Harada Method in English and Japanese.

"Ohtani is our superstar," said Bodek, who used to teach a class at Portland State University on Japanese management practices. "Everybody can't become the best baseball player in the world, but everybody can become the best that they can become."

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