



A Winning Formula

At Eaton High School, old-time methods and values lead to success

by Ted Yeatzi

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It's the type of place where you let your guard down. There's a down-home friendliness to the town, one that evokes a feeling of comfort. You can leave your car unlocked and not worry about someone deciding to take it for a joyride. You can send your kids down to the park to play and not be concerned with miscreants lurking in the bushes. You can sit in Steven's Grill, order a double cheeseburger that costs less than three bucks and listen to the locals talk about the weather, Sunday's sermon and sports. It's a peaceful place — a tranquil town.

But, these charming factors aren't the reasons why a trip to Eaton makes you feel like the clock has been turned back nearly a half-century. They simply provide the texture that makes the sensation believable. It's the town's love affair with the sport of baseball that makes you feel like you've stepped out of reality and into "The Sandlot."

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It's a place where the game is appreciated, respected, admired and loved. It's a town where kids aspire to don the red and white cap with the capital "E" stitched on the front. It's a burg that isn't hip, cool or trendy. It's a place where traditions still matter and elders are still respected. It's an untouched haven where baseball is still the only game in town.

"It's a tradition that goes on and on," explains Rod Asbra, a longtime Eaton resident who has seen his fair share of Fighting Reds baseball over the years — he drove the team bus to away

games before retiring two years ago. "There are grandsons and great-grandsons playing now, and the former players come back to speak to the team and pass along the legacy."

An afternoon spent with the green grass below your cleats, the feel of a leather mitt against your bare hand and the sweet sounds of the bat striking the ball in the air — that's the heritage in Eaton. That's the connection that binds generations. It's the constant that has remained in place year after year, decade after decade.

"My brothers played baseball for Eaton," says Junior Barrios, the Fighting Reds starting center-fielder.

when asked about his deep-seated love for the game. "I always dreamed about one day coming out here and playing, too."

It's a place where kids aspire to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors, carrying on the grand tradition of Eaton baseball.

"Of course, winning helps," Asbra admits. Ah, yes. The winning.

Success is the common thread that is woven throughout every baseball-related tradition in Eaton. It's the reason why paintings of the team hang on the

walls in Steven's joint. It's the basis for the quasi-celebrity status the players enjoy when walking the city's streets. It's what motivates the town's elementary kids to hang out in the high school dugouts during the summer. And it's why nearly everybody in town turns out to watch the Fighting Reds home games. Winning is the glue that holds this vestige of a bygone era together.

In Eaton, one man receives and deserves most of the credit for creating a utopia built on an unprecedented run of baseball achievement — head coach Jim Danley. Players have come and gone since he took over the program in 1972 — some great, some good and some only slightly above average. No matter what the talent level,

In the 31 years leading up to the 2003 season, Danley's teams have won nearly 80% of their games — a clip that is difficult to comprehend and fathom over that amount of time. In the process, the Fighting Reds have built a 506-133-1 record and won five state championships. They've played in five consecutive CHSAA title games — winning three, including the last two — and posted a perfect 24-0 mark in 1998. All the while, they've become the pride and joy of a small town situated on the plains just seven miles north of Greeley.

This type of success begs the question — how do they do it? How does a small school win on such a consistent basis? If they rode a flame-throwing lefty or a farm-fed power hitter for a couple of years, that would be one thing. But, Eaton wins no matter who's on the roster. There has to be a secret.

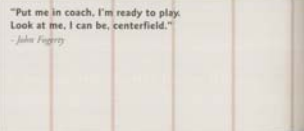
Again, all clues point in the direction of Danley. He's the man that has developed a winning formula, an approach that works year after year. While other schools and other coaches work to build a single team, Danley has spent more than three decades assembling a program at Eaton — a method of teaching baseball that extends well beyond his current varsity roster. It

permeates through every level, starting with the first time a youngster picks up a bat.

"Jim has total control of the summer program — from five-year olds on up," says Dale Hughes.

"Put me in coach, I'm ready to play. Look at me, I can be, centerfield."
- John Faggery

"Growing up with Denver Bears baseball, a day at the ballpark was truly a special moment. Baseball became my passion. Unfortunately, I was unable to adjust to the curveball while following it through the facemask."
- Adventure Guy



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the Fighting Reds hitting coach. "A key to that is the current players coaching the kids. The younger ones look up to the older ones and want to be like them. They have fun together."

This system forges a bond between kids from different age groups and allows for the legacy of Eaton High School baseball to be passed along to the next wave of players. To Danley, the benefits extend well beyond the baseball diamond.

"They are positive role models that do a lot of teaching that doesn't have anything to do with baseball," he says. "In a small town, the little kids know the guys on the high school team by their first names. The young kids are always welcome in our dugout. It makes it look like a Turkish rug sale, but it's a great thing."

This also creates a situation where Danley's system is being instilled from day one. By the time these kids step onto the diamond as Fighting Reds, they're well-schooled in the ways of Eaton baseball.

"Having our kids go back and coach in the summer is huge," Danley says about this invaluable practice of extending his system through all age groups. "We don't have to re-teach because kids are learning the same things all the way through. It gives us consistency. The techniques are taught by kids who have been taught."

This steadiness extends well beyond the fundamentals and the basics, however. Danley and his coaches have developed a game plan for winning over the past 31 years and they begin instilling the basis of this program into players at an early age.

In its simplest form, baseball is a game made up of two key components — pitching and hitting. Well aware of this fact, the Eaton coaching staff has crafted a formula for tackling both disciplines

that works no matter who's on the mound or in the batter's box.

Anybody can look like a great coach when the next Randy Johnson or Nolan Ryan is throwing gas at their opponents, they reason. And anybody can send Barry Bonds up to the plate and tell him to hack away. But these types of phenomenal talents come along once in a generation. Danley wanted to find a way to take these variables out of his success equation. He didn't want to rely on Mother Nature to provide him with a pitcher or slugger that could lead Eaton to victories.

Thus, the search began. For starters, Danley wanted to be able to craft a dominant hurler. He set out to find a way to turn a kid with average physical traits into a feared commodity on the mound. It was a journey that would take him to all corners of the baseball world.

"In the late 80s, we began looking for a power pitcher that could be taught," Danley says in explaining the pitching odyssey that has led to success at Eaton. "Knowing that we're not going to be able to have good arms year in and year out, we looked for a non-speed pitcher that is a strike-out pitcher. We found a guy at Oklahoma State that was teaching the knuckle-curve."

Danley began to study the pitch at length. He read about it. He talked to coaches and players about it. He analyzed the pros and cons. In the end, he fell in love with it. He knew it was the golden ticket that he'd been searching for.

"They threw it a lot in the Major Leagues in the 1920s and 30s," he explains with satisfaction, like a proud father describing his son's latest exploits. "It's been around a long time, but it's always been thought to be an old man's pitch."

Visions of the Niekro, Phil and Joe, come to mind when discussing the knuckle ball — long considered a "junk" pitch that guys use to stay in the game long after they've thrown every last fastball their arm can bear. It seems gimmicky — like a trick that could be used for awhile but would eventually run its course. Judging by the results in Eaton, however, opposing teams are failing to catch on to the ruse. Since 1987, the Fighting Reds have amassed a mark of 307 wins and only 55 losses, quieting the critics in the process.

"It's become our signature pitch," says Danley, defending the merits of his beloved toss. "It's the hard knuckler. It breaks very sharply, even in this climate. It's a great pitch for this area because it rarely goes up there and stops."

In other words, it's controllable. It's not dependent on heavy or humid air, and it can be thrown by someone with less than supernatural God-given ability. It's a consistent out-pitch that Danley and his coaches can teach their players to throw. It's the backbone of the Fighting Reds baseball system.

While the knuckle-curve has provided the foundation for Eaton's success, a patient approach to hitting has been nearly as important. Other teams swing for the fences and try to score in bunches. Danley's teams simply try to put the ball in play, keep rallies alive and force the opponent into making mistakes — a mentality is echoed by everyone in town.

"Home run hitters kill rallies," says Asbra, now just a fan. "These guys play for rallies."

And it's an approach that is ingrained in the players on a daily basis. "To Coach Danley, hitting is an art," says Brandon Trujillo, Eaton's senior

shortstop and an All-State candidate. "We hit until we can't hit anymore. It's been the exact same practice schedule since I was a freshman."

A major part of this routine is learning to hit when behind in the count, because the worst thing that an Eaton hitter can do is strike out. If they are able to put the ball in play, the coaches reason, anything can happen. Thus, each player is taught the same technique for hitting with two strikes.

"Dale Hughes teaches an outstanding two-strike hitting technique," explains Danley. "It's a lot like Dante Bichetti's swing. You spread the stance, flatten the bat and don't take a stride. This takes away the high fastball."

The esteemed coach talks about hitting like a sommelier discusses wine or a virtuoso describes music. He exudes a passion for the subject that is contagious. He's excited to share his knowledge. He relishes the opportunity to expound upon his favorite subject.

This love of baseball and the various nuances

of the game are passed along to his players and they are clearly buying into the method.

"He has a plan for us," says senior Mike Julia with confidence. "We don't have power hitters, we just hit the ball. Protect the plate, choke up and hit the ball to the opposite field."

To a man, the Fighting Reds speak the gospel according to Danley. They love their coach and they believe in his ways. "We do the fundamentals well — the little things that Coach Danley tries to instill in every player," says Trujillo. "We focus on the things that other teams don't spend time on or even think about."

With these skills and techniques instilled in his players, Danley is able to move on to working on the final aspect of his program — forging a winning attitude.

In an era where competition is far from en vogue in other parts of the country, it is still embraced in Eaton. Borrowing a mentality from generations gone by, Danley and the townspeople still want to win.

"We make no apologies about striving for success," says the head coach. "We think success is a very important thing, teaching lessons that can be carried on into every possible profession. We're a part of the educational process and a reason why people are successful later in life."

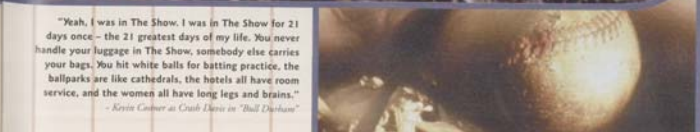
As the Fighting Reds take to the field in 2003, they will be trying to extend their run of excellence. With two consecutive state championships to their credit, it won't be an easy task.

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And they all know that the road to a title runs through Eaton — a town where time stands still and baseball is much more than just a game. ■



"Red, it took me sixteen years to get here. You play me, and I'll give ya the best I got."
- Robert Hoffman as Ray Hobbs in "The Natural"



"Yeah, I was in The Show. I was in The Show for 21 days once — the 21 greatest days of my life. You never handle your luggage in The Show, somebody else carries your bags. You hit white balls for batting practice, the ballparks are like cathedrals, the hotels all have room service, and the women all have long legs and brains."
- Kevin Costner as Crash Davis in "Bull Durham"

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In Eaton, baseball is still the favorite pastime. The game is the heartbeat of the community. While suburban kids are playing street hockey, riding their skateboards or being picked up by mom after soccer practice, youngsters in this slice of Americana gather in the center of town to play a game of pick-up hardball on a spring afternoon. While the fate of the local football team usually gets the juices flowing, passions run high in Eaton about the performance on the diamond by the Fighting Reds – the town's high school baseball team. The conversations at the local burger joint steer away from the Broncos offseason moves, the Avs playoff possibilities or the latest political scandal. Instead, the regulars talk about the virtues of the sacrifice bunt, the value of the hit-and-run and the lost art of the complete game.

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In the 31 years leading up to the 2003 season, Danley’s teams have won nearly 80% of their games – a clip that is difficult to comprehend and fathom over that amount of time. In the process, the Fighting Reds have built a 506-133-1 record and won five state championships. They’ve played in five consecutive CHSAA title games – winning three, including the last two – and posted a perfect 24-0 mark in 1998. All the while, they’ve become the pride and joy of a small town situated on the plains just seven miles north of Greeley.

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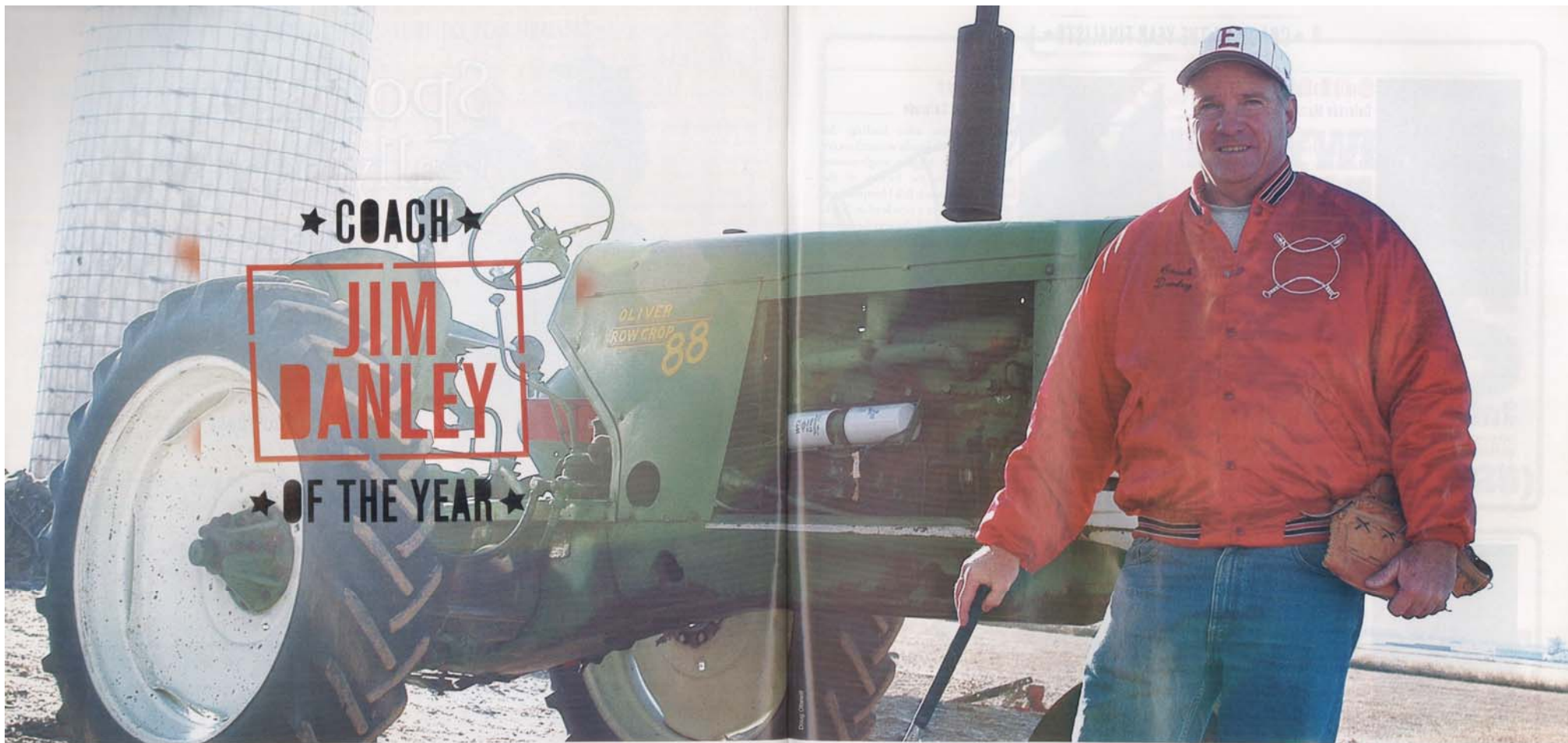
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And they all know that the road to a title runs through Eaton – a town where time stands still and baseball is much more than just a game.

Note: Following the release of this article, the Reds went on to win the Class 3A State Championship in 2003, then the American Legion B State Championship that summer, then the Class 3A State Championship again in 2004, as well as the American Legion B State Championship again that year. The Reds won all 6 Spring and Summer State Championships from 2002-2004.



★ COACH ★
JIM DANLEY
 ★ OF THE YEAR ★

Dynasties are a thing of the past in today's world of sports. The days of the Boston Celtics winning 11 NBA titles in 13 seasons have long since past. The era of the Montreal Canadiens drinking from Lord Stanley's Cup every year is but a distant memory. And there will never be a time when an NFL team will once again dominate like the Green Bay Packers did in the 1960s. Parity is en vogue, making every team a contender in nearly every season.

While the prime examples of this phenomenon exist at the pro level, it has trickled down to the college and high schools ranks, as well. Notre Dame isn't the crown jewel of the collegiate gridiron anymore, Duke isn't hoisting a hoops banner after every season and

the folks at the CHSAA no longer have every trophy pre-engraved with "Cherry Creek" on the nameplate. Times have changed.

But there remains one final vestige to a bygone era, one lone program that dares to defy this evolution – the Eaton High School baseball team. In a small town located just seven miles north of Greeley, they've built a dynasty that harkens back to the days of Mickey Mantle and his juggernaut New York Yankees.

This season, the Fighting Reds captured their third straight 3A title – beating archrival La Junta by a 17-10 count in the championship game. The victory marked Eaton's sixth consecutive trip to the final game and fourth title since 1998. It also proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that head coach Jim Danley has built

the best program – in any sport, at any level – in the state of Colorado.

Danley took over at Eaton in 1972 and has been rewriting the record books ever since. In his 32 seasons at the helm, the Fighting Reds have posted a 530-135-1 record and won six state titles. The Reds have played in 10 of the last 11 state championships. Given the fact that players come and go, this incredible string of success can only be attributed to one thing – Danley's system.

While other schools and other coaches work to build a single team, Danley has spent more than

three decades assembling a method of teaching baseball that extends well beyond his current varsity roster. It permeates through every level, starting with the first time a youngster picks up a bat and culminating with his senior season as a Red. From day one, kids in Eaton learn Danley's Way – a system of baseball steeped in the fundamentals.

By the time they get to the high school diamond, the Fighting Reds are seasoned pros. As a result, they roll to one championship season after another – making Jim Danley the most successful coach in the Centennial State.

2003
HAAS ROCK
 ★ AWARDS ★

Mile High Sports Magazine 2003 Haas Rock Awards

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Coach OF THE Month



Danley's will drives Eaton

With 8 state crowns, revered skipper forges on

BY RYANRUSSO
The Alumni

BEFORE the 1998 Class 3A state baseball championship game, Eaton head coach Jim Danley approached leadoff hitter Jason Smith and told him, "You are going to play a key role in today's game."

"I am going to swing at the first pitch, coach," Smith replied. "I know he is going to throw a fastball down the pipe."

Danley turned to Smith, looked him in the eyes and said, "You do what you have to do," and trotted down the third-base line.

Sure enough, the first pitch thrown by Lamar High School's Brad Stiles was a fastball that Smith smoked for a line-drive base hit.

Eaton beat Lamar 3-1 that day, giving the Reds their third state championship.

"That's why Coach Danley has been so successful. He believes in his players and he just lets them play their game," said Smith, who became an all-conference outfielder for the University of Northern Colorado. Smith now works at The Ridge at Castle Pines North as a golf assistant.

Ten years later, on May 17, Eaton faced Lamar again in the Class 3A title game, defeating the Savages 4-1 for another Danley achievement.

Senior starting pitcher Kyle Ottoson, who will be attending South Mountain Community College in Phoenix in the fall, struck out 15 Savage batters. He pointed to Danley for his success. "Throughout four years of high school, he has changed me completely, making me into the ballplayer that I am today. He is a tremendous coach and that's all you can say," Ottoson said.

In a career that spans more than 36 years, Danley has willed himself to accomplish just about as much as a high school baseball coach can accomplish.

"In school we work with kids' minds. The mind can think and the mind can judge, but the third thing that the mind can do is to will, and I think that is something that we don't pay much attention to in modern-day society," Danley said. "You can find no successful people who didn't get there without the ability to will their way through the tough times."

Going into this season, Danley had a winning percentage of 91



Jim Danley has led Eaton to 13 of the last 16 state championship games, including a 4-1 win this year against Lamar. File photo

JIM DANLEY

School:
Eaton
High School
Years:
36
Sports:
Baseball



DID YOU KNOW:

Coach Danley loves classical music, "It's a very well-kept secret. My mother was a concert pianist and I grew up listening to the world's greatest music."

percent over the last 10 years, and a winning percentage of 80 percent for his career. Even more impressive, he has led Eaton to 26 consecutive state tournament appearances, winning eight state championship titles.

And in January, Danley was inducted into the Colorado High School Activities Association Hall of Fame, adding to a résumé filled with awards and honors.

THANKS, GILL

Danley found his passion for baseball at a young age. "We moved in from the farm to Greeley when I was 8 years old and at that time there were really just two to three major activities," Danley said. "What you did was trade baseball cards in the morning and at noon you played baseball until it was time

to go home. I learned to love the game at that point."

The storied coach points to his father, Gilbert, as a source of inspiration: "My dad had always gone to great lengths to show me how to play the game properly. Back in those days, each town had [its] own team and in the town of Gill, Colorado, they had some great Mexican baseball players. My dad asked them to show me how to throw and how to hit. Those Mexican players and the town of Gill and those families got me into loving baseball."

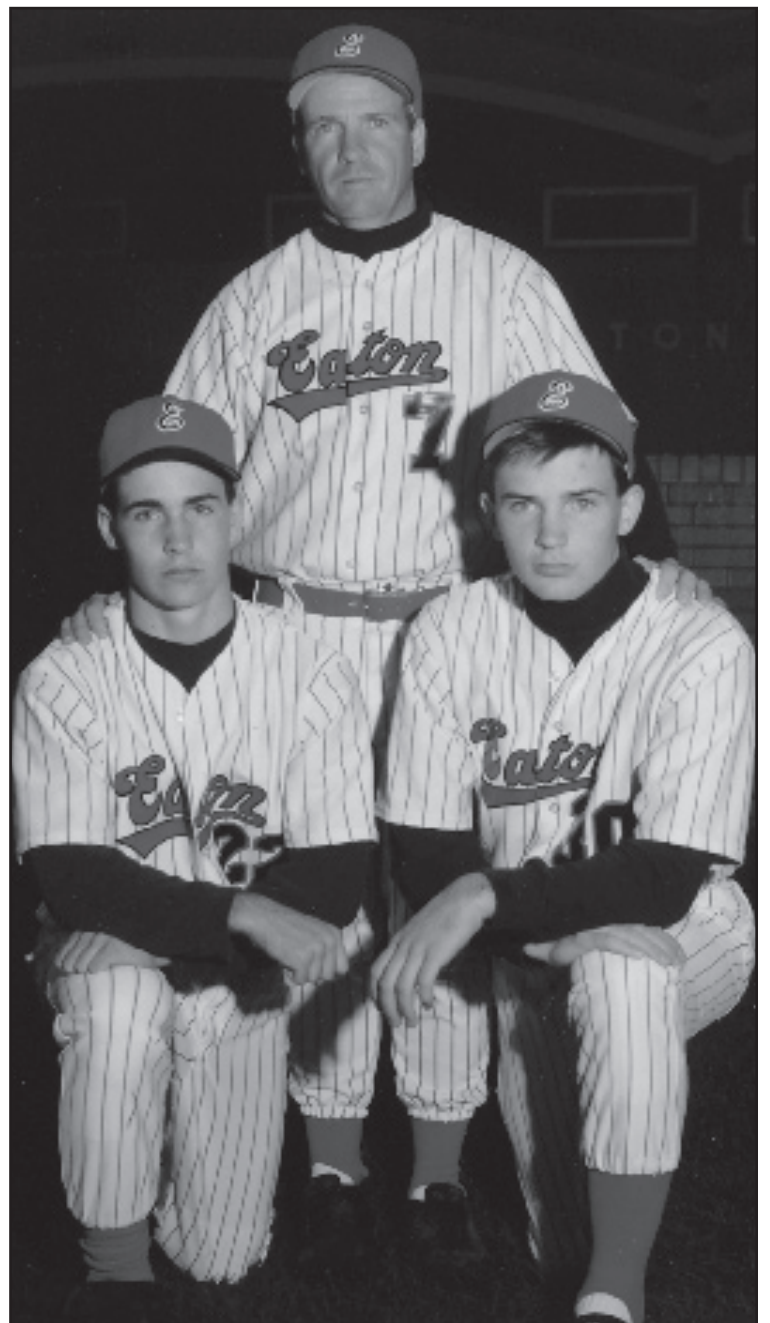
Danley served as a teacher and counselor at Eaton High School for 34 years. He founded the Eaton Elementary School Anti-Drug Character Building Program and directs the Eaton High and Middle School Anti-Drug Mentoring Program.

Eaton Athletic Director Steve Longwell said Danley is simply an outstanding individual. "It's not about just baseball with Jim," Longwell said, "it's about how he teaches the kids to approach life."

Former Eaton third basemen Mike Carrasco agreed: "He was more than my neighbor; he taught us more about life than about baseball," Carrasco said.

THE RECORD STREAK

Like Smith, Carrasco played for Danley during the school's state record run of 45 consecutive wins from 1998-99.



Jim Danley with his sons Kirk and Jimmy in 1992. File photo

Danley remembers the streak vividly and how it began: “The year before, we lost to Kent Denver 13-5 and I remember Smith, Jeff Meyers and Carrasco after the game with tears in their eyes and I remember them

coming up to me and saying, ‘Coach, this is not going to happen again.’

“Who knew what that could have meant at the time, but from that moment on, they never played a game

where they were not focused and mentally prepared.”

Carrasco remembers during the streak that the team played with great confidence. “If you have a coach who is all over you, you

don’t have much confidence. Coach Danley just let us play. He knew when to stop and he knew when to redirect us,” Carrasco said.

Danley said baseball is comprised of singular moments,

“The mind can think and the mind can judge, but the third thing that the mind can do is will, and I think that is something that we don’t pay much attention to in modern day society.”

JIM DANLEY
Eaton baseball coach

and when individuals and teams believe in themselves, they can accomplish anything. “We played superior teams during the streak and we fell behind and came back several times,”

Danley said, “but those kids imposed their will on their opponents and they simply would not go away.”

Is there another streak in his future? Danley shows no sign of stopping. “As long as I’m getting

up every morning and my first thought is about baseball, I will still be here. I guess I haven’t changed from about the age of 4 years old,” Danley said.

Danley said life on the diamond can prepare kids for anything. “I can’t think of any

better preparation for the rough and tumble capitalistic world we live in than athletics and in my case baseball,” Danley said. “It is a great vehicle for life’s lessons.” ♦

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 state championships
- 15 championship game appearances
- 22 final four appearances
- 26 consecutive state tournament appearances (1983-2008)
- 29 conference championships
- 619-146-2 overall record (Colorado state record)
- 226-21-1 record over the last 10 years
- National High School Coaches Association Baseball Coach of the Year (2003)
- Colorado High School Coaches Association Hall of Fame inductee (2005)
- Colorado Sports Hall of Fame Special Citation Award (2003)
- 28 conference coach of the year awards
- Eaton Elementary School Anti-Drug Character Building Program (Founder)
- Eaton Optimists Club (Charter member)

— For more information, log on to
www.eatonbaseball.com



COLORADO

COVERING ALL THE BASES OF HIGH SCHOOL BASEBALL

Interview with Legendary Head Coach Jim Danley

Sat November 8, 2014

By John Cackowski

State Director

There is a small farming town 70 miles northeast of Denver called Eaton. Eaton has a population of just over 4,500 people and is part of Weld County. Most people in Colorado who are up to date on Prep Baseball in the state know about Eaton, and the success they have had on the baseball field the last 30 years. What most people outside of Colorado don't realize is Eaton houses one of the most successful and dominating baseball programs in the country. Led by head coach Jim Danley for 43 years, along with his assistant Bob Ervin for 34 years, the two together have been to 20 state championships and have won 10 times.

Currently Jim Danley holds the best winning percentage in the country at 82.8% with a 781-162-2 record. With a town of only 4,500 people, what is unique about Eaton is they might be the only place in the country that systematically teaches one pitch, the knuckle curveball. Danley started to incorporate the knuckle curveball in 1987, and kids as young as 5 are groomed to be ready to pitch it by the time they get to high school. From 1972 to 1987 the program went 199-78 (72% winning percentage) with zero state championships. Since the incorporation of the knuckle curveball the program has gone 536-80 (87% winning percentage) and has won 10 state championships. Recently we sat down with Coach Danley to talk about his time at Eaton High School.

1. Out of the 43 years you have coached at Eaton, what are you the most proud of during your tenure.

Seeing so many young men return years after graduation and seeing how successful they are in their careers and in life—after having had the opportunity to play a role in their development of attaining mental toughness—honestly it doesn't get any better than that.

2. If you had to describe to someone what the phrase "Eaton-Baseball" means to you, what would you say?

Sure, let me start with the first half of that phrase, which is to speak about Eaton as a community. I can't say enough how lucky I am to be surrounded by a group of hard-working folks with high expectations that instill that same toughness and discipline in their kids; this whole thing wouldn't be even remotely possible without that. They appreciate hard work, toughness, and yes they like to win. As far as our program, I'd say we certainly are fearless, we don't fear failure—we fail, but we're not afraid to fail—we're kids from a one-stoplight town trying to compete with players from the big cities, and we expect that if we play our hardest, we'll come out ahead, even though that doesn't happen 100% of the time. We focus on effort much more so than results, as you can't always control results—sometimes grounders take a bad hop or bloopers land out of reach—but we focus hard on the effort and determination aspects of the game. We think this is a major

determinant of success after these kids' playing days have ended and they have to go beat out kids from the big cities for jobs and promotions. You can't just try to be successful; you have to will yourself to success.

3. Who in your mind have been the standout players in Colorado high school baseball this year?

We sure saw a bunch of them in the mega-scrimmage with Rocky Mountain, Regis Jesuit, ThunderRidge, Grandview, Cherokee Trail, Chaparral, Highlands Ranch, etc., but to select just a handful of players out of even this great group of talent would be incredibly difficult. Our graduates play in the summer and fall seasons with Rocky Mountain's, so frankly we're partial to the great players, and great young men, that Bullock turns out every year.

4. You have created an unbelievable baseball culture in your community. What are some of the things you do to create a positive baseball atmosphere in your community?

The first thing we do is ensure that our current players and recent grads are actively involved in bringing up the next generation of our players. This is one of the perks of a small town, that the young guys are welcome in the dugout, get announced to the crowd at the Legion A games of their older heroes, and are coached by our current and former players. The high schoolers are great with them and treat them as equals, even going to watch them play in their youth tournaments. This allows for consistency from year-to-year, and a consistent message being delivered throughout games and post-game talks. One of those messages, which I learned from my dad—a pilot in the early days of flight—is that there are only four things one has to do to achieve success: 1) *figure* out what has to be done, 2) make yourself *do* what has to be done, 3) make yourself do what has to be done *when* it has to be done, and 4) make yourself do what has to be done *when* it has to be done, *whether* you like it or not. It's that simple, it's about willing yourself to success, but getting everyone to that 4th stage takes time and multiple opportunities at success and failure, to then ultimately see them pursue success with every fiber within them. Not every kid gets there, but boy it's fun when you see the ones that exceed even our lofty expectations.

5. Your program has had the opportunity to have won 10 3A state championships since 1994. I know that every coach can look back at a season and have one awesome memory. Can you share an awesome memory or two over this successful run?

Certainly the 15-inning State Championship Game against La Junta in 2001 stands out, as we faced a pitcher that was drafted in the 5th round the following year and we had to outlast him for 11 innings before ultimately defeating his reliever. We were the visitors, and had to tie the game in the top of the 7th with two outs and two strikes on our batter, had to make multiple game-saving plays and prevent a suicide squeeze, and had to strike out a number of batters with the game-winning run on 3rd base, trusting our catcher to block every knuckle curve in the dirt to do so; it was frankly 15 straight innings of pure battle, every kid on both sides played great, their pitcher and our pitcher both threw the game of their lives, the relief pitchers were exceptional, it was heart-stopping, but fun to be a part of, and fortunately we came out on top 3-2. If every game were like that one, my heart would have given out on me decades ago.

6. You have had an opportunity to coach at Eaton for 43 years. Quite an unbelievable accomplishment, and you currently hold the highest winning percentage in the nation for active coaches at 82.8%. What a lot of people also don't realize is you have had a pretty special assistant Bob Ervin that has been with you for 35 years. Together you two have compiled a 601-141-1 record. In a game that teaches you how to deal with failure, can you share any secrets to how you have overcome failure with so much success?

Trust me, Coach Ervin and I know failure, we took over a team in 1972 that had finished toward the bottom of the league for quite a few years, and we first had to convince the kids that they could stay in games with the average teams, and then hope for heroics late. We didn't get many of those heroics back then, but you only need them to appear every once in a

while to convince kids that it's always possible. We took the advantage that we had—of being a tough bunch of farm kids—and focused on how mental toughness could overcome an otherwise superior opponent. This over time works itself up to making the kids believe that they can beat the best teams. After a while, the pendulum swings the other way, and you have to then convince the kids that they can be beaten by any other team as well. That's tougher to do and more of a struggle, but a good problem to have.

It took us 23 years to win our first State Championship, luckily folks were more patient back then than they are now when a coach is expected to win within the first 2-3 years—heck, throughout the entire 1970's we only won two league titles. It seems obvious to me that any young coaches that are passionate about what they're trying to do should be given some room and time to accomplish their goals; how different it all would have been if Marc Johnson and I would have been held to today's focus on immediate results back when we were young and flirting with .500 records.

I don't think it's any secret, but Coach Ervin and I have done our best to instill two concepts in our players: mental toughness, and unflappability. The greatest leaders in our nation's history have been unflappable, having to overcome defeat before reaching the success we remember them for, and were able to—as Rudyard Kipling states in his famous poem "If"—treat both triumph and disaster just the same. We're very proud of our results, but we care a lot more about the effort put into the battle, than about whether the ball bounces our way or not.

7. Please look at the following phrases and give me a one or two word reaction to each:

Eaton Community—die-hard

Knuckle Curveball—wipe-out

Underrated 2014 Eaton Player—Colton Lind

Assistant Coaches—the best

Hardest Loss—'83 state final

Family—unbelievable sons

Colorado Baseball—underrated