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REMEMBERING ONE OF THE EATON REDS' GREATEST SUPPORTERS AND COACHES

Coach Hernandez throwing the first pitch at Coors Field after undefeated season in 1998, and in the dugout in 2002

Every previous Red of the Month, and likely every Red of the Month that will follow, was born and bred an Eaton Red, playing in the pinstripes throughout his career. This month though, we remember a former long-time Eaton assistant coach that wasn't born an Eaton Red, but certainly quickly became one, and—without question—died an Eaton Red. As only one example of his love for Eaton Baseball and his avid support for every kid that ever wore the pinstripes, Coach Martin Hernandez had only one request for his funeral: “bury me wearing my Eaton uniform”. And that request was honored.

Coach Hernandez moved from Nebraska to Greeley at the age of 2 in 1940. Eaton didn't even field a baseball team back then, and Coach H. pitched for Greeley High School (there was only one school in Greeley at the time) and led his team to the state championship in 1957 as a senior. Coach H. then went and pitched for the semi-pro Greeley Grays baseball team and was again very successful at that level as well. A few years after marrying his high school sweetheart, Virginia, the Hernandez's gave birth to Todd, Margie, and Michelle Hernandez and moved to Eaton. Todd went on to become one of the top first basemen and left-handed hitters in Eaton history, and Coach Hernandez went on to become one of the most diehard supporters of a team and its players that any team has ever known.

A truly great pitcher himself, Coach Hernandez was in charge of the pitchers for the Reds for 13 years. He coached legendary pitchers like Cory Martin and Russ Shelton who won Eaton's first State Championships in 1994 and 1995. He taught the knuckle curveball to pitchers, regardless of what other area coaches had to say about the pitch. He knew it could be thrown as an unhittable pitch, and would one day be thrown by a Red in the pros. One of the young kids he worked with on the pitch before his passing was named Shane Dyer. Shane is now throwing that pitch in the pros, just as Coach Hernandez knew would one day happen.

He also coached immortals like Alex Ochoa and Mike Carrasco and Paul Loftis to lead the Reds to the 1998 State Championship with an undefeated record, Eaton's first perfect season. He coached future professional pitcher Scott Souther, as well as Craig Ayers, the only Eaton pitcher to ever throw 12 innings in a game, en route to the 15-inning State Championship win in 2001. He coached Lee Griffith to win the 2002 State Championship against all odds; and he coached one of the Reds' most legendary players, Dusty Dominguez, who would go on to do the impossible, and win the State Championship in every spring and summer season he ever played, earning 6 State Championship rings from the mound. As remarkable as these achievements are in their own right, Coach Hernandez didn't just coach the pitchers, he coached the whole team. And frankly, he didn't just coach them, he mentored them and provided advice on a full range of issues far outside of the scope of baseball. As Reds' legend Mike Carrasco stated, "Coach Hernandez was an outlet for us who we could go to and converse about life and girls. He was always there to lean on. He was a mentor for us all. He's one of the big reasons Eaton Baseball's on the map."

Coach Hernandez made a positive impact on each pinstripe-wearing kid he ever met and his dedication to Eaton Baseball was without question. As his son Todd noted, "He loved Eaton Baseball. Coach Danley always talked about that when you put on a jersey with Eaton on the front it should mean something, and it always did for my dad." This couldn't have been more apparent than with his final request, to be buried wearing his Eaton uniform, which occurred in the spring of 2003 after Coach H. died of a heart attack. Upon hearing of the terrible news, the Reds' ballplayers immediately dedicated the season to Coach Hernandez, placed patches on the sleeves of their jerseys with his initials, and filled a packed church to say goodbye to Coach H. The Reds ordered another jersey with Coach H.'s #9 on it, and hung it in the dugout throughout the rest of the season. During that stretch in the 2003 playoffs, the Reds completed two of the greatest rallies in Eaton history, to go on and do what they promised—to win the State Championship for Coach Hernandez. Those rallies included being down by 7 runs with only 9 outs to go, before rallying to tie the game in the bottom of the 7th inning and win it in the 8th inning; then in the State Semifinal game, as the opposing fans were lining up to storm onto the field with an apparent rare victory over Eaton just an out away, the Reds rallied from down by two runs with just one out standing between them and the end of their season, and put up 3 runs in a row to advance to the State Championship Game, which the Reds would win.

Whether these magical rallies were sparked by the Reds simply deciding they would not allow themselves to lose as Coach H. watched them from above, or whether they were sparked by the intervention of a higher power, either way, Coach H. deserves the credit for getting the most out of these Reds—God may not have time to intervene in sporting competitions, but you can be sure Coach H. would have done whatever was necessary to get His attention when the Reds were trailing by seemingly insurmountable deficits.

Coach H. certainly follows the Reds from a better place now with the same passion that he did during his lifetime. Coach Hernandez traveled throughout the spring and summer to all four corners of the state, and even to other states during the summer, to coach his beloved Reds. He was the right-hand man for Coach Danley throughout the summers, and even the winters. As Coach Danley said, "He's irreplaceable. I won't know who to call up in the middle of winter in the middle of the night to talk baseball...He was 100 percent all day, everyday Eaton Baseball. He'd call me up in the middle of November and say, 'Hey, I just got to thinking about that lineup we talked about last week. If they throw a left-handed pitcher, do we want to change hitters four and five?' We were our own Hot Stove League." Coach H. knew everything about baseball, not just about pitching and hitting, but about all of the little things that make a difference too. "He knew how to break in kids' gloves by tying them, putting them in water and putting on all the ingredients in exactly the right order and right day." The Eaton Baseball Family was blessed to have had Coach H. lead the Reds in so many ways, and for so many years, to such great successes both on and off the baseball field.

From one of the many Eaton baseball players whose life you impacted to a huge degree:

Thanks Coach H. For Your Diehard Support of Eaton Baseball and Each of Its Ballplayers, You Made a Huge Difference and are Remembered Fondly



Greeley Tribune Article

So long Coach H.

Eaton bids adieu to well-known volunteer

EATON - Martin Hernandez wore his love and passion for Eaton High School baseball to his grave.

Hernandez, who died last Friday, was buried in his Eaton Reds baseball uniform Wednesday as the entire team and coaching staff attended the funeral. When the Reds travel to Burlington for a Class 3A Patriot League doubleheader Saturday against the Cougars, a duplicate of Hernandez's No. 9 pinstriped jersey will hang in the dugout. Reds' head coach Jim Danley said the jersey will hang in the dugout for home and away games the remainder of the season as a tribute to Hernandez, who served as a Reds' volunteer pitching coach for 13 years.

"That was one thing he was very adamant about. He wanted to be buried in his uniform," said Todd Hernandez, Martin's only son who coaches and teaches at Highland High School. "He loved Eaton baseball."

Todd, a 1991 Eaton graduate, was an outstanding first baseman for the Reds. He understood exactly what his father was talking about when Martin asked to be buried in the red-and-white pinstripes.

"Coach Danley always talked about that when you put on a jersey with Eaton on the front it should mean something, and it always did for my dad," Todd said.

Reds third baseman Chris Swain said Danley told the team last Saturday that Hernandez wanted to be buried in his Eaton uniform.

"Right there our jaws dropped. It was like, 'Wow.' We realized that we've got to win for coach," Swain said. "He would always be smiling, and he'd always lighten up the mood. Our team has dedicated the season to him."

The two-time defending 3A state champion Reds also will honor Hernandez, who died of a heart attack at the age of 64 after complications from diabetes, in another way. The Eaton players will wear a white patch with black lettering spelling out Hernandez's initials (JMH for J. Martin Hernandez) on their right shoulder of their uniform.

"Growing up in the program, playing there since I was 5, having a chance to coach some of those kids who are on that team and seeing what a difference he made to all of those lives, I couldn't be prouder of my father and the man that he was and always will be," Todd said.

Danley said after the Reds won the state championship last year, the team went to Hernandez's house because he couldn't make it to Denver.

"We pulled a 60-passenger school bus up in front of his house, and we presented the trophy to him," Danley said.

Reds senior rightfielder Junior Barrios was especially close to Hernandez. He said Hernandez helped him fit in when he was a freshman and sophomore.

"He'll be with us wherever we go now. He's in a better place, and he'll be watching over us," said Barrios, the younger brother of former Reds standout Mike Carrasco. "He was always there to make us smile."

Carrasco, a 1999 Eaton graduate and starting third baseman for the University of Northern Colorado, said Hernandez was the guy the players could go to if they had to talk about something.

"Coach Hernandez was an outlet for us who we could go to and converse about life and girls," Carrasco said. "He was always there to lean on. He was a mentor for us all. He's one of the big reasons why Eaton baseball's on the map."

Reds senior left-handed pitcher Eric Kelly said Hernandez was one of the biggest influences in baseball that he's had.

"There was a good vibe around him. No matter what happened, he was always happy," Kelly said. "The only way I could ever picture him was with the biggest smile, especially when we were out on the baseball field."

Danley said the loss of Hernandez, who also assisted Danley with Eaton's Legion B summer program, will be hard to take because Hernandez was so much a part of Eaton's success.

"He was 100 percent all day, everyday Eaton baseball. He'd call me up in the middle of November and say, 'Hey, I just got to thinking about that lineup we talked about last week. If they throw a left-handed pitcher, do we want to change hitters four and five?' We were our own Hot Stove League," Danley said. "He knew how to break in kids gloves by tying them, putting them in water and putting on all the ingredients in exactly the right order and right day."

Hernandez suffered from diabetes for the last 26 years and had his right leg amputated in January 2002. Todd said his father's kidneys were failing him, his eyesight was going and he had congestive heart failure the last two years.

Hernandez was a standout pitcher for Greeley High School when the program won the state title in 1957 under head coach Pete D'Amato, and he also pitched for the semi-pro Greeley Grays.

The last time Hernandez sat in the Eaton dugout for a game was at the regional championship game against University at Butch Butler Field last May. Having the No. 9 jersey hanging in the Eaton dugout will be special for Todd.

"Not being able to go out there and be with the kids and experience the game bothered him," Todd said. "Now I'd like to think he has a front-row seat being able to watch them play."

Danley knows his former coaching friend will have the best seat in the house.

"I spent thousands and thousands of hours with him the last few years. He was the greatest supporter Eaton baseball ever had. He was a gentle, kind and warm-hearted fellow who I can't imagine had an enemy in the world," Danley said. "He's irreplaceable. I won't know who to call up in the middle of winter in the middle of the night to talk baseball."

Haircut out of respect

EATON - Not too many adults can get through to a teenager when it comes to their hair.

Count Martin Hernandez, the former Eaton Reds pitching coach who died a week ago, as one who could. Reds senior left-handed pitcher Eric Kelly, 18, recalls the last time he talked to Hernandez, and it had nothing to do about pitching.

"I remember the last thing he ever told me was to cut my hair because I had really long hair," Kelly said. "I'd grown it out since the beginning of school and it was really long at the end of basketball season."

Kelly said Hernandez told him he didn't like long hair. "He said, 'Make sure you go to the mall and get your haircut.' I went the next day and got it cut for him," Kelly said. "I didn't want to cut it, but I had to do it for coach."

Obituary

J. Martin Hernandez

J. Martin Hernandez, 64, of Eaton died Friday, April 18, 2003, at Kenton Manor, Greeley.

He was born Nov. 8, 1938, in Oshkosh, Neb., to Martin and Lucy (Trujillo) Hernandez.

On Nov. 27, 1965, he married Virginia Mirelez at Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church in Greeley. She died Dec. 13, 1997.

Mr. Hernandez moved to Greeley with his family at the age of 2. He graduated from Greeley High School in 1958. In 1973, he and his wife moved to Eaton where they raised their three children.

An avid sports fan, especially of baseball, Mr. Hernandez was the pitcher on the Greeley High baseball team that won the state championship in 1957. He pitched for the semi-pro Greeley Grays baseball team. He was an assistant coach for the Eaton High School Reds, coaching the pitchers for 13 years, and also coached American Legion baseball for them. He was honored for his dedication to the Eaton baseball team by throwing the opening pitch at a Colorado Rockies game on July 27, 1998.

Mr. Hernandez worked at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal before going to work for Monfort of Colorado, where he worked for 20 years before retiring because of his health. He was a member of Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church before joining St. Peter's Catholic Church in Greeley.

Survivors are two daughters, Michelle Hernandez of Evans and her fiance, Lyle Adler, and Margaret Hernandez of Eaton; a son, Todd Hernandez and his wife, Lisa, of Eaton; three brothers, Louis Hernandez, Robert Hernandez and Pete Hernandez, all of Denver; a grandson, Mason Todd Hernandez of Eaton; and many nieces and nephews. His parents, a sister, Francis Martinez, and two brothers, Joe Hernandez and Jim Hernandez, are deceased.

Recitation of the rosary will be at 7 p.m. Tuesday St. Peter's Catholic Church, Greeley. Mass of Christian Burial will be at 10 a.m. Wednesday, also at St. Peter's. Interment will be in the Eaton Cemetery.

Friends may visit from 2-5 p.m. Tuesday at Adamson Memorial West Chapel.