

“Playing Eaton Baseball was, and always will be, a privilege” Major Jimmy Reeman, ‘88 Reds’ Graduate and The Top Graduate from F16 Fighter Pilot School and Leader of First-Strike Missions in The War on Terror

While it may be considered a great privilege to wear the Eaton pinstripes, few would consider it much of a privilege to put on the gear and go behind the plate as the catcher for any team, let alone for the Reds, where blocking frequent knuckle curveballs in the dirt makes it arguably the toughest job in high school baseball. For a select few though, there’s no place they’d rather be than be behind the plate, involved in every single pitch of the game, and tasked with being responsible for keeping every ball in front of them, which more often than not is the difference between victory and defeat. Reds’ pitchers are only as great as their catchers allow them to be, though the Reds’ catchers have a legacy of being the best at their position, and have allowed their pitchers to be nothing less than spectacular. These Reds’ catchers are as tough as nails, they wear bruises on their arms from knuckle curves that nearly bounced away, but were knocked down to record the strikeout instead. They play through pain, even with jammed fingers and deep bone bruises, they don’t even consider letting someone else take their spot. And they have great arms, striking fear into runners who think about stealing, let alone those who consider even taking a decent lead off the base. And while these two roles of blocking everything and throwing out runners are the only real requirements for the job, these stud players have also led their teams at the plate, supplying the bulk of the power in the Reds’ lineup over the past 35 years.

The Reds’ history is filled with lore and legend of players who simply willed their way to victory and accomplished truly unbelievable feats. Many of these ghosts of the past were Reds’ catchers.

Reds’ Catchers

Lind, Batt, Pickar, Carlson, Swain, Ginther, Hughes, Drovdal, Anderson, Schneider, Fortune, Graff, Crowder, McKay, Kurtz, Galloway, Kindsfater

Colton Lind led the Reds as both their catcher and cleanup hitter in 2013 and 2014, performing his best in the postseason with multiple key hits as the Reds went 46-4 in spring with a perfect 42-0 summer season in 2013. Tyler Batt led the Reds’ behind the plate for 3 years, allowing nearly no passed balls in his entire career. He also led the Reds at the plate, hitting #4 in the lineup as only a sophomore, and going on to become as a senior the Weld County Athlete of the Year, leading the Reds to the 2012 State Championship. Bennett Pickar simply stopped opponents from even considering a steal attempt. Not only was his 1.81 pop-time strong enough to get him drafted in the 15th round of the 2009 Major League Baseball Draft, he swung a bat that put together the 2nd highest batting average in Eaton history, topping .600 and earning the honor of the top catcher in the state in all classifications by the Denver Post. Pickar led the Reds behind the plate to wins in 80 of his final 82 games played, en route to winning State Championships in spring 2008, summer 2008, and an undefeated State Championship in spring 2009 in which the Reds were ranked #1 in the nation in Class 3A. Jared Carlson led the Reds in 2004 through 2006 and blocked everything thrown his way; you could throw him 92-mph running fastballs up and in or devastating knuckle curves in the dirt, and be rest assured that nothing would get past him. Before heading to play collegiately, Carlson won multiple spring and summer State Championships for the Reds behind the plate, and ran up the total of consecutive postseason victories while staring in the face of elimination to a truly remarkable streak of 33 consecutive wins.



Lind throwing out runner at State



Batt confidently stepping into the batter’s box



Pickar is mobbed by teammates after 2009 State Championship win



Carlson is mobbed by teammates after 2004 State Championship win

Catching requires great sacrifice, as many of these players would otherwise be great infielders and not have to deal with the burden of being behind the plate. Few have sacrificed like Chris Swain though, who was an All-State third baseman for the Reds before transitioning behind the plate as a senior to lead the Reds to their 3rd consecutive spring State Championship, and 5th consecutive spring/summer season winning it all. Knowing the importance of the position and seeing that the Reds did not have a top athlete back there following the graduation of the previous year's star player, Swain went to Coach Danley and said "Hey coach, you know I don't really like to catch, but if that's what it'll take to win this thing, I'll do it." Swain and the Reds did exactly that and won the State Championship once again. The toughness exhibited by Swain was characterized before him in the Reds' smallest catcher of all-time, Justin Ginther. Standing 5'6" and 150 pounds, Ginther's small body frame made him that much bigger and tougher inside. With the true heart of a champion, Ginther led the Reds to State Championships in 2001 and 2002 behind the plate, while also setting the Reds' all-time records for highest batting average and on-base percentage, leading him to be named the Class 3A Player of the Year and Greeley Tribune Athlete of the Year. He saved the 2001 State Championship Game when the would-be winning run tried to steal home in the 14th inning by reacting quickly and forcing the batter to interfere with him as he also applied the tag in time to be sure of the out which sent the game into the 15th inning, where Eaton then won it.

Tape measure home runs are typically reserved for the Major Leagues, but Zack Hughes hit them with a regularity that made him one of the truly top ballplayers in all of Colorado, and earned him a selection to the Top 50 Game, among many other awards as well. Hughes was the catcher (and cleanup hitter) for the undefeated 1998 team, and was one of the winners of 45 consecutive games, which is still the state record. Hughes was a menace to opponents behind the plate, and an outright terror to them at the plate; Hughes still holds a tie for the Reds' record of most home runs in a season, and is the only player in the history of Eaton's field to hit a ball that flew over the leftfield fence, the street, the 1st house in the cul-de-sac, and hit squarely on the 2nd house, shattering a piece of its siding. Drovdal was behind the plate for the Reds in 1997. Following in the footsteps of those before him and those that would follow, Drovdal batted cleanup and led the Reds to yet another Regional Championship. With the league championship hanging in the balance, Drovdal threw out a runner trying to steal third base to lock up an important league win, one of many runners he gunned down.



Swain holding the 2003 State Championship Trophy



Ginther with teammates after 2001 State Championship



Hughes tags out runner at plate during the 1998 State Semifinal victory



Drovdal poses for All-Conference recognition in newspaper

Before Hughes, the best power hitting catcher the Reds had ever had was Matt Anderson. Anderson led the Reds to the State Championship Game in all 3 seasons that he played, including earning the team's first two State Titles in 1994 and 1995. In the 1995 Regional Tournament, Anderson was 7-for-8 with 12 RBIs, 6 runs scored, and 2 home runs. While this was arguably the top postseason day in Reds' history by one player, it wasn't surprising at all to Anderson or his teammates, as he hit with great power, and knocked down every knuckle curve, with great consistency. Anderson set the single season home run record at the time, and held the RBI record until 2008. Josh Schneider preceded Anderson, and these two men held the job as the Reds' starting catcher for 6 straight years. Schneider was arguably the greatest defensive catcher the Reds have had, as he simply threw out nearly anyone that tried to steal, and picked off runners from any base, at any time. Reds' infielders were always cognizant of getting to the base once it became clear a pitch wouldn't be put in play, as Schneider ended more scoring threats than any Red in history with his cannon arm and lightning quick reflexes. He also led the Reds at the plate, hitting cleanup and sending the Reds to the State Championship Game in 1991 and 1993. At the old field where inside the park home runs were common, Schneider on multiple occasions deked the hitter into jogging into the plate thinking he had an easy home run, just as Schneider put up his glove at the last instant to take the throw in and apply the tag. Reds' catchers aren't just tough, and they aren't just talented; they understand the game and play it smarter, and better, than their opponents. Referred to simply as "Burly" by his teammates, Ryan Fortune was one of the strongest, toughest looking guys you've ever seen. He, along with then Schneider and Anderson, provided the Reds 9 straight years (3 years apiece) of having the best catcher in the state in their classification. Each of these men also hit cleanup on their teams. Fortune was simply a wall behind the plate, as nothing got past him, and hardly anyone dared run on him. In the more than 50 spring games that the Reds won with Fortune behind the plate, few games were very close (the Reds outscored their opponents by more than 400 runs in these games), but Fortune excelled the most when games were tight. Steve Graff was the first Reds' catcher to catch the knuckle curve, and he handled it greatly during his seasons catching in 1986 and 1987. Graff fielded .981 behind the plate as a senior, leading the Reds to the Regionals in both years. He was flawless in an 8-inning, 1-0 District Tournament win in which his pitcher set the record at the time with 16 strikeouts in a game.



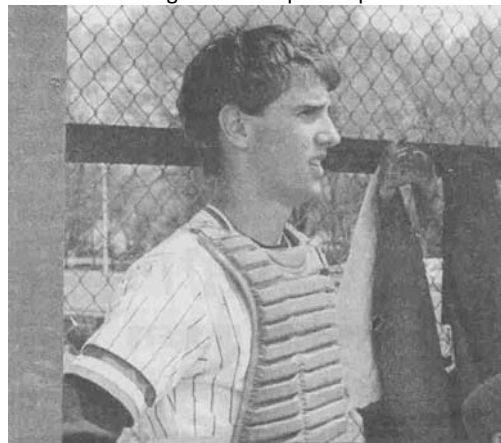
Anderson blocks the plate and tags out the runner during a 1995 extra-innings District Championship victory



Schneider is mobbed by teammates after a home run to secure 1993 Regional Championship



Fortune shown in photo for 1990 baseball preview article



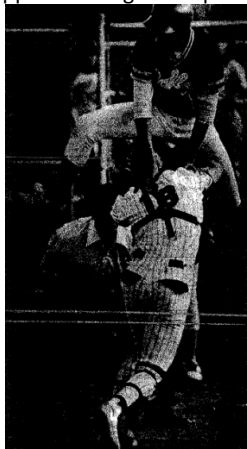
Graff prepares to take the field during the 1987 State Tournament

Ronnie Crowder had likely the greatest arm of anyone to ever wear a Reds jersey. On the first day of practice, on a dare from a teammate, he literally threw a ball from home plate over the leftfield fence 327 feet away, and did this without even warming up. He was responsible for getting word out throughout the state that you can't run on Eaton, which has been huge in allowing Reds' pitchers to throw knuckle curves for the past 20+ years without opponents being able to steal or to advance when the ball does hit the dirt. Crowder was mentored by Pat McKay, who caught for the Reds in 1983 and 1984. McKay led the Reds to their first State Championship Game in history in 1983 and then followed it up with 17 straight wins in 1984 to send the Reds back to Regionals. McKay was tough, and like Reds catchers that would follow him, yearned for those moments in the State Tournament when the game was on the line. As one example, with a 1-0 lead in the 1983 Regional Championship, McKay ended a 6th inning scoring threat by picking off the would-be tying run from third base with one out as the Reds held on for the 1-0 win. Bill Kurtz led the Reds to their 2nd Regional Championship in 1981 after throwing out the would-be go-ahead run that was attempting to steal 2nd base. Kurtz then went on to single with two outs later in the game to give the Reds an insurance run in the 3-1 win over a pitcher who would go on to play professionally. The game before that, he—like his pitcher—was flawless, as Kurtz caught a no-hitter to win the Regional Semifinals. Kurtz then went on in 1982 to knock down 6 strikeouts in the dirt and throw out the hitter at 1st base in a 1-0 victory in the District Championship. Mike Galloway fielded .980 in 1980 as the Reds advanced to Regionals for the 2nd straight year. With the game tied 1-1 in the 11th inning against Estes Park, Galloway threw out the leadoff runner in the inning as the Reds later scored to stay undefeated all-time against Estes Park. That streak still continues to this day. Earlier in the year, Galloway had helped the Reds mount a major comeback to win a game that would secure the League Championship, reaching base each time up and scoring 3 times with 3 hits to lead the Reds. Kirk Kindsfater caught for the Reds in 1979, as well as seasons before that, but it was 1979 that started the Reds' streak of dominance in winning the League Title. Batting cleanup, Kindsfater led the team with a .370 batting average as these underdog Reds defeated Valley for the first in the decade and advanced to State for only the 3rd time. With the season on the line, Kindsfater threw out a runner trying to score on a wild pitch to end a 1st inning scoring threat and to keep the Reds in a game that they would come back to win to advance to the State Tournament.



Crowder applies the tag at the plate during the 1985 State Tournament

McKay forces out the runner at home and looks to first for a double play



Kurtz tags out a Valley runner who tries to leap over him

Galloway scores from 2nd base on a wild pitch

Kindsfater catches an errant throw to prevent the runner at 2nd base from advancing

These young men were simply stronger both physically and mentally than the players around them. They were tougher and more competitive than anyone they faced, and took every game and every play as a one-on-one battle of wills. They simply did not accept anything short of absolute victory. They led their teams to remarkable championships and win streaks. They won 35 League Championships. They qualified for State 36 times. They won 29 Regional Championships. They played in 21 State Championship Games. They won 11 State Championships. They won over 730 spring games, and over 1,000 summer games as well. And they accomplished all of this within merely 37 years. They earned all sorts of all-league, all-state, and other awards, and most of them earned scholarships to play in college.

They set a standard over three decades ago that all future Reds would follow, of simply being tougher than any opponent, knocking down every pitch, throwing out base stealers and any runner that dared even take a decent lead. They also led the team with great power at the plate as the strongest men on the team; truly leading by example. They were simply flat-out studs. And we're just proud and grateful to know them as Eaton Reds.



17 Reds' Catchers Spanning 37 Years of Eaton Baseball

Lind '13-'14
Batt '10-'12
Pickar '07-'09
Carlson '04-'06
Swain '03
Ginther '01-'02
Hughes '98-'00
Drovdal '97
Anderson '94-'96

1979 – 2015
 36 State Tournament Appearances
 35 League Championships
 29 Regional Championships
 21 State Semifinal Wins
 11 State Championships
 738 Wins, Averaging 20 Wins per Season

Schneider '91-'93
Fortune '88-'90
Graff '86-'87
Crowder '85
McKay '83-'84
Kurtz '81-'82
Galloway '80
Kindsfater '79