

Year Posted: 2007



Michael McKay (center, looking to the right) celebrates with teammates as Reds qualify for their first State Championship Game in history

FORMER RED ENSHRINED IN ENTREPRENEURIAL HALL OF FAME

1983 Reds' Graduate Michael McKay Starts Sports Merchandising Firm that Earns Him Top Honor as Entrepreneur of the Year for Southwest United States

One of the top hitters in Eaton history becomes one of the top entrepreneurs in American history; yeah, that probably qualifies a guy as a Red of the Month. For this month, the Reds are proud to honor as Red of the Month Michael McKay, who was one of Eaton's finest players of all-time.

For Mike McKay, great success was something that he first experienced on the baseball field at Eaton. Growing up as one of the first kids to participate in the Reds' summer baseball program in the 1970's, McKay looked up to the older kids on the varsity team. The Reds were good then, but only good, not great. The Reds had never made it to the State Championship Game, and some years didn't even come very close to it. McKay wouldn't allow his career to be like that of the players that preceded him, as he was going to take the Reds to the next level.

After not making the starting lineup as a freshman, McKay went to work. And work he did, spending literally hundreds of hours more than nearly everyone else on the team in taking ground balls, and hitting in the batting cage. Hard work pays off, and for Mike McKay, baseball would represent the first of multiple such experiences of great effort leading to great success.

By the time McKay stepped into the high school starting lineup as only a sophomore, he quickly became one of the Reds' top hitters. In games where a big hit was needed, McKay was the bat that you wanted to see come to the plate. With two outs and a 1-0 lead in the first inning of a pivotal game against then-perennial state contender Valley, McKay stepped to the plate and singled on the first pitch to him to knock in 2 runs and effectively put the game out of reach with a 3-0 lead that was more than enough for the Reds' pitching staff to secure the win. Against a top pitcher that would go on to play professionally, McKay prevented a runner from advancing to third base in a 0-0 State Quarterfinal game with one of the most perfect, and quickest, throws to third base to end a scoring threat. The Reds would go on to win that game and advance to the State Semifinals.

During that sophomore year, McKay failed to scoop a throw out of the dirt from one of his infielders at a game in Estes Park. The game was well in hand by that point, as the Reds had a commanding lead and went on to win the game easily. Being a perfectionist though, the fact that he allowed a baseball to get past him seriously bothered McKay, including throughout the entire bus trip back down the mountains. As the other players got home and went on about their afternoons following another Eaton victory, Mike McKay called over his younger brother to throw short hops at him. When the coaching staff came back to Eaton's field at dusk that day, they saw Mike McKay still out there taking short hops; he must have fielded hundreds of short hops during that afternoon. Failure simply wasn't acceptable, and certainly nothing to be tolerated, ever.

McKay had a superior year at the plate and in the field as a junior in 1982, but the Reds failed to advance to the State Tournament for what would become the only time in now 30 years. This defeat was not acceptable to McKay and his teammates, and McKay took it upon himself to lead the Reds back to the Final Four as a senior.

In the State Quarterfinals, McKay went to the plate in the fourth inning with the game still tied 0-0. He singled, and then following a single by his younger brother Pat, he scored on the next single to bring home the only run scored that day by either team. In the State Semifinal game the following weekend, the Reds trailed 7-4, when McKay singled to spark a rally that would cut the deficit to 7-6 after 5 innings. Then after taking the lead going into the 7th inning, the Reds were one out away from advancing to the State Championship Game, but had their opponent's top hitters coming to the plate in a wild 12-9 game with a runner already on base. McKay was cunning, and he realized that the runner at first base was paying too little attention to the pitcher, assuming a pickoff throw wouldn't be coming in this situation. McKay coolly got the attention of the Reds' pitcher to signal for a pickoff, and timed the play perfectly to record the final out of the game and send the Reds to their first ever State Championship Game.

McKay left Eaton as one of the Reds' top hitters and fielders of all-time, and remains to this day one of the truly elite players to ever wear the pinstripes. After high school, he attended the University of Nebraska, wanting to live out his dream to be a football player at Nebraska. He had no scholarship to play there, and had to fight to even get a chance to walk-on. He made it into a group of 120 players that were given such a rare opportunity, and he employed the same tenacity that he had exhibited in all other aspects of his life thus far to become one of the 12 players that made the team as a walk-on. He worked his way through college, finding ways to make things work despite his father's recent bankruptcy filing. McKay would routinely take a duffel bag into a pizza buffet to load up on food for the week. There was nothing that said one couldn't do that, and it allowed him to survive, and thrive, in college. He also learned a little about finance and real estate while at Nebraska, earning top honors in those fields. He was quickly employed by Anderson Consulting, and within a very short period of time, put himself in line to make partner at the firm.

McKay decided though to start his own business. One to always capitalize on opportunities – whether it be a runner with too large of a lead off of first base, a walk-on tryout at Nebraska, or a pizza buffet without sufficient rules – McKay had a chance encounter with the son of Dallas Cowboys' owner Jerry Jones. At the time, the Cowboys' annual on-line merchandise sales were a mere \$124,000 but Mike was able to convince the Joneses that his firm (which at the time had fewer employees than the Eaton High School baseball team had players; Mike may have glossed over that fact during the conversation) could boost their sales tremendously, and when given an opportunity to succeed, McKay did just that, quickly boosting the Cowboys' online sales to \$2 million. McKay's company now supplies products and manages sales for a third of all NFL teams. *The full article, as printed in the Dallas Business Journal, is shown later in this article.*

McKay has propelled his company, eSports Partners, from literally a two-car garage startup, to now employing more than 300 people and generating over \$30 million in annual revenue. This truly American story of success led Mike to be nominated for Entrepreneur of the Year in the southwest region of the country by global consulting leader Ernst & Young. Previous winners from this area included the founder of Southwest Airlines, the founder of Dell Computers, top businessman and former presidential candidate Ross Perot, the current Dallas Mavericks owner, and many other nationally and internationally known entrepreneurs. So what's a guy from a one-stoplight town in rural Colorado doing in this group? McKay probably wasn't sure either, but he didn't care, as his story of success was such that it earned him the top award, sending him to a black tie event hosted by comedian Jay Leno in which McKay was inducted into the Ernst & Young Entrepreneurial Hall of Fame.

If such an accomplishment seems impossible for a kid who grew up in small-town Eaton, Colorado, then: i) you haven't been following other Reds of the Month noted on the website, and ii) you don't know Mike McKay.

Click below to see E&Y's Hall of Fame Entrepreneurs, type in McKay under member last name
<http://eoyhof.ey.com/SearchHallofFame.aspx>

Mike never let his own personal success get to his head when he was a player at Eaton High School. Admired tremendously by all of the younger players who wanted to one day grow up to play like him, he went out of his way to coach summer baseball teams at Eaton and instill his sense of pride and dogged determination. The young man that Mike was while at Eaton rubbed off on the younger players, and Mike in fact personally coached nearly all of the players that would go on to win the State Championship in 1994. The man that Michael McKay has become since that time, serves as a remarkable example of what one can make of themselves, simply through hard work and capitalizing on opportunities that arise.

On a quick trip to Colorado last summer, Mr. McKay made time in his busy schedule to spend considerable time talking to the current Eaton Reds team.



Michael McKay
Ernst & Young Entrepreneurial Hall of Fame Inductee

From one of the many Reds that you coached and served as a friend and mentor:

***Congratulations Mike on All of Your Success, and
Thank You for All that You Have Done For Eaton Baseball***





ERNST & YOUNG
Entrepreneur of the Year
Awards 2007
Southwest Area

RETAIL/HOSPITALITY/CONSUMER PRODUCTS

MICHAEL MCKAY

Title: Founder and CEO

Company: eSports Partners

Business: Sports Merchandising

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When Michael McKay left for the University of Nebraska, he did so with his father's warmest wishes and the news that his dad was declaring bankruptcy.

There was no telling that one day McKay would be standing on top of a sports-merchandising company that would supply products and manage sales for a third of all NFL teams, employ 300 people and generate more than \$30 million in revenue.

But first, he had to survive college and early career incarnations that would bring him to that point.

McKay worked his way through college, taking a duffel bag into a pizza buffet once a week to load up on food. He fought his way onto the Huskers football squad—one of 12 athletes to beat 120 other competitors vying for a walk-on position.

His finance degree and real estate minor helped him land a job at Anderson Consulting. Though he was in line to become a partner, McKay spun off and started his own business in London with several other entrepreneurs. Eighteen months later, it was generating \$22 million in sales.

A chance meeting in the United States with Stephen Jones (Jerry Jones' son) resulted in the pair discussing sports merchandising. McKay later met with the Joneses for four hours, after which they tried to hire him on the spot. McKay could relate to having a sports-rich bloodline—his dad was a major-league pitcher.

Still, McKay was determined to remain independent—though he took on the Joneses as his first customers.

McKay's internet launch quickly boosted the Cowboys' annual merchandise sales from \$124,000 to \$2 million.

As the number of teams represented by eSports Partners has grown, so have the numbers and services. Since its inception, eSports has outlasted eight rivals, offering catalog sales, Internet sales, on-site retail and merchandise sold at retail outlets during game days.

The general public wouldn't have a clue as to eSports' success. Its business location is nondescript, with no signage at its Coppel corporate office.

Its Web site is practically generic, offering logos of only the NCAA, the NFL and the "Collegiate Licensed Product" symbol. McKay sees eSports' job as primarily promoting his clients, and not eSports.

The company continues to gain sports organizations as clients—primarily NFL and college teams. Next on eSports Partners radar screen is NASCAR, one of the most popular spectator sports in the United States. The NBA and Major League Baseball are also reaching out to pair with eSports.

While online sales are strong, much of eSports Partners' business is done the day of the game in traditional retail fashion. And with traditional retail comes the danger of high employee turnover. eSports combats that by offering full health insurance, a 401(k), bonuses and customer-service training. At upper-management, McKay has surrounded himself with aggressive MBAs. At all levels, he has seen few employees leave.

eSports leaders are involved with several charities, including the Susan B. Komen For the Cure and the Pat Tillman foundations. The company also holds a Huddle Up, a multi-day session where eSports field representatives from across the country come and talk about how the company can support them and make their work life easier and more fulfilling.

McKay says the company's humble beginnings has helped keep it on track.

"Because of our two-car garage start-up, we've had the pressure to make sure that our decisions are correct," he says. "It has enhanced our mandate to make the right decisions, and has made me personally appreciate the accomplishments our company has realized so far."

www.EatonBaseball.com Note: Mike McKay was a standout athlete at Eaton High School and one of the premier first-basemen and hitters in Eaton Baseball history, leading the Reds to numerous championships in the early 1980's. Congratulations on all of your success Mike!