

DUSTY DOMINGUEZ – 2004 GRADUATE – EATON REDS

THIS IS EATON BASEBALL

Of the very few men that ever achieve overwhelming success, nearly all fall victim at some point to complacency, as the fire inside them ultimately dampens, after having accomplished more than one could have ever reasonably dreamed. Once success has been clearly achieved, few yearn for more, and very few simply have to have more—one more season, one more championship.

John Elway kept the fire in him to go win a Super Bowl after numerous failures in previous seasons. He then took the very unusual step for a player already past retirement age to go back once more, to go win one more Super Bowl...and he did just that. These championships removed any doubt of Elway's Hall of Fame status, and moved him into a conversation of possibly being the greatest quarterback in NFL history. This all was accomplished by a player who had seen defeat throughout his career and kept coming back to prove that he was a champion. We will never know how Reds' 2004 graduate would have handled defeat and how strongly he would have come back from it...as Dusty simply won the final game of every season that he ever played. His legacy amongst Eaton greats was cemented as only a sophomore, but the fire inside Dominguez drove him into never settling for anything other than first place, and along the way, Dominguez proved to become the greatest pitcher in Eaton history when the Reds' backs were to the wall.

In 2002, the Reds were down 5-2 in the first inning of a must-win Regional Championship Game against University. The Reds had won Regionals every year for the past decade, but all win streaks must end at some point, and this appeared to be the end of the line. Then sophomore Dusty Dominguez entered the game in relief and got the Reds out of the jam. Over the course of the next 6 innings, Dominguez allowed just one run, as the Reds came back to win 11-6 and advance yet again to the State Semifinals. During that next game, Dominguez again entered in relief, this time in the 4th inning, as the Reds had given away most of an early 4-0 lead before Dominguez came in again to shut down his opponent and maintain a one-run lead. Dominguez was then perfect the rest of the way, retiring the side in order in the 5th, 6th and 7th innings to lead the Reds to the State Championship Game, which the Reds won handily the following day. One season with Dominguez on the mound, one State Championship.

That summer, Dominguez started the pivotal 2nd game of the District Tournaments, where a win would guarantee the Reds a spot in the State Tournament the following week. Dominguez simply threw a one-hitter to lead the Reds to a 2-1 victory over Greeley Central. In the first round of the State Tournament, Dominguez again faced Greeley Central, and again allowed only one run until the Reds scored 10 runs in the 4th inning to put the game away via the mercy rule. Then two games later, Dominguez took the mound against Canon City and threw a no-hitter through 6 innings, facing the minimum of 18 batters. Coach Danley took the rare step of removing a pitcher throwing a no-hitter after the Reds scored enough late to take control of the game. Dominguez though understood that this game was over with and the Reds wanted to have Dominguez as rested as possible in case they would need him again in the State Championship "If" Game. It turned out that Dominguez's bat made that scenario unnecessary, as his 2-run double in the State Championship Game gave the Reds an early 7-1 lead, and while he warmed up between innings just in case, the Reds rolled to winning this State Championship without needing to put a tired Dominguez back on the mound. It would be the last time the Reds ever had such a luxury during Dominguez's career. Two seasons, two State Championships.

In the spring of 2003, facing a low-seed in the first round of the State Tournament, the Reds fell behind 8-1 and then 11-4 before Dominguez took the mound in the 6th inning. Scheduled to start the following day, Dominguez instead had to end the damage and save the Reds' season, which he did by striking out a batter on just three pitches with the bases loaded to prevent the Reds from being at risk of being 10-runned. Despite trailing by 7 runs with just six outs left in the season, the Reds stormed back to tie the game in the bottom of the 7th inning following another scoreless inning by

Dominguez. Dominguez then struck out the final two batters of the 8th inning to maintain the 11-11 score, before the Reds won it in walk-off fashion in the bottom of the 8th inning. The following week in the State Championship Game, Dominguez again entered in relief early on to maintain a 6-4 lead before the Reds went on to take a commanding 14-4 lead en route to the Reds' third straight State Championship. Three seasons, three State Championships.

A weird sense of calmness can occur when a highly successful and confident team finds themselves trailing, even if by a nearly insurmountable score and even if it is late in a ballgame...instead of thinking about the myriad of ways that a game can be won or lost when it starts, or to prevent the multiple ways in which you can lose once you have a lead, instead the focus turns to one singular path, which is the only possible way to come back to win a game in which you're trailing heavily. There are just two things that have to happen to win such a game: 1) your pitcher must simply dominate to not allow another run, and 2) every single batter must find a way to reach base, whether by single, walk, hit-by-pitch, etc. The only outs on offense the rest of the way are going to be on line drives that happen to be right at someone. It's just that simple at that point—it is the only path to victory. Dominguez throughout his entire career single-handedly took care of the first step, which allowed the rest of the team to focus on the 2nd step and have the confidence to know that not only could this comeback happen, with Dominguez on the mound, this comeback simply was going to happen. Dominguez not only pitched with a pride and a purpose that intimidated other batters into thinking they would fail against him, he did so even when the Reds were trailing in a way that intimidated opponents into thinking that this guy still thinks he can win this game and his whole team is rallying around him to do just that. Now that's intimidating.

In the summer of 2003, the Reds were in a must-win State Tournament game against Arapahoe, when Dominguez again came in to shut down his opponent to maintain a 1-run lead by throwing two perfect innings to earn the save after Dominguez had already led the Reds at the plate going 4-for-4. Having to beat Evergreen twice in a row to win State, Dominguez took over with a one-run lead in the 5th inning and turned it into a 4-run win. The following day, with the State Championship on the line, Dominguez took over in the 3rd inning in a tie game and went on to earn a one-run victory, after knocking in a couple runs of his own at the plate, and induced a groundout with the would-be winning run at the plate to earn yet another State Title, and another State Tournament MVP Award, on the mound. Four seasons, four State Championships.

Complacency is always a concern, especially when it appears that a team cannot be beaten with their big dog on the mound. While clearly being Eaton's "big dog", Dominguez though was typically shorter and weighed less than opposing pitchers. He wasn't physically intimidating, but one could see in his eyes that he wanted it, and he would stop at little to get it. Every game was a war and every pitch was a one-on-one battle. In the spring of 2004 though, a week after having thrown the only perfect game in Reds' history in his last appearance on Eaton's home field, the Reds suffered a rare postseason loss, albeit in a meaningless district tournament championship as both Eaton and their opponent, Valley, had already qualified for the State Tournament the following week. Following this loss though, as many of the Reds put their heads down and walked out of the dugout, Dominguez affixed his eyes on the Valley players jumping up and down on home plate chanting their school's name. If there had been any concern about complacency before that moment, all was eliminated as Dominguez simply stated to Coach Danley: "Get me those (guys) again."

The following week, the Reds would face Valley again, but not until after Dominguez had to take the mound trailing 2-0 against Machebeuf in the 3rd inning and hold on for a 3-2 comeback win after striking out 8 and having to throw out the potential go-ahead run on a suicide squeeze attempt. After trailing most of the game to Valley, despite a game-tying triple by Dominguez in the 3rd inning, the Reds took the lead in the 6th inning as Dominguez got warmed up to finish off Valley. Dominguez took the mound in the 7th inning, and did just that, striking out the final batter to advance again to the State Final Four.

The following weekend, Dominguez took the mound against Faith Christian while holding onto a one-run lead in the 6th inning. Despite an Eaton error allowing the game to be tied up, Dominguez then ended the 7th inning and sent the game into extra innings. For the 2nd straight week, the opposing coach decided his best way to try to score against Dominguez

was with a steal of home, but Dominguez again handled the pressure perfectly and ensured the batter had to duck the pitch to allow for a successful tag at the plate, before the Reds went on to win again in walk-off fashion.

In the State Championship Game against La Junta, Dominguez again took the mound in the 3rd inning holding onto a one-run lead. Dominguez allowed just one run the rest of the way, as the Reds added runs to never trail or even be tied in this game. In the 7th inning of the game, with Dominguez holding onto a commanding 3-run lead, the leadoff batter for La Junta tapped out to Dominguez who then made a routine throw to first base for the first out of the inning. During the play though, La Junta's batter ran well inside the line and threw an elbow to dislocate the Reds' first baseman's elbow, though Shane Dyer held onto the ball to record the out. It was the second straight game in which the Reds had had such an incident at first base, though in the previous game the umpire threw the runner out of the game and all settled down. In this case, La Junta's players chose to mock the downed Red. Any opponent's scouting report would have indicated that with Dominguez, much as was said about Ty Cobb, "Let him sleep if he will, if you get him riled up, he will annihilate us." La Junta must have skipped the scouting report though, and after having heard enough from the La Junta players and fans, Dominguez removed his glove to hold up six fingers, and state: "six pitches, just six", indicating the remaining amount of time left in La Junta's season. As always, Dominguez delivered, first with a first-pitch tap out that he fielded himself, and then with a 3-pitch strikeout to end the game, and one of the most amazing careers in the history of high school baseball. No one comes through every time, and no one knows what it's like to win the last game of every season ever played...well no one except for the Reds' Dusty Dominguez. Five seasons, five State Championships.

Dominguez's write-up as one of the greatest Reds of all-time—clearly a player that would be on the Mount Rushmore of Eaton Baseball pitchers—had to be chronicled in detail, as frankly for those who didn't witness it firsthand, couldn't believe a short summary of his career; one would have to think there were omissions and times of strife and defeat that were glossed over—however that's simply not the case. The fire inside Dominguez burned strong from his first day in Pinstripes all the way through the last pitch of his career. He had a clear purpose, an unequalled will to win, a fire inside him to make sure no one ever could say they got the best of him. Not even once. In big games, Dominguez never lost.

