

2008 YEAR IN REVIEW

MUST-WIN SEASON

The term “must-win” can be used all too often, like when the home team in a 7-game series is only down one game to zero. But in some cases, such as with the Reds’ 2008 season, must-win was certainly the correct term for a year in which the Reds simply had to win the State Championship. At stake was more than just the Reds’ 12th State Championship (and 8th during the Spring season), as for the first time in a decade and a half, a senior class could graduate without at least one State Championship Ring. Furthermore, the senior class that was without a ring included arguably the Reds’ most dominant strikeout pitcher and toughest competitor throughout all of the school’s storied past. Without a State Championship in the past few seasons, the Reds’ swagger was being tested. But seniors Kyle Ottoson and Bo McLavey weren’t leaving without a ring, and the Reds simply had to win State in ’08.

January and February

On January 23, 2008, the American Flag was flown at the Colorado State Capitol Building in honor of the Reds’ Baseball Program. Former Red, and current State Senator, Scott Renfro handed the folded flag to Coach Danley during the Colorado High School Activities Association’s Hall of Fame induction ceremony, in which the Reds were honored as only the 2nd baseball team in Colorado history to win their coach into the Hall of Fame.

The 2008 season started with open gyms in January, and official practices starting in mid-February. However, prior to the first pitch of the Spring being thrown, McLavey had already secured a full-ride scholarship to Trinidad State Junior College, which would go on to win the Region IX Title in 2008 and come within a single opponent of reaching the Junior College World Series, finishing in the Top 20 junior college teams in the nation. Ottoson too had been courted by many top junior college teams as well as top Division I teams, and he would later sign at South Mountain in Phoenix, which is where 2006 Reds’ graduate Shane Dyer pitched as well.

With college considerations out of the way, McLavey, Ottoson, and the rest of the Reds had only one focus: preparing to win a State Championship. A decade prior, the 1998 Reds had gone undefeated with an offensive-laden team unlike any the Reds had ever fielded before, or since. The 2008 Reds would feature a dominant one-two punch on the mound, with a highly-talented junior class behind them along with one starting sophomore and freshman.

The Reds carried into the season the highest winning percentage in baseball throughout the entire country over the past 25 years at 86.3%, and proudly displayed this on the team’s website. The Reds also were tied for the most State Championships in the country over the past 15 years. The 2008 Reds would not allow either of these marks to be jeopardized.

March

The season started with Class 4A Fossil Ridge, and any chance of an undefeated season for the Reds ended early on with a defeat to open the season as many of the Reds’ top players were still playing basketball. That was also true as the Reds headed to Brush for a pivotal game to begin the league season. In between these games, a historic first occurred for the Reds, as Tyler Wallace hit for the cycle against Class 4A Denver North for the first time in the history of the

Program. Wallace capped off the cycle with a grand slam, making him likely one of literally only a handful of players in the nation to accomplish this feat in 2008.

Against Brush, the Reds were without their starting catcher, so senior McLavey practiced for one week and then went behind the plate for the first time in his life, to catch arguably the toughest pitch being thrown in prep baseball in Colorado—Ottoson's knuckle curveball. After one ball bounced to the side of him in the first inning, not another ball got past him all day, as Ottoson struck out 15 batters and led the Reds to a 4-1 win in their first league game of the year. Four days later, McLavey threw a no-hitter and nearly a perfect game against Yuma, striking out 10 batters. The win marked the 16th no-hitter in Reds' history, and kept the Reds undefeated against Eastern teams Brush and Yuma since the fall of the Soviet Union. The following day, Ottoson turned in one of the best regular season pitching performances in Eaton history, striking out 17 batters from Faith Christian en route to a 2-1 victory amidst wind gusts that reached 35 miles per hour at times. Opponents were quoted in the paper as saying, "we haven't seen anything close to Kyle." Wallace, McLavey, and Ottoson pitched the Reds to lopsided wins over Weld Central, University, and Valley, respectively, to end the month of March with a 5-0 league record, though the Reds did have to mount a late-inning comeback to defeat Valley.

The Reds were honored in March by being awarded the host site for the 2008 Colorado American Legion B State Tournament. That State Tournament would have to wait though, as the Reds had a State Championship run to put together for the Spring season. Reds' 1983 Graduate Michael McKay was honored as the Red of the Month in March, after earning Ernst & Young's Entrepreneur of the Year Award for the Southwest region of the country.

April

Logan Hall started off April on the mound with a win over Strasburg as the Reds defeated Strasburg, Platte Valley, and Lyons by a combined score of 43-3. The Reds would then endure their only consecutive losses throughout all of 2008 as the Reds fell late to Holy Family 6-5 at Coors Field, and then at Erie 5-4. The loss to Erie effectively ended the Reds' shot at winning their 17th consecutive League Championship, and what would have been their 29th League Championship in the past 30 years. Following a rare long bus ride home, Reds' seniors Ottoson and McLavey went over to Coach Danley's house and told him "I'm sorry we didn't get a League Championship, but we will get the State Championship." The Reds would have to prove this over the final four weeks of the season. Prove it they would. A total of only three runs were allowed against University, Estes Park, Highland, and Brush, while the Reds posted 49 runs against those teams. Wallace and Bryce Ruff combined to throw the 17th no-hitter in Reds' history against University. The Reds then faced Roosevelt in the final game of the regular season, and the Reds overcame an early 2-0 deficit, and then a 3-1 deficit, to come back and win as McLavey and freshman Seth Jackson delivered big hits (following intentional walks being issued) to tie the game and then win it. The Reds qualified for their 30th State Tournament appearance, and 26th consecutive State Tournament appearance.

Reds' 1988 Graduate Marc Gustafson, and current Director of Player Development for the 2007 National League Champion Colorado Rockies, was honored as the April Red of the Month.

May

The month of May is when legends are made at Eaton, as the pressure is turned up a notch as the success of the Reds' entire season is determined by one play here or there. The Reds hosted Regionals and quickly dispatched of Clear Creek and Hotchkiss by the scores of 16-2 and 19-2 en route to advancing to the double-elimination Elite Eight.

The Reds' first-round opponent was Roosevelt, and McLavey called for—and got—the ball. He scattered just four hits in the 7-inning shutout, never allowing more than one per inning, and retired 12 of the game's final 13 batters as the Reds scored via Sterling Monfort singling home Ottoson following a double, and consecutive singles from Monfort, Adam Geisick, and Hall in the 5th inning to score 2 insurance runs in the 3-0 win. The Reds then faced Faith Christian and pitched Ottoson. McLavey doubled home Hall and Wallace in the first inning, and Bennett Pickar, Geisick, Hall and Wallace all scored in the 2nd inning to put the game out of reach with a 6-0 lead. The Reds poured on the runs to defeat Faith Christian 11-3 in a dominant offensive performance that advanced them to face Erie. Following a 1-2-3 top of the first pitched by Wallace, the Reds' first 7 batters all reached base and scored to put the game out of reach. The Reds went on to 10-run Erie as Geisick scored the 16th run to end the game in the bottom of the 5th inning with a headfirst slide across homeplate sending the Reds on to the final weekend as the only undefeated team at State.

Heading into the final weekend of the season, the Reds were afforded the luxury of being able to lose a game and still play for the State Championship. The Reds would have nothing to do with taking that risk though, and went after Brush with McLavey in the Semifinals. After the Reds scored one run in the top of the first inning, McLavey quickly showed Brush it was going to be a bad day at the plate for them in disposing of their batters quickly. The Reds drew walks and scored three more runs in the 2nd inning, and McLavey's 2-run double in the 4th inning put the game completely out of reach at 6-0. McLavey scattered just four hits and set the Reds' postseason ERA record allowing just one earned run throughout the Tournament, as Brush scored one earned, and one unearned, run in the bottom of the 6th inning after the outcome had already been determined. The Reds were headed into the State Championship Game on Saturday, and had to win just one of potentially two games against Lamar. Ottoson would get the start in the first game, allowing an Ottoson-McLavey combination in the second game if necessary. It wouldn't be necessary.

Ottoson, who had just recently been named the Denver Post Athlete of the Week, took the ball and set down Lamar through the first three innings as the Reds took a 2-0 lead with doubles from Hall, Jackson and Pickar. Following a couple of rare errors by the Reds, Lamar tightened the game to 2-1 and loaded the bases with no outs in the top of the fourth inning. Ottoson then simply went to work and struck out each of the next three batters, on just 9 pitches in total, to end the threat. There wouldn't be another threat. The Reds added two insurance runs in the bottom of the 6th inning, led by another double from Jackson. The Reds took the 4-1 lead into the 7th inning.

Having ended each of the first six innings with a strikeout, Ottoson took the mound in the top of the 7th inning with a chance to improve his career record to 34-3, but to most importantly secure the long sought-after State Championship. The first out was recorded on a groundball to third baseman Wallace. Ottoson then recorded a strikeout to bring the Reds within an out of winning

it all. Having already set the Reds' single-season record, and shattering the career-mark for strikeouts, with two strikes on the final batter, Ottoson reached back and threw one final, unhittable knuckle-curveball that was swung at and missed. The Reds immediately piled up on the field, in arguably one of the Reds' all-time ugliest pileups. The Reds are happy to take criticism though for the quality, or lack thereof, of their pileups. A few months later, the Reds would get another opportunity to improve upon the Spring pileup.

Ottoson was named Tournament MVP after recording 15 strikeouts in the State Championship, increasing his season total to a record 136, and his career record to 385 strikeouts. Seniors Ottoson, McLavey, and Todd Self accepted the State Championship Trophy on behalf of the team, and carried it back to a group of players who had dreamt of this moment for years. McLavey and Ottoson got their State Championship Rings, along with fellow senior Self. All three would go on to play college baseball, with Self serving as the Nebraska Cornhuskers' bullpen catcher, while McLavey and Ottoson would go on to dominate junior college baseball in the Fall season. However, none of the accomplishments made by these young men were as meaningful as holding up the Trophy that symbolized that they were #1. State Champions.

[PowerPoint Slides of Final Out and Pile-Up \(3 MB\)](#) -- [Video Clip of Final Out and Pile-Up \(143 MB\)](#)

Ottoson was named by the Rocky Mountain News and Denver Post as the Pitcher of the Year in all classifications. McLavey was one of only two players in Colorado to be named All-State as both a shortstop and as a pitcher. Wallace was the Player of the Year in Class 3A baseball. Wallace completed the most remarkable year offensively in Reds' history, setting or tying nearly every single major record in Reds' history, led by a .638 batting average with 12 home runs and 57 runs batted in; Wallace led the entire state at the Class 3A-5A level in every major statistic.

For the first time in national history, a high school team was publicly noted coming into the season as the winningest baseball team in America over the last quarter-century, and the Reds maintained that standard by matching the 1983 Reds' winning percentage, thereby keeping the rolling 25-year winning percentage at a remarkable 86.3%. The Reds were also noted as one of a handful of teams that were tied for the most State Championships in the country over the past 15 years, and the victory on Championship Saturday kept the Reds in this elite company as well.

Reds' 1993 Graduate Josh Schneider, now head coach of the Class 2A Kiowa Indians, was honored as the Red of the Month for May after advancing his team to yet another State Tournament berth and setting them on a path that closely matches the early days of the Eaton Reds' Program. Throughout the course of the 2008 Season, former Reds' players donated \$1,000 to members of the military defending our nation overseas. Each time the 2008 Reds chased a starting pitcher from the game and forced the opponent to make a call to the bullpen, which occurred 20 times throughout the season, the Reds Alumni donated money that allowed our heroes to call back home for free, donating up to 24,000 minutes of talk time.

A must-win season had been completed, and victory it was for the Reds. While that kind of pressure did not exist going into the Summer season, the Reds now to-be-senior class wanted to leave their mark on the Program as well, and got started with a hard fought 8-7 league victory over Greeley West. The Reds then defeated Highland 10-0 and swept Fort Morgan prior to a 2-0 defeat to Niwot. The Reds ended May with league wins over Valley and Greeley Central.

June

Reds' 2003 Graduate Tyler Garretson graduated from Utah Valley State after playing his final two years of baseball there. The same was true for 2004 Graduate Dusty Dominguez, who graduated from York College after finishing his baseball career. Many other recent Reds' graduates also excelled in the classroom in 2008.

In the field, the Reds started June with 6 league wins (vs. Northridge, Greeley West, and sweeps of University and Brighton) and 6 non-league wins (with sweeps of Conifer and Prairie View, along with wins over Resurrection Christian and Roosevelt), improving the Reds to a record of 18-1 as the Reds then headed out to Omaha to watch the College World Series. 1994 Graduate Matt Rice hosted the Reds while in Nebraska; Rice arranged hotel rooms and College World Series tickets, and had a barbeque at his house outside of Lincoln. 1988 Graduate Ron "Dino" Nolin had done the same for the Reds the previous year.

Right before leaving for Omaha, the Reds had two players drafted in the same year for the first time in Eaton history. The 2008 Major League Draft had Tampa Bay selecting players before all other MLB teams, and with their sixth round pick, the Rays selected 2006 graduate Shane Dyer. Dyer would go on to sign for a large signing bonus and was rewarded with the opportunity to not only skip Rookie ball and head straight to Single-A, but also be given a spot in the starting rotation with the Hudson Valley Renegades. Additionally, the Colorado Rockies drafted Ottoson, and while he didn't end up signing this year and opted to go to college instead, this likely won't be Ottoson's final appearance in the Major League Draft either.

The Reds returned from the Omaha trip and continued to stay undefeated in the month of June, allowing one run or less in four of the next five league games with wins against Fort Morgan, and sweeps of Legacy and Fort Lupton, along with a non-league sweep of Weld Central. Wallace carried a perfect game into the 7th inning against Fort Morgan.

For the first time in the history of the Program, the Reds went undefeated throughout the month of June. Remarkably, the winning streak caught on with the Reds' younger players as well, as the Legion C team and the Junior Legion team also went undefeated over the course of 30 days, during which time these 3 Reds' teams won an astounding 46 consecutive games, outscoring all opponents by nearly 500 runs in total over this period, winning by an average margin of 14-3.

July

The Reds started July with a league win over Northridge, and then defeated Holy Family 12-2 in an important non-league win. With seven league games left in the final eight days of the season, the Reds left no doubt that this League Championship would be secured, defeating each of their final opponents via the 10-run rule, with a sweep of Sterling and wins over Valley and Greeley Central, along with a dominant 23-4 win over Niwot. The Reds had secured the League Championship with two games left to play, but they were facing the team that had defeated the Reds in the Spring to end the Reds' consecutive League Title streak, so the game took on great importance. The Reds quickly put both games out of reach, winning 16-6 and 11-0 to end the regular season with the best Legion B regular season record in Reds' history at 34-1.

What started as simply another Summer of baseball in which the Reds would challenge for a State Championship as usual but most importantly prepare for winning the following Spring, all

of a sudden was heightened to the status of another must-win Title once the Reds posted such a remarkable record. Furthermore, the Reds would be hosting the State Tournament this year. The Reds' postseason started at Erie though, as the Reds faced Valley in the first round. The Reds won that game 10-2 and were fortunate to avoid a 7th inning injury when a Valley player stepped on the Reds' first baseman Monfort on a routine play, a career-threatening situation that unfortunately has become a near annual experience for the Reds. The Reds then defeated Fort Morgan in the second round to guarantee the Reds a spot in the State Tournament, as 5 teams would move on from the District Tournament to play in the State Tournament. Wallace was intentionally walked four times in the game for the first time in Reds' history, including once with the bases loaded, but the Reds' supporting cast capitalized and put away Fort Morgan for a 5th time in 2008. The Reds then lost to Brush 6-5 on a close call at the plate. The loss was the first for the Reds since May, but worked to focus the Reds on taking care of business for the rest of the postseason. The following day, the Reds came out and scored 23 runs against Greeley West and 19 runs against Fort Morgan, as Monfort led the team with eight hits and 11 runs batted in on the day. The Reds then came back the following day and quickly put the game out of reach, defeating Brush for the District Championship by a score of 12-3. Wallace, Hall, Jackson, and Gus Jones led the Reds in pitching at the District Tournament.

Having secured the #1 seed for the State Tournament with an overall record of 39-2, the Reds again faced Valley in the first round. Playing at home at Eaton, the Reds fell behind Valley on the opening night of the Tournament, before the worst rainstorm of 2008 hit and rained out the game until the following morning. In the meantime, volunteers led by Gary Geisick literally worked throughout the night along with some of the Reds' younger players and many other players' dads and other fans of Eaton Baseball contributing significantly as well to get the field ready for play the following day. On the first pitch thrown once the game resumed, Pickar singled to knock in two runs and bring the Reds right back into the game. The Reds then took the lead and went on to win the game 10-4 as Hall shut down Valley from the mound.

Facing Fort Morgan for the 6th time of the season, the Reds managed yet another win by the score of 9-5, sending the Reds on to meet Holy Family the following day as the only two undefeated teams left in the State Tournament. The Reds jumped out to an early start and went on to defeat Holy Family comfortably by an 8-2 margin. The Reds were once again in the State Championship Game with an undefeated record, and had to win just one of potentially two games against Holy Family. The Reds took the field the following day with Wallace on the mound. After trailing 1-0 early in the game, the Reds came back to score 5 runs in the 5th inning and take a 6-1 lead into the 7th inning. With the Reds' 2nd State Championship of the year on the line in the 7th inning with the bases loaded, Hall took the mound in relief and shut down Holy Family, inducing a flyout to Geisick to end the game and earn the Reds the State Championship.

[PowerPoint Slides of Final Out and Pile-Up \(3 MB\)](#) -- [Video Clip of Final Out and Pile-Up \(51 MB\)](#)

Hall was named Tournament MVP in a close race with fellow senior Pickar, both of whom hit clutch singles and extra-base hits in pressure situations, but Hall earned one victory and two saves in the State Tournament for the Reds as well. The Reds ended the Summer with the best record in Eaton history, finishing 43-2. The Reds were honored prior to the start of the State Tournament by the National and Colorado American Legion organizations for 40 years of continuous baseball success since Coach Danley started coaching the Reds in 1968 in American Legion baseball, one year prior to Americans landing a man on the moon. Dyer was also honored by getting the ball to start for Hudson Valley against the Red Sox minor league affiliate playing at Fenway Park. Dyer pitched well and retired the final 7 straight batters.

August

The Reds wasted no time in preparing for the next Championship that could be won, the Fall Championship that is, with an intra-squad scrimmage the weekend following the State Championship. The Reds once again fielded two teams for Fall Baseball, aiming to continue the Reds' streak of Championships that started with the 2007 Fall Championship and continued throughout the Spring and Summer seasons with State Championships as well. Wallace, Pickar and Hall were invited to play for the Wyoming-Colorado (WYCO) Braves, an all-star team sponsored by the Atlanta Braves with games against a number of college teams throughout the Fall. The Reds had to win the Fall Championship without Ottoson the year before, and this year would have to do it without their three most prolific ballplayers.

The Reds started August by receiving their State Championship Rings from the Spring, and ordered their Summer State Championship Rings as well. The Reds won a scrimmage against a combined team from Greeley West, Greeley Central, Valley and Northridge even before the Fall Season officially started the following month in September. The 2008 graduates headed to college, with Ottoson heading to South Mountain in Phoenix, McLavey heading to Trinidad State, and Self going to the University of Nebraska where he was the Huskers' bullpen catcher.

September

The Fall season started with the Reds heading to Class 5A Grandview in southeast Denver, and defeating them 8-1 in a charged victory after the opponent started chastising the Reds for being a Class 3A team. The following weekend, the Reds held on to a 3-2 win over Class 4A Fort Lupton. The Reds defeated Class 5A Douglas County and Class 5A Denver East the following two weekends by scores of 5-2 and 5-4. In the meantime, the Reds played on Wednesdays after school winning scrimmages against the combined team from the Greeley area.

Dyer was selected to play for Tampa Bay's Instructional League team, which is comprised of the top talent from throughout each Major League team's minor league affiliates. In one game, Dyer came in relief of 2002 World Champion Troy Percival and earned the save retiring all six batters faced. Ottoson and McLavey, along with other former Reds still playing baseball, all pitched very well in their collegiate Fall seasons, led by sidearmer McLavey who quickly moved up from reliever to one of the top starters for Trinidad State, posting a 3-0 record in September.

October

The Reds were featured in the Veterans of Foreign Wars' international newsletter for their donation this Spring to Operation Uplink, allowing our servicemen up to 24,000 minutes of talk time to call home to their families. The Reds forced their opponents to make 20 calls to the bullpen this Spring, which led to our heroes overseas being able to make many hundreds of calls of their own for free. Comcast Entertainment Television also highlighted the Reds' Program in early October in a 30-minute TV special. Lastly, Fall Coach Brent Payne was admitted into the Colorado School of Mines, transferring to one of the top engineering schools in the entire Rocky Mountain Region.

The Reds started October with an 8-0 win over Class 5A George Washington. Following a rainout the next weekend, the Reds then defeated Class 4A Sterling 7-0, as Hall nearly threw a perfect game until it was broken up by an infield single in the 7th inning. The Reds then entered

the final weekend of the season with an opportunity to win their 4th straight Championship, faced against the only two teams not yet played in Fall Ball—Brush/Fort Morgan and University. The Reds took a 2-0 early lead against Brush, and expanded that to 4-0 for the win, which was the Reds' third straight shutout. The Reds then fell behind for the only time all Fall, and needed to come back from an early 6-run deficit to University. The Reds quickly made up 5 of those runs, and then tied up the game in the bottom of the 6th inning on a hit by Josh Cruz, and then won the game in the 8th inning on a bases loaded walk by Jones. Wallace had shut down University since taking the mound in the 4th inning in relief. The win marked four straight Championships for the Reds, with two straight Fall Championships, and a Spring and Summer State Title in between. The Reds were undefeated in league and postseason games this Fall for the 2nd consecutive year.

The Reds posted an overall record of 78-7 for the year, a 92% winning percentage. In league games, the Reds were 40-2 (95%); throughout all postseason games, the Reds were 16-1 (94%).

McLavey finished up 7-0 in wood bat games throughout the Fall for Trinidad State, posting an ERA under 1.00. Ottoson had a similarly strong Fall season, though with shorter appearances and thus fewer opportunities to record victories at South Mountain than McLavey had at Trinidad State. Wallace was honored with an opportunity to represent his team in an all-star home-run contest, while Pickar was selected for an all-star game in Florida.

November and December

The Reds received their 2nd set of State Championship Rings in 2008 in early November, receiving the hardware earned for becoming the 2008 Colorado American Legion B State Champions. The Reds' website was visited for the 40,000th time, with more than 125,000 pages viewed by nearly 6,000 different individuals from 48 states and more than 30 countries. The Reds continued to work out, practice and scrimmage throughout the offseason in preparation for the 2009 season. Two of the hardest working players were seniors that had already received top-dollar scholarships at Division I schools. Wallace signed at the University of Northern Colorado (UNC), and Pickar signed at Oral Roberts University (ORU).

Looking Back, Looking Forward

2007 was a year filled with tragedy as the Reds lost two members of its family, 1997 Graduate Christian Mock and 1998 Graduate Jeff Hager. Both of these young men acted heroically both on the ballfield, and off the field. They were remembered throughout the 2008 season.

2008 was without loss for the Reds, most importantly off the field, but also on the field, as the Reds posted their best year in history, duplicating the feats of 2002, 2003, and 2004 in which both Spring and Summer State Championships were earned, but also posting the best record in history in 2008, winning over 70 games more than the Reds lost throughout the year. The Reds are preparing to make 2009 another memorable year, and will face the daunting challenge of needing to defeat a couple of the top opposing Class 3A arms in recent history, but coming loaded with talent and desire to end yet another season in a pileup.





