

KYLE OTTOSON – 2008 GRADUATE – EATON REDS

THIS IS EATON BASEBALL

Presence is one of the rarest of traits in people, as it requires an ability to both be down in the trenches fighting tooth and nail, while simultaneously also being able to psychologically remove yourself from the details below and rise above to look at the bigger picture, as if you have temporarily left your body and risen toward the clouds to look down below at the battle that ensues. To simultaneously have the awareness of both the ant and the eagle is a gift that's probably bestowed upon no one, but instead an ability which is accomplished by a very, very select few. Reds' 2008 graduate Kyle Ottoson is a member of this rare breed of competitor.

As only an 8th grader, Ottoson was thrust into a nearly impossible situation, taking the mound as the starting pitcher against the host team in the Legion B State Tournament. And the Reds had to win this game to keep their season alive. And after losing Game 1 of the double-elimination tournament, followed by two hard-fought wins, the Reds were now low enough on rested arms that they were entrusting the fate of the entire season to a 13 year-old kid who maybe weighed 100 pounds.

In this case, the proverbial ant looks into the eyes of the much older, stronger opponents and fears risk of getting annihilated if he makes any mistakes whatsoever. The eagle on the other hand sees before him a truly great career forthcoming in which he will win many, many State Tournament games and championships, and sees no reason to fear as he knows that he's going to be better than these guys soon enough. The combination of these two competing philosophies makes for a nearly undefeatable balance of confidence of success tempered only by a slight fear of failure. That combination is exactly where Kyle Ottoson pitched his entire career wearing The Pinstripes.

Kyle didn't only win that State Tournament game, he threw a complete 7-inning game, not allowing a single run, and allowing just 4 hits while striking out 9 batters. The Reds then went on win the next 3 games to earn the State Championship.

As Kyle's legend grew through consistent victories in dominant fashion, the tale of Kyle Ottoson was told by opposing coaches amongst themselves as they prepared to have to try to challenge Mr. Ottoson. One team that had just lost a couple days before in the Legion B State Tournament to the Reds 5-1, found themselves trailing to another Reds' pitcher when the game was delayed for rain. After rain threatened to delay the game another day and force this team to pay for hotels another night before the game could resume, their coach called Coach Danley to explain his rationale for offering an unprecedented State Tournament forfeit victory, which was simply "I know that if I ever started any kind of rally, you'd just bring in that lefty anyway."

Known as Lefty, Ottoson wasn't quite automatic, but nearly so, winning seemingly every time he took the mound. His losses are remembered, as they were so infrequent, and while he would never make excuses, the Reds' coaching staff remembers each of them...an uncanny skip on an artificial surface, a bunt-a-thon on an infield with standing water, a game without the Reds' starting catcher, and wind gusts often exceeding 50 mph. Ottoson simply never had an off game as he put together a 34-3 record in the spring and a nearly undefeated summer career; there simply were a couple days where the breaks went against the Reds, and those days were quite few, as Ottoson's stuff was lights-out and nearly always was good enough whether the Reds put together any kind of offense or not.

Opponents tried every tactic they could to defeat Ottoson. In a game against league foe Valley, the mound had been built up to where the landing spot was as high as the pitching rubber and rock-hard. Ottoson simply went out before the bottom of the first inning, and calmly kicked away the dirt in large clods, some had to be carried to foul territory by teammates, to shape the mound to where he could get on top of his knuckle curveball and throw it downhill.

Opponents and umpires stared nearly awestruck that a 17 year-old had the presence to just remove the bottom half of the mound from the playing field; the Reds on the other hand knew that Kyle was zoned in, and just had to do a little battlefield preparation work to get them where they needed to go, and those teammates quickly gave a hand to hauling off the largest of the clods of cement-like dirt blocks. Ottoson then proceeded to strike out 17 batters to gain the victory.

The opposing coach described to the newspapers that facing Ottoson was “not fun, I’ll tell you that. It wasn’t comfortable coaching against him let alone being in the batter’s box against him. If you don’t bring your A-game, you don’t have a shot.” With Ottoson’s mind set on simply performing the task at hand, it didn’t matter if the other team knew what pitch was coming, they were defeated before they ever entered the batter’s box. A Valley player stated to the newspapers that day: “He throws that knuckle curve, you know it’s coming, but you swing at it even if it’s in the dirt...You can’t really prepare for him because he’s something else.” Another Final Four coach put it simply: “We haven’t seen anything close to Kyle.”

As a senior, in the State Championship Game, the Reds led 2-1 but a couple of errors put the game in jeopardy, as Lamar had the bases loaded with no outs. Rather than panic, Ottoson calmly struck out the next 3 batters in order, offering them only 3 pitches apiece, to end the threat in just 9 pitches, all swings and misses. That opposing coach described Ottoson’s performance as “mowing them down...you take your hat off to a kid that pitches that way.” The Reds went on to win that State Championship without another threat from Lamar. As the game got later, the more opponents had zero chance; the scouting report on Ottoson was simply “you’d better get a run or two in the first inning, as you won’t get anything after that.”

Ottoson was arguably the most intimidating 135-pound kid in Colorado during his years at Eaton, and thereafter. While others on the team performed the labors of fielding a rare groundball or popup, Ottoson was a sharpshooter out there, with a unique mental edge that combined both that of the sniper, and that of the field general. Ottoson set all Eaton records for strikeouts, with 17 strikeouts in multiple games, 136 strikeouts as a senior, and 385 K’s throughout his 4-year career in spring games. His ERA never exceeded 2.00, leading him to be named by the Denver Post as the top pitcher in the State of Colorado at all levels in 2008.

Only weeks after graduating from Eaton, Ottoson was drafted by the Colorado Rockies, and offered a major scholarship to the University of Nebraska. Hardly any player could turn down the opportunity to go live out his childhood dream of professional baseball, but Ottoson had the presence to say “thanks, but no thanks”, opting instead to go pitch at a top junior college team and add some weight to his body before the 135-pounder started professional baseball. The following year, Kyle was drafted again, this time by the New York Yankees, and the response was the same, as Ottoson returned to South Mountain. The following year the Philadelphia Phillies came calling, but Ottoson stuck to attending Arizona State University as planned. Then after ASU was banned from postseason play and the Washington Nationals drafted Kyle the following year, he again showed the presence to at this point just go finish his college degree at Oklahoma State University. In 2012, he was drafted for a 5th time and this time agreed to start his professional career with the San Diego Padres’ Organization.

Throughout his college career, Ottoson pitched in his team’s biggest games, and pitched his best against the top teams in the nation, including defeating Oklahoma in the OU-OSU Bedlam matchup, and leaving the game with a lead in the decisive Game 3 of the Super Regionals for ASU against Texas.

Ottoson’s presence led him into, and victoriously out of, the most hostile of territory, and amidst thousands of screaming fans, Ottoson heard none of the noise, he instead focused on just one thing: throwing his pitch in his location. He was so fully into the game, that he actually was above it.

