

SHANE DYER – 2006 GRADUATE – EATON REDS

THIS IS EATON BASEBALL

Shane Dyer was born a gifted player. There was zero question of that when after T-Ball practice as an 8 year-old he routinely headed over to the 11-12 year Eaton all-star team's practices and fit right in as one of the best players on that team, taking ground balls, shagging throws, and doing anything he could to learn to play as well as they did. Technically he wasn't on that 12 year-old team's roster, but in his heart, and in the minds of all those top players that would go on to win State Championship after State Championship when they got older, he certainly was one of the guys. That was true as well with how Shane spent his evenings in those summers as a youth, as the batboy for the varsity team which was in the midst of winning multiple State Championships at the time. Shane experienced being under the bright lights as only a kid, playing catch with the varsity leftfielder in between innings during those 8pm varsity games played by legends like Carrasco, Meyers, Smith and Loftis. They were the best group the Reds had ever put on the ballfield, and Dyer dreamed of playing as well as them one day. When the Reds went undefeated in 1998 and won the State Championship, Shane Dyer leapt to the top of the dogpile in images that have been forever memorialized throughout the town of Eaton, displayed proudly at the local bar and grill and in local, state and national publications.

The gift of talent though isn't what sends people on to greatness. It's simply a requisite to fill one of the suitcases that one carries with them along their path to success; the other suitcase, the more important one, is filled by the greats with a tremendous work ethic. That's something Shane learned at an early age and has carried with him from the outfield grass in Eaton where he once played T-ball all the way up to the minor league ballfields in which he now competes at the AA level, only two steps away from fulfilling a childhood dream of playing Major League Baseball.

During those days as a batboy, Dyer was learning what it took to compete, as those varsity Reds were frankly the mentally toughest group in Eaton history. He also watched the Reds throw their patented knuckle curveball, and while his fingers were too short to throw a baseball the same way that Carrasco, Loftis and Souther did, he found a way he could grip a tennis ball and throw it with the required overspin. He threw that tennis ball against a wall for hours at a time until he could get it to spin over the top like the varsity guys did with baseballs. He warmed up with the varsity guys, he played knuckle curve catch with them before games, he took ground balls with them after games that had ended at 11pm. He hadn't even reached his 10th birthday yet, and was putting in all his mental and physical might into catching the full-speed throws made by the best combination of infielders the Reds had ever put on the field in Carrasco and Meyers, and he did this under the lights, often around midnight and sometimes later. And then he awoke early the next morning to go compete against his classmates in morning league games, where he of course was dominant. But that wasn't good enough, being the best in his class was never good enough. He wanted to be as good as the star 12 year-olds like Trujillo and Swain and Garretson, so he played amongst them too. After spending a few hours at the 12 year-olds game or practice, Dyer stopped by his house, only a few blocks from the field, and put on his Eaton pinstripes to go represent the varsity team, technically as a batboy, but more realistically as simply one of the guys.

After completing one of the best youth careers in the history of the Reds' program, Dyer went into high school immediately moving up the ranks to the varsity team. Now he was the one playing those 8pm games under the bright lights. That wasn't good enough though, as he knew he wasn't as good as his heroes yet. He threw the knuckle curve anytime he could. He ran at night around his neighborhood to get in shape, to get stronger, to get better. He lifted weights in the offseason following the Atlanta Braves' pitchers workouts daily to improve his velocity. As only a sophomore he threw his first no-hitter at the varsity level, a feat he would later repeat. He won the key games of the 2003 Legion B State Tournament to earn another State Championship. He caught the first out of the 7th inning of the 2004 State Championship, holding onto the ball despite having the opponent dislocate his elbow in the collision.

Dyer was a major component of the Reds' most historic feat in history, winning 33 consecutive spring and summer games in the face of elimination. That streak will be remembered most for the likes of '04 graduate Dominguez and '05 graduate Noblitt, as Dyer was still the younger kid playing his role on those teams led by other greats. But after the graduation of some of the best players in Reds' history, which had led the Reds to spring State Titles in 2001-2004 and summer state titles in 2002-2004, many believed, or at least wanted to think, that the Reds' magical run was over with, and the Reds would have to return to normalcy heading into the 2006 season, Dyer's final year in Reds' pinstripes.

That wasn't the case though, as Dyer led the Reds to the final day of the Legion State Tournament with a supporting cast of mainly first-year starters in the summer of '05. During his senior year, Dyer nearly single-handedly won the Reds the Regional Championship in arguably the most dominant pitching performance in State Tournament history. Facing a tough opponent, the Reds mustered only one run on offense, but that would be enough, as Dyer's velocity increased throughout the game as adrenalin kicked in and his fastball reached 92 mph. His knuckle curve was thrown in the low to mid 80's, the normal speed for a high school fastball, but this pitch simply dropped from a batter's knee height into the dirt at the last split-second. So dominant was Dyer, that he accomplished something that seems impossible, but he struck out the opponent's #3 and #4 hitters (one an All-State candidate), on just three pitches alone—the remarkable part of this is that they both opted with two strikes to attempt a bunt just to put him in play. They failed.

Dyer went on to be drafted following his senior year, but opted instead to accept a major scholarship at the University of New Mexico. He worked hard all summer to get ready for the tougher physical conditioning he would face in college, and he pitched for New Mexico against a number of top Division I schools as only a freshmen. With professional baseball right in front of him, he transferred to the South Mountain Cougars outside of Phoenix for his sophomore year, after completing a strong summer season in the prestigious Northwoods League. He immediately became South Mountain's ace pitcher and was the #1 recruit for the University of Nebraska for the following year. Dyer though had to turn down that offer after being the first selection of the 6th round in the 2008 Major League Draft, selected by the Tampa Bay Rays.

While other top draft picks like Dyer were holding out to negotiate over the last few dollars of their signing bonus, Dyer got the entire process over within a couple of days, stating matter-of-factly, "Sir, I know the slot values and I know I'm leaving a few dollars on the table, but I want to join your organization and be on the mound for you next week." His attitude was rewarded as the Rays had him skip Rookie Ball and move straight to their A franchise in Hudson Valley as a part of the starting rotation. Dyer pitched great there and was rewarded during the 2009 Spring Training by moving up a level to their full-season A team in Bowling Green. There, he continued to impress, and was invited to work out in California before the 2010 Spring Training. He jumped at the chance, while costing him some money and time away from friends and family, it was simply something that needed to be done to advance his career. He again was rewarded and moved up to the High-A team in Charlotte. Again, the same occurred in 2011, a few weeks in California to prepare for spring training, and then additional hard work throughout the season to move up to the Double-A team in Montgomery, followed by an invitation to the Arizona Fall League. He again did this in 2012, and in the middle of the season was called up to Triple-A Durham, only one step away from reaching his childhood dream.

In a brief interview before this article was written, all that Dyer would talk about was Carrasco and Meyers, Souther and Swain, Dominguez and Noblitt. He didn't want the article written about him, unless it could be used to help push some other young Eaton kid out there reading the story to work that much harder, to dream of being as good as the current varsity stars. Dyer recently spoke to the entire Eaton Middle School about dreams, goals, and work ethic. He helps coach the Reds in the fall season and winter workouts. He spent two entire days pushing snow off the field a couple falls ago just to get the field ready for the Reds to go win the Fall Championship. Dyer of course became every bit as good as his childhood heroes, and now through exceptional hard work has gone further than any Eaton Red in history in professional baseball. But he still dreams of more. The Eaton Baseball website will forever have just one motto of Dyer's on its youth pages: Dream Big, Work Hard.

