

JOSH NOBLITT – 2005 GRADUATE – EATON REDS

THIS IS EATON BASEBALL

If the Reds had a Mount Rushmore carved with the faces of their greatest players, it's hard to imagine anyone objecting to Josh Noblitt as being a part of that group of four legends. Winning six straight spring and summer state titles doesn't exactly hurt his case. Being the shortstop, closer, and #3 hitter during a run of 33 consecutive playoff games that the Reds won against the top teams in the state while staring in the face of season-ending elimination isn't just historic, or legendary, it's frankly impossible. And yet it happened. It happened because Josh Noblitt simply determined it was going to happen, and he led his teammates to accomplish something completely unfathomable. The odds of winning 33 straight coin flips are 1 in 8.5 billion, as too should be the odds of winning 33 straight games against the top teams in the state, most of whom have saved back their ace pitcher to face the Reds. But no statistician could ever convince Josh Noblitt that something wasn't possible. Neither could anyone else.

Born with a club foot, doctors told his parents at just 6 days of age that their son wasn't normal and they couldn't make him normal. Those doctors were ignored by the Noblitt family, and new doctors then tried the first of multiple surgeries to fix his foot. Those doctors said Josh was handicapped and would never be able to run or participate in sports, and that they had done all that they could do. A dozen doctors and a dozen braces and casts later, the doctors always had the same message to set realistic expectations for Josh and his family: you can't do most things other kids can do. It's fair to say a dozen doctors can't all be wrong, but in this case, all dozen doctors didn't realize the exceptional willpower that Josh Noblitt had to prove them all wrong. This was that one kid in a few million that simply could will his body to endure whatever pain was necessary to accomplish the remarkable.

There are those that want to lower expectations and just hope for the best after the bar has been dropped to a reasonable expectation—the Noblitt family was the complete opposite of that. Josh entered Eaton's T-Ball program as a 7 year-old without any of the coaches, and hardly any of the parents, knowing about Josh's foot. His foot was quietly taped before each game to try to mitigate the pain, and then Josh would go out and take the field and play as hard and as well as any of the older kids he was playing against.

It was only looking back, years later after learning of his club foot, that his youth coaches remembered seeing his face grimace with pain from time to time, but when questioned, Josh's answer had always been something like "yeah I got stepped on a couple games ago, but it's fine." He was never stepped on, literally or figuratively, as Josh was a star player at the age of 7, and the very best player on the 9 year-old team a year later despite being more than a year younger than the other Reds. Given his talent, the Reds' T-Ball coaches let him play any position he wanted, so a safe choice might have been third base to limit his movement, but Josh always insisted on playing shortstop.

One has to recall that in T-Ball, the top kids drive the ball into the outfield nearly every time up, and thus while Josh was officially called the shortstop, whenever a good player on the other team got up, Josh headed to left-centerfield...then the batter adjusted to move around to square up to hit it to right-centerfield, only to then have the ball caught out there, sometimes in deep rightfield, by Noblitt who had seen the kid change his stance and moved accordingly during the swing. Parents complained about why the coaches didn't make him stay in one spot rather than run all over the field, but the Reds saw a future great player taking charge out there at the age of 8 and weren't going to stand in his way.

Actually, Josh never let anyone or anything stand in his way.

"One of the greatest things in life, I think, is to prove someone wrong", Josh Noblitt, in a media interview.

By the time Josh was older, he let Coach Danley know about his foot, as he was after all his middle school basketball coach as well. Coach Danley taped his foot before each game, but did it out of the sight of the opponents as no one was going to let anyone know that Noblitt had any potential weakness, any kryptonite. Coach Danley pulled him out of basketball games after the Reds took a commanding lead, which occurred often as they never lost a single game, to allow him to rest for the following game. While this didn't sit well with Noblitt, he understood, he just didn't have to like it. During the heat of battle though, there were no restrictions and Noblitt was key to the run-and-gun full-court press defense the Reds employed in those basketball games.

As he moved into high school, he immediately became a varsity starter on the baseball team, and immediately became one of the top players in the state. The pain in his foot and ankle was ever-present, but it just didn't matter, winning was all that mattered to Josh.

One could say that it was a good thing that a competitive kid like Josh who couldn't stand losing was fortunate enough to play on a Reds' team that simply won every big game, but that wouldn't be accurate. The Reds were the fortunate ones that witnessed Josh Noblitt leading them to wins in every big game. 33 straight big games in which the winner went on and the loser went home, and 33 straight wins for the Reds in those games, thanks in large part to Mr. Noblitt.

The dozens of times that Noblitt had the game-tying or game-winning hit, or game-saving play at shortstop, or took the mound to end any opponents' scoring threat are chronicled elsewhere on this website, but they are so numerous it would appear as if we're trying to describe the accolades of a handful of great players. But, no, they are the singular accomplishments of one truly great player regardless of circumstance, and yet given the circumstances he had to overcome to even compete in sports let alone to compete at its highest levels, and to be the top player on a team that enjoyed such unparalleled success, now that is truly remarkable.

Even after earning literally more than a handful of State Championship Rings and numerous honors including 1st Team All-State as an underclassman, Noblitt then had to go back to the doctors for one more surgery on his foot. Coming out of that surgery, the doctors told him there was no way that he would be able to compete at the collegiate level. They still hadn't learned of Josh's willpower and ability to endure pain, and these doctors would again be proven wrong, as after a season for the Reds in which he led the team in every key statistic, and earned a spot from the Colorado Rockies in the Top 50 Game at Coors Field, Josh also earned a full-ride scholarship to do exactly what they said was impossible, to play at the college level. Noblitt didn't just play college ball, he was a star player at that level as well. He simply wouldn't allow himself to be anything less than the very best, and was there to battle and to win, every single time; there was never any question in the minds of Josh's teammates, nor his unfortunate opponents, that Josh was the very best, and that he knew exactly what it took to win, and would do anything to make sure that was the end result. Pain is fleeting, victory is forever. The tales of Josh Noblitt also live on into eternity in the Eaton baseball dugout, as many current Reds' players were too young to have seen him play, but all have heard about this legendary competitor. The doctors and the naysayers were right with their diagnosis when describing 999,999 kids out of a million, but Josh doesn't care about odds like that against him, he bested odds of 1 in 8.5 billion to win 33 straight battles, and likely similar odds in defying over a dozen doctors to become arguably the greatest all-around player in Reds' history.

