

# MIKE CARRASCO – 1999 GRADUATE – EATON REDS

## THIS IS EATON BASEBALL

Character isn't the public persona one shows when all is going well, instead character is revealed when a person, or his team, are at their lowest. The way in which men respond at such times determines their destiny.

The Reds now play in the State Championship Game nearly every year, winning it more often than not, but in the spring of 1997, the Reds weren't just beaten one game short of the State Championship Game, the Reds were thoroughly trounced after the worst first inning in Eaton State Tournament history. The Reds fought back, but it was too little, too late. It was not only an end to the Reds' State Tournament run, it was a humiliating end to the Reds' season.

Moments after the postgame team conversation, as players were walking out to the team bus for the long trip home from Denver, All-State sophomore Mike Carrasco led fellow All-State teammate Jeff Meyers to go pull Coach Danley away from the remaining members of the press and Carrasco uttered just one statement:

*"Coach Danley, we're sorry, this will never happen again. Never."*

Sophomores aren't supposed to take responsibility for a team defeat; especially not after they had played very well and done enough individually to lead the team to victory as usual. But Mike Carrasco wasn't like other sophomores. Frankly, he wasn't like anything the Reds had known before or since. A decade later, Tim Tebow would make a postgame speech after a loss in college that would go on to cement his legacy as one of the all-time great competitors; well, Mike delivered fewer words, but had the exact same meaning as Tebow's speech:

*"I'm extremely sorry. We were hoping for an undefeated season. That was my goal, something (we) have never done here. I promise you one thing, a lot of good will come out of this. You will never see any player in the entire country play as hard as I will play the rest of the season. You will never see someone push the rest of the team as hard as I will push everybody the rest of the season. You will never see a team play harder than we will the rest of the season. God Bless."*

364 days later, Carrasco was back at the same field playing again in the State Semifinals. This battle resulted in another lopsided score, but Mike and the Reds handily won this State Semifinal game. The following day, exactly one year to the day of his declaration to Coach Danley, Carrasco led the Reds to a State Championship Game victory, finishing the season as Tebow himself later had desired...undefeated; marking the Reds' first undefeated season in history. Carrasco and the Reds would go on to set the new state record the following season earning 45 straight wins.

This glory was the product of Carrasco's efforts, and this team and individual success were well-documented by the press throughout northern Colorado, Denver, the state, and even the nation, as Carrasco became the first Red in history to be named an All-American by USA Today. Those successes are chronicled throughout the entire History section of the Reds' website, but when the Reds' long-time coaches and former players think of Mike Carrasco, it isn't his record-setting statistics or his multiple honors at the highest levels that are remembered; the Reds remember Mike's dominance to take over a game when everything was on the line, his mental toughness, his physical toughness, and—as a foundation for all of the aforementioned qualities—his quiet faith, exceptional confidence, and utmost character.

During the 12 months from State Tournament rags to riches, Carrasco led the Reds to outwork and outcompete their opponents. As still an underclassmen, Carrasco immediately became the Reds' leader, both on and off the field. The Reds quickly became a tight knit group, something that led them to win the Legion B State Championship over a Class 5A team in what was described by the newspapers as David beating Goliath. Yes, 15 years ago the Reds were still

considered David in these types of match-ups against schools that often had a school enrollment very similar to the entire town population of Eaton.

Thus only 3 months after State Tournament disaster, Carrasco and the Reds became State Champions. Then by the spring, the Reds again were State Champions, this time undefeated. Throughout that entire time, Carrasco encouraged the younger kids on the team, and held the older players to meet the standard of seeking excellence, truly to do all that they can imagine to get better every single day. Everyone was on board. By the spring, Coach Danley described the team in the 1998 preseason Greeley Tribune articles with:

*“The expectations have been high for these kids all the way through. I think our expectations for ourselves are high. We just have to be mentally tough enough to handle it. This is a very competitive group of young men. I like these kids mentally.”*

Since the greatest journalists in the nation haven't been able to truly describe all that comprises Tim Tebow, EatonBaseball.com won't try to describe everything that has made Mike Carrasco one of the greatest leaders and players throughout the rich history of the Reds. As with Tebow, if you don't know Mike, it's hard to put him into words.

Carrasco has been a Red his entire life. He was the team batboy back in the late 1980's as his brother, Ray Garza, led the Reds' pitching staff into the playoffs. Upon winning the undefeated State Championship in 1998, as reporters asked Carrasco a number of questions pointed at his individual successes, including the game-winning hit in the State Championship Game and his dominant relief appearance to earn the 3-1 save over a future MLB draft pick, Carrasco simply stated:

*“This isn't just for me. It's for the whole team and the whole community. Eaton Baseball is just one big family.”*

Only a few years ago, Carrasco ran into another Reds' graduate and stated within the first 5 minutes of their conversation “you know, if we could have just cut the deficit to 9 runs to continue that game into the 6<sup>th</sup> inning, I swear we were going to win that game.” We all carry our losses with us, but there are a very select few that believe deep down in their hearts that they are going to win every game, and that they can simply will themselves and their team to such victory. Tim Tebow is one of these men, so too is Mike Carrasco, one of arguably the greatest Reds to ever wear the coveted Pinstripes.

