



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 willd 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."

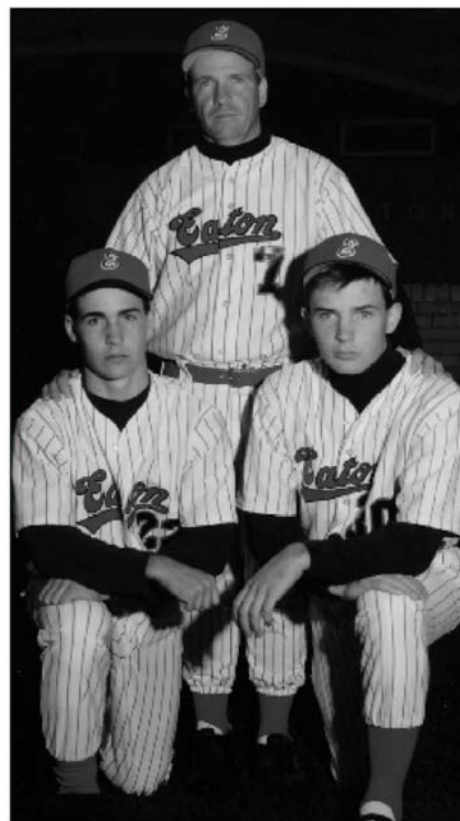
Danley served as a teacher and counselor at Eaton High School for 34 years. He founded the Eaton Elementary School Anti-Drug Character Building Program and directs the Eaton High and Middle School Anti-Drug Mentoring Program.

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,

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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