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# Eaton, Colorado, lives and dies with baseball

*By Benjamin Hochman*

EATON» Bury my heart in my baseball uniform.

## Editor's Note

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For nine innings this summer, The Denver Post will share stories that capture our state's love of baseball. We spend the third inning with the town of Eaton, which has a passion for the game that runs generations deep.

It was the dying coach's request.

Martin Hernandez, a beloved Eaton High School assistant, taught generations of boys the knuckle curve ... and courage. Even his own son, Todd, who grew up in the dugouts of this tiny town.

Coach Hernandez was diabetic. Toward the end, after his right leg below his knee was amputated, he would come to games in a wheelchair with an oxygen tank.

When the Eaton Reds won the 2003 Class 3A state championship, they had their

bus stop at the Hernandez home so the boys could share the big moment with their old coach. Later that year, Hernandez was back in his uniform – in an open casket.

“I’ll never forget the sight of it,” said longtime friend Jim Danley, Eaton’s head coach. “It was emblematic of his dedication and his love for Eaton baseball.”

How they love their baseball here.



AARON ONTIVEROZ, THE DENVER POST

*Eaton Reds sophomore outfielder Sean Carson jokes with Joey Blaskowski, 10, in the dugout. In Eaton, players learn the game at an early age.*

This lifestyle and lifeblood – it’s Indiana and basketball, Texas and football. In this nook of a Colorado town about an hour north of Denver, where the population (4,647) is close to the elevation (4,839 feet), they live for the game – and, so it seems, they die with the game.

“You grow up with that pride,” said Todd Hernandez, 42, who played for Eaton and now coaches one of its summer teams. “Coach Danley always said that those five letters on the front of your jersey should mean something. When you put on a uniform, you’ve got Eaton on the front, and there’s a target on the back.

“You’re playing for the people who were here before you, and the people who are going to be here after you.”

Eaton won the Class 3A state championship this spring, the school’s 11th title, all under Danley and the most in state history. Since 1990, only two times has Eaton failed to win its league. Since he became head coach in 1972, Danley’s teams have won an astounding 83.1 percent of its games.

Just what are they doing up there?

I hit the road to find out.



AARON ONTIVEROZ, THE DENVER POST



AARON ONTIVEROZ, THE DENVER POST

Isaac Garcia, 14, enters Steven's Grill in downtown Eaton. The diner is home to "The George," four cheeseburgers stacked between a bun.

Eaton Reds memorabilia, including an autographed No. 7 jersey of legendary coach Jim Danley, hangs on the wall at Steven's Grill.



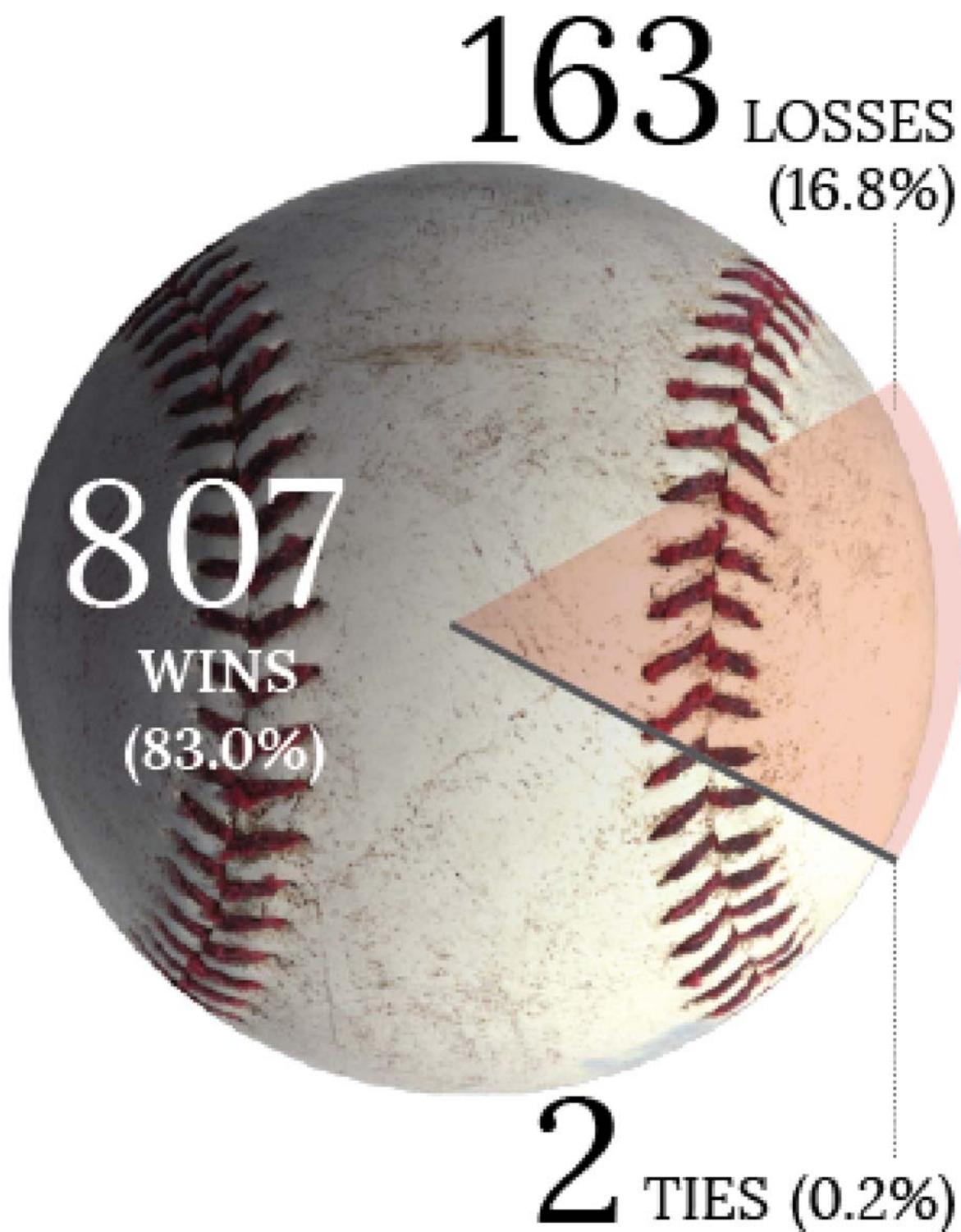
AARON ONTIVEROZ, THE DENVER POST

Eaton manager Jim Danley, who says baseball was his favorite sport "from the day I first picked up a baseball," watches his team in the class 3A state tournament. The Reds advanced to the title series where they beat Brush for their 11th state championship – the most ever by a Colorado prep baseball team.

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A MEASURE OF SUCCESS

Eaton high school baseball coach Jim Danley just guided his team to its 11th state 3A title, capping a 26-1 campaign. Winning is nothing new to either Danley or the Eaton Reds. Since 1972, the team has:



## Highlights

- 44 seasons

- 11 state 3A titles, more than any other Colorado prep program
- 79 consecutive league wins (current)
- 60 wins against any opponents (2008-2010) with consecutive state titles in 2008 and 2009

—Severiano Galván, *The Denver Post*

## Uncool to wear white ballcap

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As I pulled into town, sure enough, I was welcomed by the image of a father and a son playing catch in a park.

And a manure stench.

It smells here.

Eaton High School features adjacent baseball fields, and on this afternoon, the first field was scattered with fresh-faced freshmen-to-be, one kid tossing up a ball, bending his back, ping-ponging the ball high into the air for outfielders to shag. One of the boys on the field was Todd Hernandez's son, Mason – Martin's grandson. Another boy stood upon the bullpen rubber, the wiry, brown grass crawling up around his ankles. After this pixie pitcher heaved a pitch, he proclaimed to the catcher, "I got my fingertips in it!"

Soon I would realize he was experimenting with the knuckle curve, one of the nuances of the Eaton Way.

On the varsity field, the big kids prepared for a big game. Danley's Reds were in the state tournament, yet again. I met Chris Blaser, the team's athletic trainer.

"Pretty much a one-stoplight town," he explained. "You do something in the morning, and your parents know about it by the time the night's done."

## THE DIRTIER THE BETTER

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Blaser was in his first season with the team, and his ballcap – with red pinstripes, a red bill and a red E – was white and bright, which was sort of like spotting a rare ivory-billed woodpecker. See, the hats the varsity boys wear are the same hats they

first receive, over on the other field. Eaton starts ‘em young here, and players keep the same hat along for the ride. So by the time the boys are upperclassmen, their hats are a spectrum of browns, dirtied by a decade of diamonds and dusty dugouts.

“It becomes really uncool to have a white hat,” Danley explained.

Also, the hats are fitted at a young age – champions don’t wear snap-back hats – so as the boys’ heads grow, they simply make a cut in the back of the hat, which allows it to expand in size.

In a way, an old hat is old hat here. But it’s a status symbol, like the Eaton letter jacket.



AARON ONTIVEROZ, THE DENVER POST

*Junior first baseman Joe Mondragon (No.5) and his teammates prepare to take their dugout prior to their state tournament game against Sterling this spring.*

Danley, 68, was raised in the area, 13 miles down the road in Gill, an unincorporated community. And he was raised on the game.

“My favorite sport from the day I first picked up a baseball,” he said.

His father, Gilbert, was a pilot whose license was signed in 1931 by Orville Wright. Gilbert was a tough man but cool too. Unflappable. Danley’s dad would have 5-year-old Jim play catch with the Hispanics in Gill “because they knew how to throw properly. He wanted to make sure I got it right.”

In the spring of 1969, Jim became an Eaton assistant baseball coach. He earned the head gig in 1972. His teams were good, winning the league and such, but it wasn’t until 1994 that they won their first state championship.

Danley’s son, Kirk, played second base for the Reds that season. Gilbert was there too.

“I can see him right there, in the old bleachers, with his straw hat, just taking in every little thing,” Jim Danley said. “I see that (image of him) a lot. ... To have them be a part of it made it very much a family event. It was one of the best moments of my life.”

It was the lone Reds championship Gilbert would see.

## Pitching makes Eaton prosper

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In Eaton, soon after a nurse cuts the cord, babies are taught to pull the string on a changeup.

“We joke about the fact that if you’re born in Eaton, you’re a pitcher until we tell you you’re not,” Danley said. “Our feeling is: Baseball is a sport that is dominated by the pitching position. It’s very difficult to stay consistent if you don’t have guys on the mound who are tough, resilient and experienced.

“And Bear Bryant was right in football: You’ve got to stop losing before you can start winning. So our view is: Pitching and defense is a way to stop losing.”



AARON ONTIVEROZ, THE DENVER POST

*Tyler Kramer, top, Justin Cunningham, left, and Trenton Kramer watch an American Legion game at the Eaton baseball fields from the bed of a pickup truck.*



AARON ONTIVEROZ, THE DENVER POST

*Eaton’s Dalton Lind works from the pitcher’s mound during the state tournament. In Eaton, Coach Danley says, “You’re a pitcher until we tell you you’re not.” And all pitchers are taught to throw the knuckle curve.*

Spring after spring, along with coach Martin Hernandez, Danley taught pitching passionately and properly, as his father would want. He would watch pitchers on TV with the same microscopes in his corneas. And so, as the story goes, a game in 1986 changed the way Eaton played the game. It was Oklahoma State playing in the College World Series in Omaha, and Danley was watching when the Cowboys’ pitcher unleashed this pitch.

“And as soon as I saw that, I thought, ‘Ah, he’s throwing an illegal pitch,’ ” Danley said. “I thought it was a spitter.

“So I thought, I got to go down there and see this guy. I drove to Oklahoma State to talk to coach Tom Holliday, Matt’s dad. I talked to the coach on Saturday, and he said, ‘Well, he’s just throwing a curveball,’ and I said, ‘I think it’s a little more than a curveball.’ He kind of looks at me and winks and says, ‘Come in tomorrow morning around 8 o’clock.’ ”

What happened next sounds like something out of the fictional Sidd Finch story, when outsiders were allowed into a private area to watch Finch’s 168 mph pitch.

“He brings him in and the guy starts throwing an 82, 83 mph fastball, nothing special, just very average college stuff,” Danley recalled. “And then (Holliday) said, ‘All right, throw him one.’ And the ball came in just like the 82, 83 one – but it just dropped like a rock.”

The knuckle curve.

Get Danley talking about this thing, and it’s like you’re on barstools. He will show you how to properly place your fingernails along the seams, and how it will spin forward, seven times, maybe eight, “and then it’ll snap.” Or he will regale you with old stories about long-ago pitchers such as Jesse Haines from St. Louis’ Gashouse Gang, one of the first to throw the pitch.

“At that time (in 1986), it was thought to be an old man’s pitch, a way you hang on in the majors,” Danley said. “But I reasoned, if he has a 19-year-old guy doing it, why in the world couldn’t we have 12- and 13-year-olds do it? ... It doesn’t hurt the arm, so we teach that pitch. We learned how to teach it. It took a long time to figure out the best way to do it, a lot of trial and error. The knuckle curve is a big pitch for us, and that’s maybe one of the things that separates us from most programs.”



AARON ONTIVEROZ, THE DENVER POST

*Micah Dorsey, a sophomore catcher and pitcher, plays pepper with teammates as a rainbow takes the sky between games.*

Lane Greiman was 10 when he first learned the knuckle curve.

“It was kind of rough for me – I used to be a small kid and didn’t have very big hands,” he said. By eighth grade, he could throw the knuckle curve for strikes, and this past spring the 6-foot senior Greiman was named the Class 3A player of the year by The Denver Post.

“It was a lot of work and getting used to it,” Greiman said of the pitch. “But it enhances everything. Once you have that pitch, you can get batters off (anticipating) fastballs. And it’s an off-speed pitch that doesn’t hurt your arm. It’s really effective.”

# Old players instruct new players

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It's cash or check only at Steven's Grill, but don't end up on the bad check list, because that thing is laminated.

On a sign inside, the phone number doesn't have an area code; on the sign outside, it advertises "lunch and supper." But regardless of what time you arrive at Steve Schlotthauer's greasy spoon, you have to get a burger.

And if you have a Mitch Unrein appetite – the ol' Broncos fan favorite is a native son – order "The George." This gastronomical gas-giver has four cheeseburgers stacked like pancakes between a bun, inspired by the boxer George Foreman, who once said that he trained by eating cheeseburgers. It costs \$7.60.

Schlotthauer is also something of a curator. His place is part greasy spoon, part Guggenheim. The walls of his diner feature framed photos, jerseys and articles about Eaton, as well as one enormous, air-brushed painting of the team celebrating another state title.

And next to this is a framed white jersey with red pinstripes. It's No. 7. DANLEY. And the Sharpied autograph on it reads "Coach Danley."

Danley has an aura about him. Sure, he's a farmer, quick with a quip, a regular fellow. But when it comes to baseball, he's the godfather here, looming like this enormous framed jersey above boys eating burgers.

"You'd see him when you're playing, like 12 years old, and you're looking over like, 'Who is that guy?' " remembered Matt Burkart, a key player on this season's state champs. "You go into the dugout and ask your coach. And he says, 'That's seven.' "

Danley is Eaton baseball. He doesn't coach a team; he coaches a culture. And it starts with T-ball, really. After that the boys enter the youth program, teams coached by Kirk Danley, Todd Hernandez and other Jim Danley disciples.

"It's something that's done at Eaton," Kirk Danley said matter-of-factly about the old players coming back to coach the new ones.

This summer, Greiman is helping coach what is called the Eaton Morning League, a program for kids as young as 7. Sometimes, he'll wear his dirty hat.

"We play baseball and teach them lessons," he said. "And we have one whole day dedicated to the knuckle curve."



AARON ONTIVEROZ, THE DENVER POST

*Bryce Leafgrean, 13, is part of the next generation of Eaton players. Kids are encouraged to spend time around the older teams, from working the scoreboard to hanging out in the dugout so they can “rub shoulders with their heroes,” as coach Danley says.*

Learning baseball here is like learning your multiplication tables in elementary school.

“Seeing the winning firsthand, it definitely plants a seed. You’re instantly hooked,” said Burkart, who has his clichés down like a veteran big-leaguer. “You want to get on the train, and you want to push it farther than it’s ever been.”

## Mound with more meaning

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It’s a Thursday in early June. The 8 p.m. sun hangs like a curveball just above the outfield, illuminating clouds like stadium lights. In the distance, a swing pings. Over there, a ball hits a mitt, as a father plays catch with his kin. It’s all so perfect.

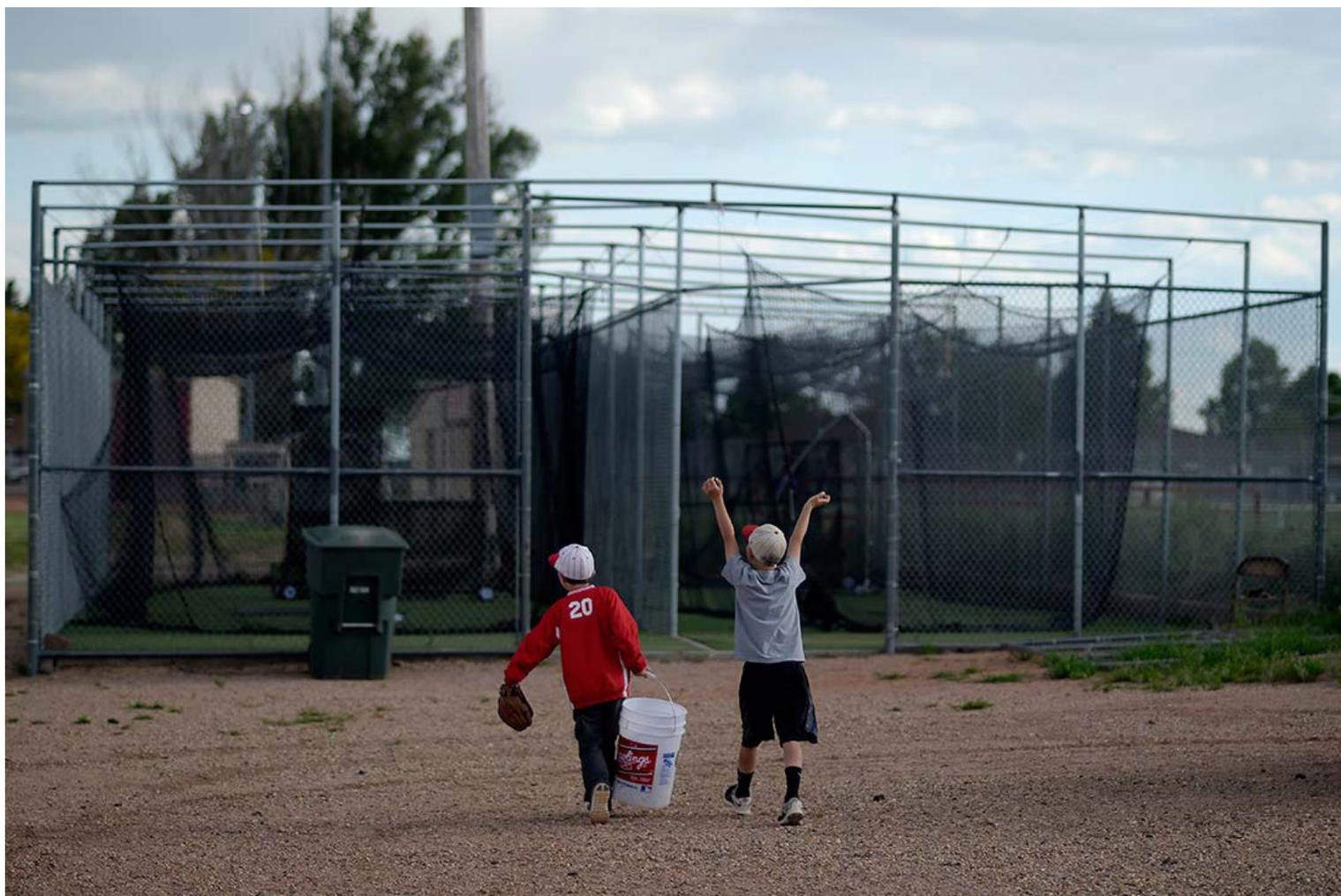
Well, except that stench.

I walked toward the varsity field. Three high schoolers took cuts in the cage, right behind the dusty bleachers. The field was empty. I took a quick glimpse at the pitcher’s mound, where innumerable knuckle curves have baffled batters since the heyday of Martin Hernandez, the beloved assistant coach who never stopped smiling, even when they took his leg.

“Here’s a guy who gave his life to Eaton baseball – time, effort, money,” Danley said of Todd’s dad and 14-year-old Mason’s grandfather. “There isn’t anything that Martin Hernandez wouldn’t do for us. ... What a legacy.”

Martin is buried in his uniform at Eaton Cemetery, which is on a clay hill. It just so happens that some of the best clay and dirt in the area come from the cemetery. So, when they dig a grave, they pile the excess dirt in a special section of the cemetery.

“And we use it for our pitching mounds,” Danley said. “It’s top-level clay, just the right mixture. Whenever we have to firm up the mounds, we take a truck, go out and visit the old coach.”



AARON ONTIVEROZ, THE DENVER POST

*Joey Blaskowski, 10, carries a bucket of balls to the cages for batting practice. Cash Rinker, 9, is at his side. Perhaps one day they will add to the narrative of the Eaton Reds.*

## MaxPreps Final 2015 National Small Schools Top 25 High School Baseball Rankings

Eaton has won 11 state championships since 1993, including a 3A title in 2015.



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By Kevin Askeland | MaxPreps.com

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### **Josh Henderson Livonia highlights**

*Watch the standout for Livonia (N.Y.) in action.*

Eaton (Colo.) has one of the most successful small-school baseball programs in the country, and the 2015 season may have been one of its best.

Under coach Jim Danley, the 2009 MaxPreps Small School Coach of the Year, the Reds have won 11 state championships since 1993. During that time, Eaton has won the regional championship every year (23 years straight) and has won 22 league championships during that time.

Eaton also finishes the year as the No. 1 team in the MaxPreps Small Schools National Rankings.

In his 44 years as head coach, Danley has the best winning percentage in the nation at 83.1 percent. He is 807-163-2. This season, Danley led the Reds to the most wins in a single season (26), according to the program's website, en route to winning the Class 3A state championship.

Mattituck (N.Y.), the Class B state champion in New York, comes in at No. 2 while West (Texas), the Class 3A state champion in Texas, is the No. 3 team.

The small-school rankings are based on the [MaxPreps Computer Rankings](#) and include schools that belong to state enrollment divisions generally with fewer than 1,000 students. Each team is listed with its record and its computer rating.

## **Final 2015 Small Schools National Baseball Rankings**



# Small Schools Baseball National Champion

*Eaton, CO*

Photos by Tom Hanson/Graphic by Ryan Escobar

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1. [Eaton \(Colo.\)](#), 26-1, 30.06\*
2. [Mattituck \(N.Y.\)](#), 27-1, 29.51\*
3. [West \(Texas\)](#), 32-2-1, 27.94\*
4. [Sumrall \(Miss.\)](#), 33-5, 26.92\*
5. [South Spencer \(Rockport, Ind.\)](#), 24-2, 26.88\*
6. [Silo \(Okla.\)](#), 32-1, 26.75\*
7. [Wesleyan \(Norcross, Ga.\)](#), 32-4, 26.59\*
8. [Roff \(Okla.\)](#), 34-2, 25.57
9. [Brunswick \(Md.\)](#), 20-2, 25.22\*
10. [King's Ridge Christian \(Alpharetta, Ga.\)](#), 30-5, 24.87\*
11. [Ouachita Christian \(Monroe, La.\)](#), 28-4, 24.67\*
12. [Belmont \(Miss.\)](#), 26-5, 24.58
13. [Harleton \(Texas\)](#), 21-3, 24.39
14. [Campbell \(Litchfield, N.H.\)](#), 21-0, 24.22\*
15. [Livonia \(N.Y.\)](#), 25-2, 24.21
16. [Verdigris \(Claremore, Okla.\)](#), 33-3, 24.21
17. [Whiteville \(N.C.\)](#), 28-5, 23.66\*
18. [Ninety Six \(S.C.\)](#), 26-6, 23.54\*
19. [Heritage Hall \(Oklahoma City, Okla.\)](#), 34-4, 23.36\*
20. [Mid-Carolina \(Prosperity, S.C.\)](#), 25-4, 22.37
21. [Westminster Christian \(Miami\)](#), 23-7-1, 22.12\*
22. [Hoosic Valley \(Schaghticoke, N.Y.\)](#), 23-1, 22.01\*



# A Winning Formula

At Eaton High School, old-time methods and values lead to success

by Ted Yeatzi

On the seven-mile stretch between Greeley and Eaton, it's as though you travel through a time warp. A journey along this lonely section of Highway 85 in northeast Colorado takes a visitor back to another era — a simpler, more innocent time. Once you see the grain elevator or the pinto bean processing plant that dominate the Eaton skyline, it's as though you've been transported back to 1955.

It's the type of place where you let your guard down. There's a down-home friendliness to the town, one that evokes a feeling of comfort. You can leave your car unlocked and not worry about someone deciding to take it for a joyride. You can send your kids down to the park to play and not be concerned with miscreants lurking in the bushes. You can sit in Steven's Grill, order a double cheeseburger that costs less than three bucks and listen to the locals talk about the weather, Sunday's sermon and sports. It's a peaceful place — a tranquil town.

But, these charming factors aren't the reasons why a trip to Eaton makes you feel like the clock has been turned back nearly a half-century. They simply provide the texture that makes the sensation believable. It's the town's love affair with the sport of baseball that makes you feel like you've stepped out of reality and into "The Sandlot."

ter of town to play a game of pick-up hardball on a spring afternoon. While the fate of the local football team usually gets the juices flowing, passions run high in Eaton about the performance on the diamond by the Fighting Reds — the town's high school baseball team. The conversations at the local burger joint steer away from the Broncos offseason moves, the A's playoff possibilities or the latest political scandal. Instead, the regulars talk about the virtues of the sacrifice bunt, the value of the hit-and-run and the lost art of the complete game.

It's a place where the game is appreciated, respected, admired and loved. It's a town where kids aspire to don the red and white cap with the capital "E" stitched on the front. It's a burg that isn't hip, cool or trendy. It's a place where traditions still matter and elders are still respected. It's an untouched haven where baseball is still the only game in town.

"It's a tradition that goes on and on," explains Rod Asbra, a longtime Eaton resident who has seen his fair share of Fighting Reds baseball over the years — he drove the team bus to away

games before retiring two years ago. "There are grandsons and great-grandsons playing now, and the former players come back to speak to the team and pass along the legacy."

An afternoon spent with the green grass below your cleats, the feel of a leather mitt against your bare hand and the sweet sounds of the bat striking the ball in the air — that's the heritage in Eaton. That's the connection that binds generations. It's the constant that has remained in place year after year, decade after decade.

"My brothers played baseball for Eaton," says Junior Barrios, the Fighting Reds starting center-fielder.

when asked about his deep-seated love for the game. "I always dreamed about one day coming out here and playing, too."

It's a place where kids aspire to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors, carrying on the grand tradition of Eaton baseball.

"Of course, winning helps," Asbra admits. Ah, yes. The winning.

Success is the common thread that is woven throughout every baseball-related tradition in Eaton. It's the reason why paintings of the team hang on the

walls in Steven's joint. It's the basis for the quasi-celebrity status the players enjoy when walking the city's streets. It's what motivates the town's elementary kids to hang out in the high school dugouts during the summer. And it's why nearly everybody in town turns out to watch the Fighting Reds home games. Winning is the glue that holds this vestige of a bygone era together.

In Eaton, one man receives and deserves most of the credit for creating a utopia built on an unprecedented run of baseball achievement — head coach Jim Danley. Players have come and gone since he took over the program in 1972 — some great, some good and some only slightly above average. No matter what the talent level,

In the 31 years leading up to the 2003 season, Danley's teams have won nearly 80% of their games — a clip that is difficult to comprehend and fathom over that amount of time. In the process, the Fighting Reds have built a 506-133-1 record and won five state championships. They've played in five consecutive CHSAA title games — winning three, including the last two — and posted a perfect 24-0 mark in 1998. All the while, they've become the pride and joy of a small town situated on the plains just seven miles north of Greeley.

This type of success begs the question — how do they do it? How does a small school win on such a consistent basis? If they rode a flame-throwing lefty or a farm-fed power hitter for a couple of years, that would be one thing. But, Eaton wins no matter who's on the roster. There has to be a secret.

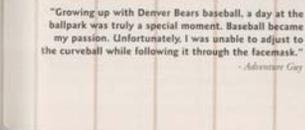
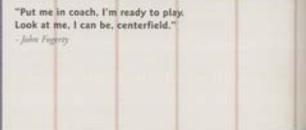
Again, all clues point in the direction of Danley. He's the man that has developed a winning formula, an approach that works year after year. While other schools and other coaches work to build a single team, Danley has spent more than three decades assembling a program at Eaton — a method of teaching baseball that extends well beyond his current varsity roster. It

permeates through every level, starting with the first time a youngster picks up a bat.

"Jim has total control of the summer program — from five-year olds on up," says Dale Hughes.

"Put me in coach, I'm ready to play. Look at me, I can be, centerfield."  
- John Faggery

"Growing up with Denver Bears baseball, a day at the ballpark was truly a special moment. Baseball became my passion. Unfortunately, I was unable to adjust to the curveball while following it through the facemask."  
- Adventure Guy



the Fighting Reds hitting coach. "A key to that is the current players coaching the kids. The younger ones look up to the older ones and want to be like them. They have fun together."

This system forges a bond between kids from different age groups and allows for the legacy of Eaton High School baseball to be passed along to the next wave of players. To Danley, the benefits extend well beyond the baseball diamond.

"They are positive role models that do a lot of teaching that doesn't have anything to do with baseball," he says. "In a small town, the little kids know the guys on the high school team by their first names. The young kids are always welcome in our dugout. It makes it look like a Turkish rug sale, but it's a great thing."

This also creates a situation where Danley's system is being instilled from day one. By the time these kids step onto the diamond as Fighting Reds, they're well-schooled in the ways of Eaton baseball.

"Having our kids go back and coach in the summer is huge," Danley says about this invaluable practice of extending his system through all age groups. "We don't have to re-teach because kids are learning the same things all the way through. It gives us consistency. The techniques are taught by kids who have been taught."

This steadiness extends well beyond the fundamentals and the basics, however. Danley and his coaches have developed a game plan for winning over the past 31 years and they begin instilling the basis of this program into players at an early age.

In its simplest form, baseball is a game made up of two key components — pitching and hitting. Well aware of this fact, the Eaton coaching staff has crafted a formula for tackling both disciplines

that works no matter who's on the mound or in the batter's box.

Anybody can look like a great coach when the next Randy Johnson or Nolan Ryan is throwing gas at their opponents, they reason. And anybody can send Barry Bonds up to the plate and tell him to hack away. But these types of phenomenal talents come along once in a generation. Danley wanted to find a way to take these variables out of his success equation. He didn't want to rely on Mother Nature to provide him with a pitcher or slugger that could lead Eaton to victories.

Thus, the search began. For starters, Danley wanted to be able to craft a dominant hurler. He set out to find a way to turn a kid with average physical traits into a feared commodity on the mound. It was a journey that would take him to all corners of the baseball world.

"In the late 80s, we began looking for a power pitcher that could be taught," Danley says in explaining the pitching odyssey that has led to success at Eaton. "Knowing that we're not going to be able to have good arms year in and year out, we looked for a non-speed pitcher that is a strike-out pitcher. We found a guy at Oklahoma State that was teaching the knuckle-curve."

Danley began to study the pitch at length. He read about it. He talked to coaches and players about it. He analyzed the pros and cons. In the end, he fell in love with it. He knew it was the golden ticket that he'd been searching for.

"They threw it a lot in the Major Leagues in the 1920s and 30s," he explains with satisfaction, like a proud father describing his son's latest exploits. "It's been around a long time, but it's always been thought to be an old man's pitch."

Visions of the Niekro, Phil and Joe, come to mind when discussing the knuckle ball — long considered a "junk" pitch that guys use to stay in the game long after they've thrown every last fastball their arm can bear. It seems gimmicky — like a trick that could be used for awhile but would eventually run its course. Judging by the results in Eaton, however, opposing teams are failing to catch on to the ruse. Since 1987, the Fighting Reds have amassed a mark of 307 wins and only 55 losses, quieting the critics in the process.

"It's become our signature pitch," says Danley, defending the merits of his beloved toss. "It's the hard knuckler. It breaks very sharply, even in this climate. It's a great pitch for this area because it rarely goes up there and stops."

In other words, it's controllable. It's not dependent on heavy or humid air, and it can be thrown by someone with less than supernatural God-given ability. It's a consistent out-pitch that Danley and his coaches can teach their players to throw. It's the backbone of the Fighting Reds baseball system.

While the knuckle-curve has provided the foundation for Eaton's success, a patient approach to hitting has been nearly as important. Other teams swing for the fences and try to score in bunches. Danley's teams simply try to put the ball in play, keep rallies alive and force the opponent into making mistakes — a mentality is echoed by everyone in town.

"Home run hitters kill rallies," says Asbra, now just a fan. "These guys play for rallies."

And it's an approach that is ingrained in the players on a daily basis. "To Coach Danley, hitting is an art," says Brandon Trujillo, Eaton's senior

shortstop and an All-State candidate. "We hit until we can't hit anymore. It's been the exact same practice schedule since I was a freshman."

A major part of this routine is learning to hit when behind in the count, because the worst thing that an Eaton hitter can do is strike out. If they are able to put the ball in play, the coaches reason, anything can happen. Thus, each player is taught the same technique for hitting with two strikes.

"Dale Hughes teaches an outstanding two-strike hitting technique," explains Danley. "It's a lot like Dante Bichetti's swing. You spread the stance, flatten the bat and don't take a stride. This takes away the high fastball."

The esteemed coach talks about hitting like a sommelier discusses wine or a virtuoso describes music. He exudes a passion for the subject that is contagious. He's excited to share his knowledge. He relishes the opportunity to expound upon his favorite subject.

This love of baseball and the various nuances

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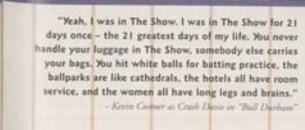
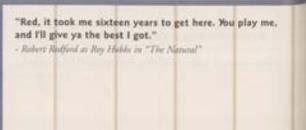
In an era where competition is far from en vogue in other parts of the country, it is still embraced in Eaton. Borrowing a mentality from generations gone by, Danley and the townspeople still want to win.

"We make no apologies about striving for success," says the head coach. "We think success is a very important thing, teaching lessons that can be carried on into every possible profession. We're a part of the educational process and a reason why people are successful later in life."

As the Fighting Reds take to the field in 2003, they will be trying to extend their run of excellence. With two consecutive state championships to their credit, it won't be an easy task.

"Every team is gunning for us," admits Trujillo. "The other teams know our reputation."

And they all know that the road to a title runs through Eaton — a town where time stands still and baseball is much more than just a game. ■



"Red, it took me sixteen years to get here. You play me, and I'll give ya the best I got."  
- Robert Hoffman as Ray Hobbs in "The Natural"

"Yeah, I was in The Show. I was in The Show for 21 days once... the 21 greatest days of my life. You never handle your luggage in The Show, somebody else carries your bags. You hit white balls for batting practice, the ballparks are like cathedrals, the hotels all have room service, and the women all have long legs and brains."  
- Kevin Costner as Crash Davis in "Bull Durham"

# **A Winning Formula**

## **At Eaton High School, old-time methods and values lead to success**

By Ted Yhedri

Mile High Sports Magazine, April 2003

On the seven-mile stretch between Greeley and Eaton, it's as though you travel through a time warp. A journey along this lonely section of Highway 85 in northeast Colorado takes a visitor back to another era – a simpler, more innocent time. Once you see the grain elevator or the pinto bean processing plant that dominate the Eaton skyline, it's as though you've been transported back to 1955.

It's the type of place where you let your guard down. There's a down-home friendliness to the town, one that evokes a feeling of comfort. You can leave your car unlocked and not worry about someone deciding to take it for a joyride. You can send your kids down to the park to play and not be concerned with miscreants lurking in the bushes. You can sit in Steven's Grill, order a double cheeseburger that costs less than three bucks and listen to the locals talk about the weather, Sunday's sermon and sports. It's a peaceful place – a tranquil town.

But, these charming factors aren't the reasons why a trip to Eaton makes you feel like the clock has been turned back nearly a half-century. They simply provide the texture that makes the sensation believable. It's the town's love affair with the sport of baseball that makes you feel like you've stepped out of reality and into "The Sandlot."

In Eaton, baseball is still the favorite pastime. The game is the heartbeat of the community. While suburban kids are playing street hockey, riding their skateboards or being picked up by mom after soccer practice, youngsters in this slice of Americana gather in the center of town to play a game of pick-up hardball on a spring afternoon. While the fate of the local football team usually gets the juices flowing, passions run high in Eaton about the performance on the diamond by the Fighting Reds – the town's high school baseball team. The conversations at the local burger joint steer away from the Broncos offseason moves, the Avs playoff possibilities or the latest political scandal. Instead, the regulars talk about the virtues of the sacrifice bunt, the value of the hit-and-run and the lost art of the complete game.

It's a place where the game is appreciated, respected, admired and loved. It's a town where kids aspire to don the red and white cap with the capital "E" stitched on the front. It's a burg that isn't hip, cool or trendy. It's a place where traditions still matter and elders are respected. It's an untouched haven where baseball is still the only game in town.

"It's a tradition that goes on and on," explains Rod Asbra, a longtime Eaton resident who has seen his fair share of Fighting Reds baseball over the years – he drove the team bus to away games before retiring two years ago. "There are grandsons and great-grandsons playing now, and the former players come back to speak to the team and pass along the legacy."

An afternoon spent with the green grass below your cleats, the feel of a leather mitt against your bare hand and the sweet sounds of the bat striking the ball in the air – that’s the heritage in Eaton. That’s the connection that binds generations. It’s the constant that has remained in place year after year, decade after decade.

“My brothers played baseball for Eaton,” says Junior Barrios, the Fighting Reds starting centerfielder, when asked about his deep-seeded love for the game. “I always dreamed about one day coming out here and playing, too.”

It’s a place where kids aspire to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors, carrying on the grand tradition of Eaton baseball.

“Of course, winning helps,” Asbra admits.

Ah, yes. The winning.

Success is the common thread that is woven throughout every baseball-related tradition in Eaton. It’s the reason why paintings of the team hang on the walls in Steven’s joint. It’s the basis for the quasi-celebrity status the players enjoy when walking the city’s streets. It’s what motivates the town’s elementary kids to hang out in the high school dugouts during the summer. And it’s why nearly everybody in town turns out to watch the Fighting Reds home games. Winning is the glue that holds this vestige of a bygone era together.

In Eaton, one man receives and deserves most of the credit for creating a utopia built on an unprecedented run of baseball achievement – head coach Jim Danley. Players have come and gone since he took over the program in 1972 – some great, some good and some only slightly above average. No matter what the talent level, however, the 56-year old baseball veteran has consistently fielded a winner, building an unbelievable resume in the process.

In the 31 years leading up to the 2003 season, Danley’s teams have won nearly 80% of their games – a clip that is difficult to comprehend and fathom over that amount of time. In the process, the Fighting Reds have built a 506-133-1 record and won five state championships. They’ve played in five consecutive CHSAA title games – winning three, including the last two – and posted a perfect 24-0 mark in 1998. All the while, they’ve become the pride and joy of a small town situated on the plains just seven miles north of Greeley.

This type of success begs the question – how do they do it? How does a small school win on such a consistent basis? If they rode a flame-throwing lefty or a farm-fed power hitter for a couple of years, that would be one thing. But, Eaton wins no matter who’s on the roster. There has to be a secret.

Again, all clues point in the direction of Danley. He’s the man that has developed a winning formula, an approach that works year after year. While other schools and other coaches work to build a single team, Danley has spent more than three decades assembling a program at Eaton – a method of teaching baseball that extends well beyond his current varsity roster. It permeates through every level, starting with the first time a youngster picks up a bat.

“Jim has total control of the summer program – from five-year olds on up,” says Dale Hughes, the Fighting Reds hitting coach. “A key to that is the current players coaching the kids. The younger ones look up to the older ones and want to be like them. They have fun together.”

This system forges a bond between kids from different age groups and allows for the legacy of Eaton High School baseball to be passed along to the next wave of players. To Danley, the benefits extend well beyond the baseball diamond.

“They are positive role models that do a lot of teaching that doesn’t have anything to do with baseball,” he says. “In a small town, the little kids know the guys on the high school team by their first names. The young kids are always welcome in our dugout. It makes it look like a Turkish rug sale, but it’s a great thing.”

This also creates a situation where Danley’s system is being instilled from day one. By the time these kids step onto the diamond as Fighting Reds, they’re well-schooled in the ways of Eaton baseball.

“Having our kids go back and coach in the summer is huge,” Danley says about this invaluable practice of extending his system through all age groups. “We don’t have to re-teach because kids are learning the same things all the way through. It gives us consistency. The techniques are taught by kids who have been taught.”

“This steadiness extends well beyond the fundamentals and the basics, however, Danley and his coaches have developed a game plan for winning over the past 31 years and they begin instilling the basis of this program into players at an early age.

In its simplest form, baseball is a game made up of two key components – pitching and hitting. Well aware of this fact, the Eaton coaching staff has crafted a formula for tackling both disciplines that works no matter who’s on the mound or in the batter’s box.

Anybody can look like a great coach when the next Randy Johnson or Nolan Ryan is throwing gas at their opponents, they reason. And anybody can send Barry Bonds up to the plate and tell him to hack away. But these types of phenomenal talents come along once in a generation. Danley wanted to find a way to take these variables out of his success quotient. He didn’t want to rely on Mother Nature to provide him with a pitcher or slugger that could lead Eaton to victories.

Thus, the search began.

For starters, Danley wanted to be able to craft a dominant hurler. He set out to find a way to turn a kid with average physical traits into a feared commodity on the mound. It was a journey that would take him to all corners of the baseball world.

“In the late 80s, we began looking for a power pitch that could be taught,” Danley says in explaining the pitching odyssey that has led to success at Eaton. “Knowing that we’re not going

to be able to have good arms year in and year out, we looked for a non-speed pitch that is a strike-out pitch. We found a guy at Oklahoma State that was teaching the knuckle-curve.”

Danley began to study the pitch at length. He read about it. He analyzed the pros and cons. In the end, he fell in love with it. He knew it was the golden ticket that he’d been searching for.

“They threw it a lot in the Major Leagues in the 1920s and 30s,” he explains with satisfaction, like a proud father describing his son’s latest exploits. “It’s been around a long time, but it’s always been thought to be an old man’s pitch.”

Visions of the Niekros, Phil and Joe, come to mind when discussing the knuckle ball – long considered a “junk” pitch that guys use to stay in the game long after they’ve thrown every last fastball their arm can bear. It seems gimmicky – like a trick that could be used for awhile but would eventually run its course. Judging by the results in Eaton, however, opposing teams are failing to catch on to the ruse. Since 1987, the Fighting Reds have amassed a mark of 307 wins and only 55 losses, quieting the critics in the process.

“It’s become our signature pitch,” says Danley, defending the merits of his beloved toss. “It’s the hard knuckler. It breaks very sharply, even in this climate. It’s a great pitch for this area because it rarely goes up there and stops.”

In other words, it’s controllable. It’s not dependent on heavy or humid air, and it can be thrown by someone with less than supernatural God-given ability. It’s a consistent out-pitch that Danley and his coaches can teach their players to throw. It’s the backbone of the Fighting Reds baseball system.

While the knuckle-curve has provided the foundation for Eaton’s success, a patient approach to hitting has been nearly as important. Other teams swing for the fences and try to score in bunches. Danley’s teams simply try to put the ball in play, keep rallies alive and force the opponent into making mistakes – a mentality echoed by everyone in town.

“Home run hitters kill rallies,” says Asbra, now just a fan. “These guys play for rallies.”

“To Coach Danley, hitting is an art,” says Branden Trujillo, Eaton’s senior shortstop and an All-State candidate. “We hit until we can’t hit anymore. It’s been the exact same practice schedule since I was a freshman.”

A major part of this routine is learning to hit when behind in the count, because the worst thing that an Eaton hitter can do is strike out. If they are able to put the ball in play, the coaches reason, anything can happen. Thus, each player is taught the same technique for hitting with two strikes.

“Dale Hughes teaches an outstanding two-strike hitting technique,” explains Danley. “It’s a lot like Dante Bichette’s swing. You spread the stance, flatten the bat and don’t take a stride. This takes away the high fastball.”

The esteemed coach talks about hitting like a sommelier discusses wine or a virtuoso describes music. He exudes a passion for the subject that is contagious. He's excited to share his knowledge. He relishes the opportunity to expound upon his favorite subject.

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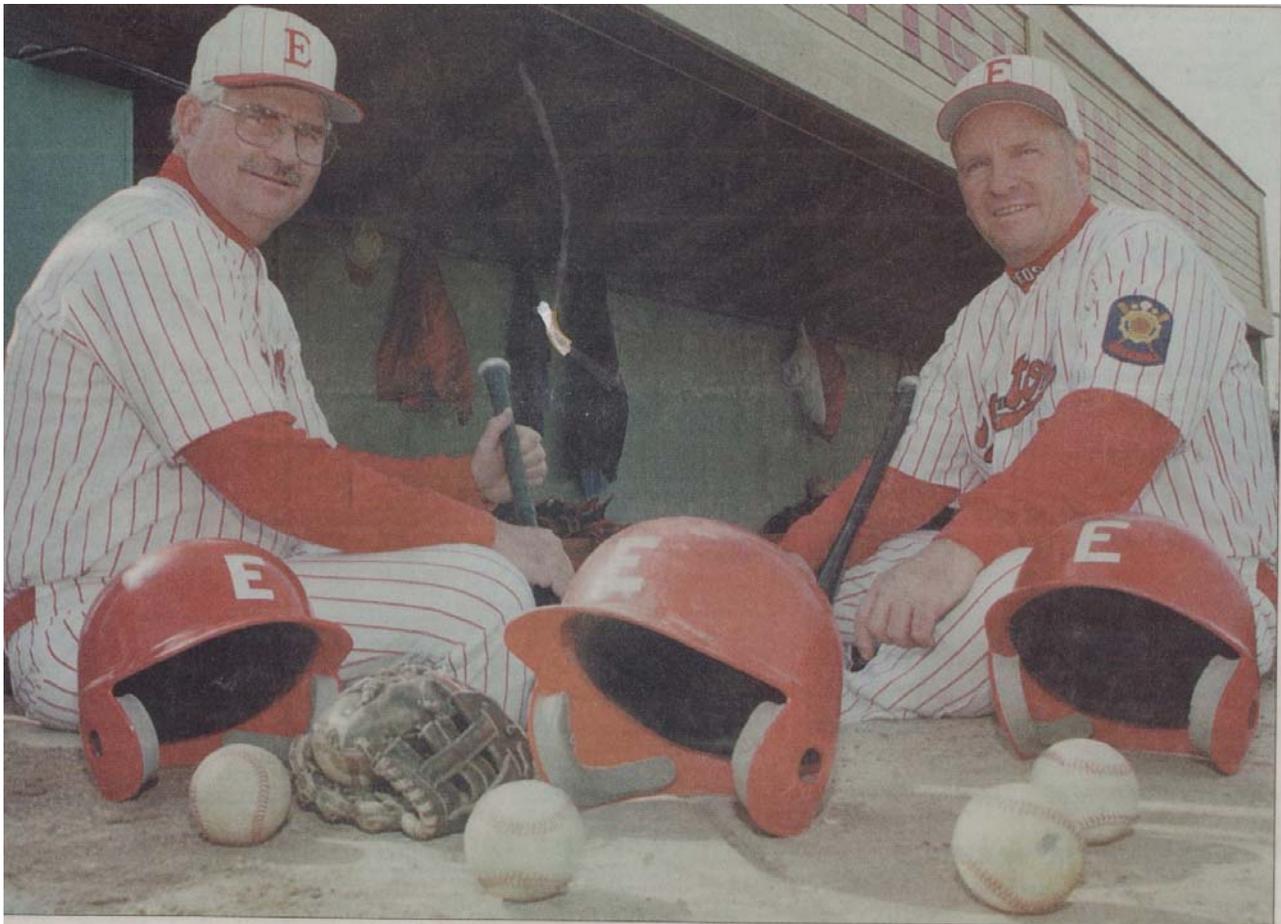
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And they all know that the road to a title runs through Eaton – a town where time stands still and baseball is much more than just a game.

*Note: Following the release of this article, the Reds went on to win the Class 3A State Championship in 2003, then the American Legion B State Championship that summer, then the Class 3A State Championship again in 2004, as well as the American Legion B State Championship again that year. The Reds won all 6 Spring and Summer State Championships from 2002-2004.*



**AT LEFT:** Eaton's head coach Jim Danley, right, and assistant coach Bob Ervin have been coaching baseball together for 31 years, 28 of those at Eaton. Danley and Ervin will try to guide their team to a state-record 43rd straight win on Saturday.

RICHARD M. HACKETT  
Greeley Tribune

**BOTTOM INSET:** Danley, left, and Ervin in a 1972 photo.

COURTESY PHOTO

# Together forever

Longtime Eaton baseball coaches know what it takes to build winning team

BY T.M. FASANO  
Greeley Tribune

**EATON** — Eaton head baseball coach Jim Danley and his longtime assistant Bob Ervin are into making history these days.

When Danley and Ervin took over the Reds way back in 1972, all they wanted to do was make some kind of success out of the program.

Some would say that they overextended themselves.

Around noon on Saturday, Danley and Ervin could be a part of something that no

other coaches have experienced in the history of Colorado high school baseball.

A win over Holy Family (12-6) in the Class 3A Region 1 semifinals, which starts at 10 a.m. Saturday at Butch Butler Field, would be Eaton's 43rd straight, an all-time state record that would pass Valley (1979-81) and Grand Junction (1960-62) on the consecutive wins list.

Top-ranked Eaton (18-0) would then face the winner of Paonia and Falcon in the regional championship game at 3 p.m. for a berth in the Final Four May 21-22 in Denver.

In the other 3A playoff regional of interest to Weld County baseball fans, Roo-



sevelt (13-4) travels to Pueblo's Runyon Field for a Region 4 game against D'Evelyn (9-10) at 12:30 p.m. A Rough Riders win would put them in the championship game against the winner of No. 2 Lamar or Erie for a chance to play in the Final Four.

Danley, 52, and Ervin, 53, started coaching summer baseball together in

1969.

They've been together so long, they're finishing each other's sentences.

"We know what each other is going to say before he says it," Danley joked.

Danley's and Ervin's 28-year tenure with Eaton's high school baseball team has spanned the Nixon Ad-

ministration, Ford Administration, Carter Administration, Reagan Administration, Bush Administration and is on the tail end of the Clinton Administration.

They've made it through the Beach Boys, Hardy Boys and Backstreet Boys, while watching the younger generation wear platform shoes, bell bottoms, leisure suits, black Chuck Taylor Converse high tops, white Air Jordan medium cuts and now back to bell bottoms.

The one outfit that went unchanged over all the years was the pinstripes of the Eaton Reds.

They're the Hope and Crosby, Carson and McMahon and Batman and Robin of Colorado baseball. They've been around longer than traffic on Interstate 25.

Danley coaches third base. Ervin coaches first base. The 5-foot-8 Danley used to have hair. The 6-3 Ervin used to

See COACHES, Page B3

## COACHES

have black hair.

That's when they first met at Eaton High School when Danley was teaching German and Ervin was teaching English. Ervin is still teaching at the high school, while Danley moved over to the middle school and is a counselor.

Both know what it's like to wait for a state title. After 23 years of coaching the Reds, the elusive state baseball title came home to Eaton in 1994. They've won two more titles since '94 and will be favored to win their fourth state title in six years next weekend if they survive Saturday's regionals.

"From 1973 to 1993 we did not win a state title," Ervin said. "We still remember how long it takes to build a team."

This current crop of Reds know what the two men mean to the Eaton program.

"They put so much time into this program. They've been around forever," said all-state third baseman Mike Carrasco, who was a bat boy for the Reds when he was in elementary school and the two coaches were still trying to win their first state title. "They've coached some of the parents here. They keep the tradition going. They just love baseball and that rubs off on us."

Up until three summers ago, Ervin and Danley coached the Eaton high school players in the Legion B program. Ervin, who won his first state title as the Reds' girls basketball coach last winter, gave up coaching summer baseball to concentrate on coaching the girls in the summer.

Growing up in a program since the age of 5 when future Reds start playing T-ball, every Eaton baseball prospect knows what to expect before ever entering high school.

Reds assistant coach Randy Sparkman has been with the baseball program for the past nine years

and said it's such a benefit to have players come into a familiar system that they've been in for 10 years.

"The kids know what's expected. They don't have to learn a lot of coaching philosophies," Sparkman said. "It's been the same when they were in the fifth grade watching high school ball. They wear the same uniforms. (Danley and Ervin) have coached players who have boys coming through high school. You just don't see that."

Danley and Ervin have coached baseball together 13 years longer than their center fielder Jason Smith has been alive.

"That's pretty amazing," said the 18-year-old Smith. "They love this game. They make you think about the game. To them, baseball is more of a mental game than a physical game."

Jeff Meyers, a four-year starter and all-stater at shortstop, said Danley and Ervin are great coaches.

"I don't know what else to say. They know baseball probably better than most people in the state. Coach (Danley) has won way over 400 games. He knows how to win."

With a record of 436 wins and only 120 losses in 28 years, win No. 437 against Holy Family would be the one victory that makes state history.

There's the three state titles, 12 Final Four appearances, nine regional championships, 16 league titles and one game away from a state-record 43 straight, but all of that isn't the most important accomplishment to Danley.

He said his biggest accomplishment is that his teams, with Ervin coaching right with him, have made the state playoffs every year since 1983.

"That says more about the youth coaches we have and the dozens and dozens of kids who have

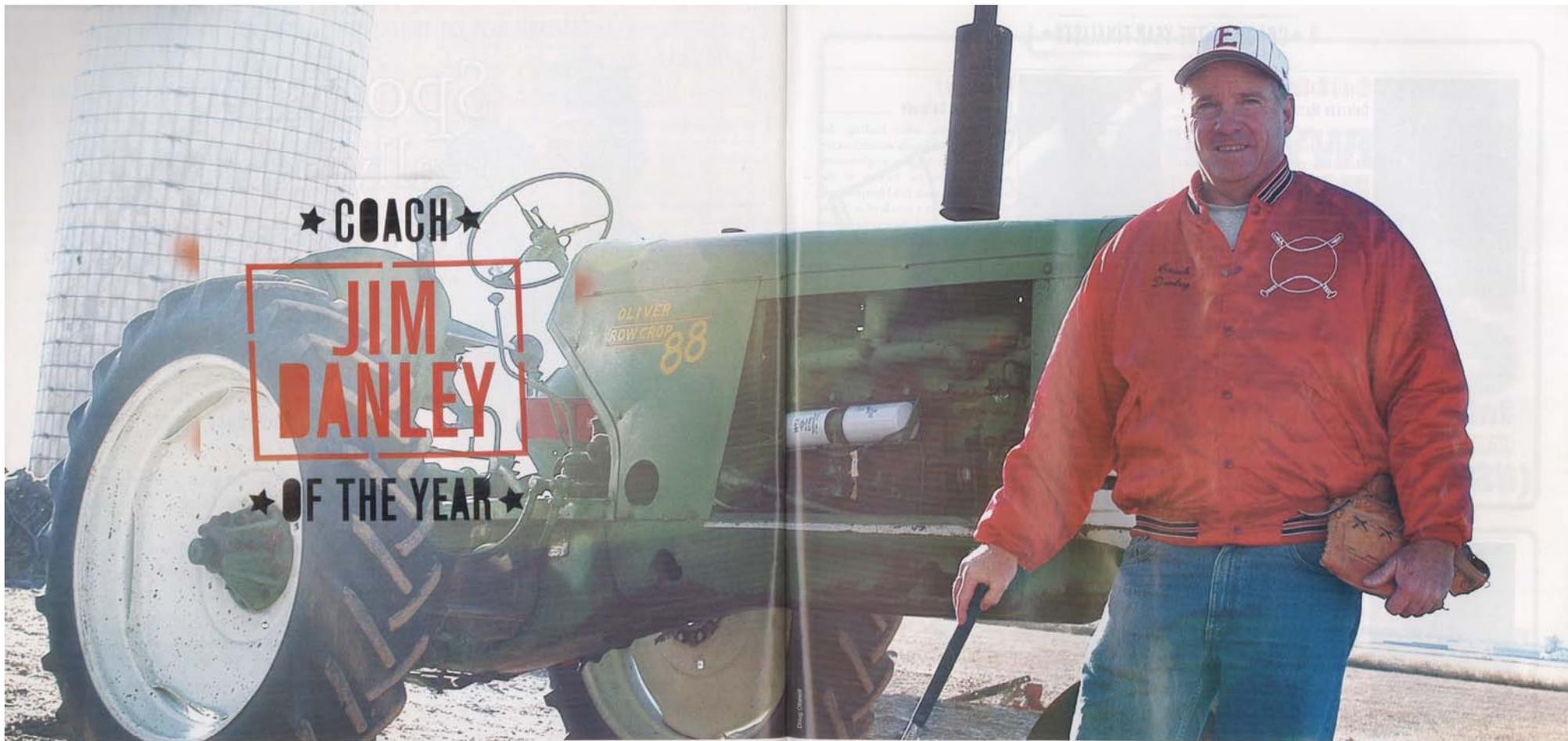
## WHAT A RUN

### THE DANLEY-ERVIN YEARS

Year	Wins	Losses	Final Four
1972	13	5	
1973	11	6	
1974	9	7	
1975	6	9	
1976	13	7	*
1977	9	7	
1978	11	6	
1979	14	5	
1980	13	6	
1981	19	3	*
1982	14	4	
1983	15	1	*
1984	17	1	
1985	21	2	*
1986	15	4	
1987	17	4	
1988	16	4	
1989	19	3	*
1990	16	3	
1991	14	9	*
1992	14	6	
1993	19	4	*
1994	20	3	*
(1st)			
1995	22	1	*
(1st)			
1996	18	6	*
1997	19	4	*
1998	24	0	*
(1st)			
1999	18	0	???
<b>Overall</b>	<b>436</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>.784</b>

played here and have taken the program in the right direction," Danley said. "The credit should go to the entire community and the coaches and players who have worn the pinstripes."

But all along the way, Danley and Ervin have been there to nurture this baby. A baby that has captured the attention of every baseball fan in the state.



★ COACH ★  
**JIM DANLEY**  
 ★ OF THE YEAR ★

Dynasties are a thing of the past in today's world of sports. The days of the Boston Celtics winning 11 NBA titles in 13 seasons have long since past. The era of the Montreal Canadiens drinking from Lord Stanley's Cup every year is but a distant memory. And there will never be a time when an NFL team will once again dominate like the Green Bay Packers did in the 1960s. Parity is en vogue, making every team a contender in nearly every season.

While the prime examples of this phenomenon exist at the pro level, it has trickled down to the college and high schools ranks, as well. Notre Dame isn't the crown jewel of the collegiate gridiron anymore, Duke isn't hoisting a hoops banner after every season and

the folks at the CHSAA no longer have every trophy pre-engraved with "Cherry Creek" on the nameplate. Times have changed.

But there remains one final vestige to a bygone era, one lone program that dares to defy this evolution – the Eaton High School baseball team. In a small town located just seven miles north of Greeley, they've built a dynasty that harkens back to the days of Mickey Mantle and his juggernaut New York Yankees.

This season, the Fighting Reds captured their third straight 3A title – beating archrival La Junta by a 17-10 count in the championship game. The victory marked Eaton's sixth consecutive trip to the final game and fourth title since 1998. It also proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that head coach Jim Danley has built

the best program – in any sport, at any level – in the state of Colorado.

Danley took over at Eaton in 1972 and has been rewriting the record books ever since. In his 32 seasons at the helm, the Fighting Reds have posted a 530-135-1 record and won six state titles. The Reds have played in 10 of the last 11 state championships. Given the fact that players come and go, this incredible string of success can only be attributed to one thing – Danley's system.

While other schools and other coaches work to build a single team, Danley has spent more than

three decades assembling a method of teaching baseball that extends well beyond his current varsity roster. It permeates through every level, starting with the first time a youngster picks up a bat and culminating with his senior season as a Red. From day one, kids in Eaton learn Danley's Way – a system of baseball steeped in the fundamentals.

By the time they get to the high school diamond, the Fighting Reds are seasoned pros. As a result, they roll to one championship season after another – making Jim Danley the most successful coach in the Centennial State.



Dynasties are a thing of the past in today's world of sports... (full article on next page)

## Mile High Sports Magazine 2003 Haas Rock Awards

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# Coach OF THE Month



## Danley's will drives Eaton

With 8 state crowns, revered skipper forges on

BY RYANRUSSO  
The Alumni

**B**EFORE the 1998 Class 3A state baseball championship game, Eaton head coach Jim Danley approached leadoff hitter Jason Smith and told him, "You are going to play a key role in today's game."

"I am going to swing at the first pitch, coach," Smith replied. "I know he is going to throw a fastball down the pipe."

Danley turned to Smith, looked him in the eyes and said, "You do what you have to do," and trotted down the third-base line.

Sure enough, the first pitch thrown by Lamar High School's Brad Stiles was a fastball that Smith smoked for a line-drive base hit.

Eaton beat Lamar 3-1 that day, giving the Reds their third state championship.

"That's why Coach Danley has been so successful. He believes in his players and he just lets them play their game," said Smith, who became an all-conference outfielder for the University of Northern Colorado. Smith now works at The Ridge at Castle Pines North as a golf assistant.

Ten years later, on May 17, Eaton faced Lamar again in the Class 3A title game, defeating the Savages 4-1 for another Danley achievement.

Senior starting pitcher Kyle Ottoson, who will be attending South Mountain Community College in Phoenix in the fall, struck out 15 Savage batters. He pointed to Danley for his success. "Throughout four years of high school, he has changed me completely, making me into the ballplayer that I am today. He is a tremendous coach and that's all you can say," Ottoson said.

In a career that spans more than 36 years, Danley has willed himself to accomplish just about as much as a high school baseball coach can accomplish.

"In school we work with kids' minds. The mind can think and the mind can judge, but the third thing that the mind can do is to will, and I think that is something that we don't pay much attention to in modern-day society," Danley said. "You can find no successful people who didn't get there without the ability to will their way through the tough times."

Going into this season, Danley had a winning percentage of 91



Jim Danley has led Eaton to 13 of the last 16 state championship games, including a 4-1 win this year against Lamar. File photo

### JIM DANLEY

**School:**  
Eaton  
High School  
**Years:**  
36  
**Sports:**  
Baseball



#### DID YOU KNOW:

Coach Danley loves classical music, "It's a very well-kept secret. My mother was a concert pianist and I grew up listening to the world's greatest music."

percent over the last 10 years, and a winning percentage of 80 percent for his career. Even more impressive, he has led Eaton to 26 consecutive state tournament appearances, winning eight state championship titles.

And in January, Danley was inducted into the Colorado High School Activities Association Hall of Fame, adding to a résumé filled with awards and honors.

#### THANKS, GILL

Danley found his passion for baseball at a young age. "We moved in from the farm to Greeley when I was 8 years old and at that time there were really just two to three major activities," Danley said. "What you did was trade baseball cards in the morning and at noon you played baseball until it was time

to go home. I learned to love the game at that point."

The storied coach points to his father, Gilbert, as a source of inspiration: "My dad had always gone to great lengths to show me how to play the game properly. Back in those days, each town had [its] own team and in the town of Gill, Colorado, they had some great Mexican baseball players. My dad asked them to show me how to throw and how to hit. Those Mexican players and the town of Gill and those families got me into loving baseball."

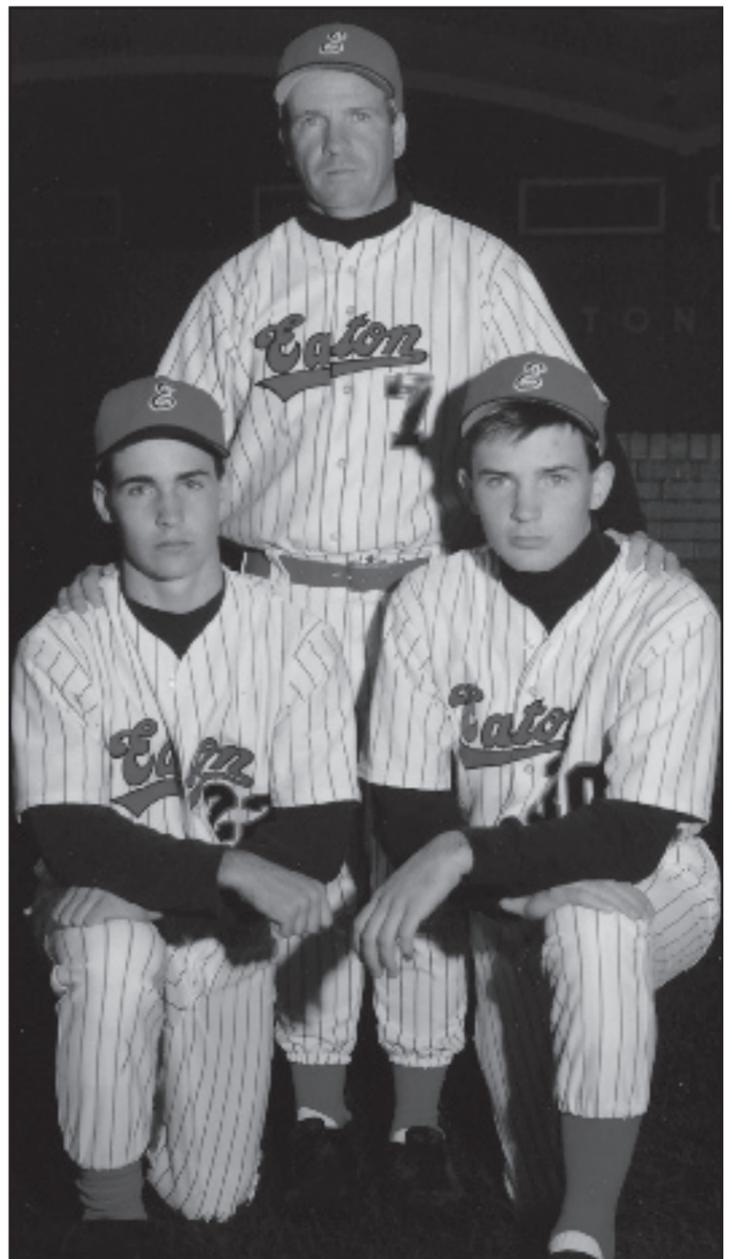
Danley served as a teacher and counselor at Eaton High School for 34 years. He founded the Eaton Elementary School Anti-Drug Character Building Program and directs the Eaton High and Middle School Anti-Drug Mentoring Program.

Eaton Athletic Director Steve Longwell said Danley is simply an outstanding individual. "It's not about just baseball with Jim," Longwell said, "it's about how he teaches the kids to approach life."

Former Eaton third basemen Mike Carrasco agreed: "He was more than my neighbor; he taught us more about life than about baseball," Carrasco said.

#### THE RECORD STREAK

Like Smith, Carrasco played for Danley during the school's state record run of 45 consecutive wins from 1998-99.



Jim Danley with his sons Kirk and Jimmy in 1992. File photo

Danley remembers the streak vividly and how it began: “The year before, we lost to Kent Denver 13-5 and I remember Smith, Jeff Meyers and Carrasco after the game with tears in their eyes and I remember them

coming up to me and saying, ‘Coach, this is not going to happen again.’

“Who knew what that could have meant at the time, but from that moment on, they never played a game

where they were not focused and mentally prepared.”

Carrasco remembers during the streak that the team played with great confidence. “If you have a coach who is all over you, you

don’t have much confidence. Coach Danley just let us play. He knew when to stop and he knew when to redirect us,” Carrasco said.

Danley said baseball is comprised of singular moments,

**“The mind can think and the mind can judge, but the third thing that the mind can do is will, and I think that is something that we don’t pay much attention to in modern day society.”**

**JIM DANLEY**  
Eaton baseball coach

and when individuals and teams believe in themselves, they can accomplish anything. “We played superior teams during the streak and we fell behind and came back several times,”

Danley said, “but those kids imposed their will on their opponents and they simply would not go away.”

Is there another streak in his future? Danley shows no sign of stopping. “As long as I’m getting

up every morning and my first thought is about baseball, I will still be here. I guess I haven’t changed from about the age of 4 years old,” Danley said.

Danley said life on the diamond can prepare kids for anything. “I can’t think of any

better preparation for the rough and tumble capitalistic world we live in than athletics and in my case baseball,” Danley said. “It is a great vehicle for life’s lessons.” ♦

## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- 8 state championships
- 15 championship game appearances
- 22 final four appearances
- 26 consecutive state tournament appearances (1983-2008)
- 29 conference championships
- 619-146-2 overall record (Colorado state record)
- 226-21-1 record over the last 10 years
- National High School Coaches Association Baseball Coach of the Year (2003)
- Colorado High School Coaches Association Hall of Fame inductee (2005)
- Colorado Sports Hall of Fame Special Citation Award (2003)
- 28 conference coach of the year awards
- Eaton Elementary School Anti-Drug Character Building Program (Founder)
- Eaton Optimists Club (Charter member)

— For more information, log on to  
[www.eatonbaseball.com](http://www.eatonbaseball.com)

# Eaton proud of dirty baseball caps

Jesse Horne

EATON - The Eaton baseball club is uniquely dressed for success.

Sure, they've won 14 state varsity and Legion baseball titles since 1994. Sure, they are ranked as one of the most dominant prep baseball programs in the nation.

But, ask them to tip their cap to salute their success. Off comes the hat - along with dirt, eye black and other grime collected over several seasons.

"Yeah, it's kind of become the thing that we do," Eaton manager Jim Danley said. "I'm not necessarily proud of those hats, but they are sort of a team-unifying thing."

The hideous hats will be on display Thursday night when Eaton hosts this year's American Legion Class B state tournament. The defending champs open double-elimination play against Holy Family - the team Eaton beat last season to win the title.

"That's a tough draw," Jim Danley said. "Holy Family is one of the outstanding programs in Colorado. So, we're fortunate to play them, in one sense. But, it means starting off the tournament with one of the top teams."

If anything, Eaton's loathsome lids could be an advantage. Whenever the Reds take the field tonight, Holy Family will have to see what remains of eight baseball caps.

"We hear a lot from visitors who aren't used to such an atrocity," Jim Danley said.

The tradition started in 1994, when the club went to the white hats, with red pinstripes and a bold, red 'E' on the front. It didn't take long for the players to make the gamer hats dirty and broken in.

"You know, you just weren't cool if your hat was too white," Jim Daley said. "So, it became a sign of experience and savoir-faire and it just followed from that point."

The dirty hats were on display for Eaton that '94 season - all the way to the Reds' first-ever baseball title. Since then, they've won a combined 14 varsity and Legion state championships.

"So, you know nobody is taking that hat off," Jim Danley said.

Jim's son, Kirk, was a player on that '94 title-winning team and said normally a dirty hat would make his father scorn.

"But after 23 years, to then finally get it, I think he kind of gave us a free pass to do it our own way from there on out," Kirk Danley, now an Eaton assistant coach, said.

For the players, the filth on a cap is just like medals on a soldier's chest. They are signs of battle and accomplishments on the field.

"Over 400 games, three state titles and a lot of dirt," Eaton's Adam Giesick said, while looking at his dirty cap.

Giesick said it's tradition to get only one hat when you start playing ball for Eaton. It's never washed or exchanged for a new one. In time, the dirt begins to accumulate. Also, the collected sweat inside can turn a hat into a biology experiment.

"It gets pretty bad on a hot day," Giesick said. "On cooler days, you're fine."

## Video Eaton's dirty hats

The Eaton baseball club is known for two things – winning and wearing filthy baseball caps.



Because of this, Giesick's hat is not brought inside his house.

"I leave it in my car," he said.

Sometimes, the hats get mutilated because of off-the-field incidents. Cory Dyer will only be a sophomore when the coming school year starts. Yet his hat already has a fun back story.

"I started playing and it got dirty," he said. "Then, I made the mistake of putting the hat on my floor in my bedroom."

Bad move. Dyer's Pekingese named Taz found it.

"I thought he would smell it and get away from it," he said.

"But, the dog loves the dirty hat just as much as we do."

Taz started gnawing at it as if it was just another chew toy. Now, there's a huge chunk of the hat taken out of the left side and teeth marks on the front bill.

Todd Garretson has heard the horror stories of the Eaton hats. As owner of Garretson's Sporting Goods in Greeley, he furnishes Eaton with the caps - before they are basically destroyed.

"We've tried to do repairs where dogs have chewed them up and we've had to try and sew it for them," he said. "I'll say 'Why don't you buy a new hat?' They'll say 'Well, this one's just broken in perfectly and I don't want to change it.'"

They start out as a pristine white, but Garretson knows it won't take long before the white becomes a dark brown.

"Once I take them out of here, they're on their own and who knows what happens," he said. "I've seen the gradual progression from this to something that looks like it's not even a cap."

So has Jim Danley. The winningest varsity baseball manager in Colorado high school history said he has a limit on how bad the grime can get - and one player crossed that line a few years ago.

"I had to threaten Zach Hughes - one of our greatest players ever - and said 'Zach, that one is just too over the top. You can't wear that hat,'" Danley said.

"I threatened him with burning it and then one fine day, I had to come through.

"I put gasoline on it, set it on home plate and said 'Zach, that's your hat over there. Get another hat!'"

Despite the baseball-playing, dog-chewing, fire-inciting moments for Eaton baseball over the last decade and a half, the hat has remained a symbol of pride for everyone that wears it.

"You can see it from the banners on the outfield wall and we're real proud of the accomplishments that these guys have had from generation to generation of ballplayers," Kirk Danley said. "Yeah, I think we feel like the dirty hat is worth a run or two in a close game."

Those that wear the hat know it's worth more than that.

"Other teams see the hats and see that we play to win," Dyer said.

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# Eaton considered the gold standard

**By Adam Dunivan, Special To The News  
May 20, 2004**

Among Class 3A baseball coaches, it has been said several times during the past three decades, but Faith Christian coach Ralph Nance felt it appropriate to reiterate when talking about the success of Jim Danley and the Eaton baseball program.

"I hope to get him one of these days," said Nance, whose team has gone 0-6 all-time against the Reds. "I'm going to get him before I retire."

Now, is as good a time as any for the Eagles, for a win Friday against the Reds in the 3A state semifinals would put them into the state championship game for the first time.

Nance knows well, though, that victories against the six-time 3A champions are few and far between.

"I can't imagine any program in the state that has been as consistently good as Eaton," Nance said. "They don't make mistakes, and they're not going to let you beat them with mistakes. They'll find a way to come back on you."

Eaton (20-3) returns to the semifinals as one of the most storied programs in Colorado prep sports history. The Reds recorded their 551st victory under Danley in a comeback win Saturday against Valley.

Looking for its fourth title in a row, Eaton will look toward pitchers Dusty Dominguez, Shane Dyer and Brett Myatt to carry them through the rest of the playoffs. Each pitcher threw a no-hitter this season, including Dominguez's perfect game against Burlington on May 1.

"It's always exciting to go play them," Nance said. "They are a class act, and it's just fun baseball."

# Kids just wanna be Reds

BY ROSS MAAK

Greeley Tribune

The proverbial "they" say that it takes a village to raise a child.

In Eaton, it takes an entire town to build a sports powerhouse.



● Community support good for Eaton / B6

It doesn't matter if one wants to talk about baseball, basketball, football, volleyball, tennis, swimming or gymnastics, there's always a success story to find.

There are a number of reasons for such huge success in this small town when it comes to high school sports, and no one understands them better than baseball coach Jim Danley, whose team just lost its bid for a second straight state championship.

"One thing is that it's important to the community," Danley said. "When you think of this community, you think of a group of people who have a lot of pride in what they do. When you go through town, you see that the streets are clean and the houses are well kept. They just take pride in doing things well."

That pride spills over into the high school, where the athletes are expected to win and usually meet expectations.

"That lays over into the athletic department, but it comes over academically as well," Danley said. "A lot of people don't realize this, but that state championship baseball team we had last year also had the best grade-point average of any team in the state. They were No. 1 in the state in academics and baseball."

That's something Danley takes pride in. However, focusing more specifically on the sport, Danley said the younger kids start playing early in Eaton.

"I think we're successful at the high school because we have a program for young kids and we can start them at early ages," Danley said. "No coach can win without coach players, and there are a lot of talented players that come up to the varsity level with impressive experience and understanding."

Danley along with assistant coach Bob Ervin started the summer baseball program for youth in Eaton in 1968.

"We had a total of 33 players in the entire program from age 6-18, and that included softball," Danley said. "Now, including softball, we've got close to 350 members."

While getting the lower leagues to work in harmony with the high school coaches isn't an easy thing to do, longevity at the coaching position has helped in Eaton.

"I think it helps that the coaches around here tend to stay," Danley said. "By planning on being around for a while, that allows the coach to bring the program along slowly. If you're only going to be there for three or four years, that doesn't give you time or the desire to spend some time with the younger kids and bring the program along that way."

Danley, the head baseball coach during the high school season and the coach of the Eaton Legion B team during the summer, keeps himself busy.

In fact, it would be very difficult to keep up with the younger kids without help.

High school players get in on teaching the younger players.

Eaton's Josh Noblitt, 12, has aspirations of playing professional baseball, but before that he hopes to wear an Eaton High varsity uniform.

"I was in the morning league for about six or seven years," said Noblitt, a sixth grader.

"And a few years ago the high school players had to teach morning league. They basically taught us how to hit, field and everything."

Noblitt went on to say it was nice to have those guys to look up to. In fact, when asked if he knew any of the players on the high school team now, Noblitt was able to rattle off the names of almost the entire team.

Ervin, who also coached the girls basketball team to a state championship this season and to a second-place finish in 1997, is also using his players now to recruit and teach players for the future.

"I'm planning a basketball camp for girls in June," Ervin said.

"It's going to be coached by mem-

bers of last year's state championship varsity team."

Ervin said the advantage of that is getting some of the kids who may have seen a girls basketball game last season a chance to work one-on-one with the players they saw on the court.

"When they get to know them by name, then maybe that will be incentive to work at it, and maybe we'll have some players that will turn out to be better than they would have," Ervin said.

The sports steeped in tradition aren't the only ones that are successful at Eaton.

The softball team played for the first time this year, and ended up finishing the season as one of the top four teams in the state.

"We were all ready to go at the beginning of the season, it was just a matter of getting everybody together," said coach Merrill Walker.

"We had girls from all different teams and levels."

Before last season, any Eaton girl who wanted to play softball had to go to another school, like Platte Valley or Windsor. So the girls who had some experience helped in the leadership role.

Walker also touched on a point Danley made.

"It's kind of ironic, but Danley runs the boys and I run the girls, and we're both right in the middle of things at the younger levels, too," Walker said. "We talk all the time. He's a great person to get ideas from."

"There are differences between baseball and softball, but there are so many similarities, too. Getting those younger players ready and playing them against tough competition at an early age, even if they get beat sometimes, is great for the program."

Danley lives by that.

"In baseball, we try to get the best competition available," Danley said. "I've always said that I'd prefer to lose a close game than beat a team that doesn't have the experience and skill to compete."

Lately, finding anyone to compete with Eaton sports is getting difficult.

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# The kids bleed Eaton red

SAM MUSTARI,

PUEBLO -- It's a good bet that Spencer Keirnes, Gus Jones, Sterling Monfort and Charles Keirnes will comprise a solid foursome on the golf course someday. But the group of Eaton's biggest, yet smallest fans, would rather make up half of the Reds' lineup card within the next five years.

Saturday afternoon, the Keirnes brothers, Sterling and Gus put together a game of catch in right field at Hobbs Field at Runyon Sports Complex, celebrating in their own way the heroics of the Eaton baseball team, which had just won its fourth straight Class 3A state championship.

"I know I want to be on the varsity someday, and Coach (Jim) Danley will know when I'm ready to play," said Spencer Keirnes, a 9-year-old who already strategizes his future much the same way Danley has guided the Reds to seven state titles.

Spencer is the runt of the bunch, but his goals are hardly dwarfed by those of his older brother, Charles, 13; Monfort, 13, and Jones, 12.

"I want to win a state title just like those guys," Jones said. "I know we can."

Danley, who has masterminded the Eaton Morning League, Pee Wee and Junior Legion programs longer than he'd like to remember, knows the importance of feeding success with success.

"It's important, and I enjoy the kids," said Danley, once a middle school counselor. "It's important that those kids feel like a part of all of this."

Some people stop just short of accusing him of directing a baseball factory on the plains north of Greeley.

Argue if you will, but there are no qualms when it comes to the bottom line, which reads 154-13 since 1998.

"I don't want anybody to think we're producing a factory-line product, but it starts with the kids," he said. "I really feel that a lot of successful programs start the same way."

The uniform of choice is red pinstripes, which Jones wore at Saturday's title game in support of his coaches, who double as players on the Reds' varsity roster.

"Every guy on this roster has coached the kids," Danley said. "That's what makes it so special. We notice things about them when they're young, which only helps to develop them as they reach high school age."

When asked if they could imagine playing for any other high school, the four future Reds said, "No way," in unison.

"My whole family is in Eaton, and they all watch us play," Charles Keirnes said.

Monfort, whose exposure to the sport stretches all the way to the major leagues -- his father Dick is a general managing partner of the Colorado Rockies -- has never imagined wearing something different than the Eaton pinstriped uniform, right down to the red-and-white pinstriped hat.

"All of us want to play for Eaton -- not anybody else," Monfort said.

There aren't many kids in Eaton who ever think of anything other than some day being a Red.

The list stretches back nearly four decades, and members of the current roster who are picking up state titles at a faster clip than they did catch-phrases as kids, remember what it was like to come up through the ranks.

"Oh man," Eaton left fielder Garrett Walker said, "my coaches were Jason Smith, Mike Carrasco and all the guys before us who won state titles.

"I think about it when I'm coaching the little kids now."

The future Reds are sometimes invited to sit in the dugout in American Legion games in the summer.

"They know that we pay attention to them," Danley said.

Even when their heroes were hogging the camera in a dogpile in front of the pitcher's mound after Saturday's last out, a small part of the Reds' future was already taking center stage in right field with visions of their own celebration, which is becoming an annual Eaton tradition.

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<http://www.greeleytribune.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20040523/NEWS/105230052&parentprofile=search&template=printart>

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# Strength comes from the people

## Town rallies around high school sports

BY ROSS MAAK

Greeley Tribune

One of the reasons for such a string of success recently in Eaton High School sports is the amount of community support the teams receive.

"There are also a lot of teams that are put together by parents in the community," Eaton baseball coach Jim Danley said. "And that's true in everything — volleyball, baseball, basketball, softball."

Danley and the rest of the Reds baseball team just concluded a record-setting year, winning 45 straight games before falling to Lamar in the championship game on Saturday.

"One important aspect is the parents and the community support," said Eaton softball coach Merrill Walker. "We couldn't possibly compete without them. The high school kids help and everything."

"It takes a lot of people to make this thing work."

Eaton didn't have a softball team before this season, but the first-year team still finished with a trip to the final four.

There's even a man out there who knows what it's like from just about every angle. Dave Barber was a teacher for 31 years — 25 in Eaton — and helps coach girls basketball, baseball and golf.

Barber had two kids graduate from high school this decade, but has continued to help with the sports programs at the high school even though his kids are gone.

"I was certainly glad to be coaching while they were playing, but I really enjoyed the coaching part," Barber said. "My son played baseball forever and was pretty successful, and when he was done I wasn't sure how I would feel about coaching."

"But I decided I really wanted to coach, and I still enjoyed it."

There is one specific aspect of



RICHARD M. HACKETT / Greeley Tribune

Eaton Middle School students Katie Frantz, 11, and Josh Noblitt, 12, hope to grow into varsity uniforms and continue a winning tradition.

coaching that Barber still enjoys, too.

"I just enjoy being around the kids," Barber said. "I enjoy the sports and the camaraderie that I have with the coaches, but it's really being around the kids, mainly."

Girls basketball coach Bob Ervin sees the parents and the community as a factor as well.

"The way they support the girls and get them to camps during the summer is great," Ervin said. "They're really willing to make an investment."

Ervin wasn't just talking finances, either.

"They are willing to put in the money, but they also have a time commitment," Ervin said. "I'm sure there are parents out there who

“

It takes a lot of people to make this thing work.

— Merrill Walker

Eaton softball coach

”

would rather be doing something else than taking their kids to camps and other activities, but they do it."

So far, the commitment from the community and the parents seems to be paying off.



The Denver Post / Andy Cross

Eaton coach Jim Danley has led the Reds to 32 straight victories.

## BIG RED MACHINE

Eaton, one of Colorado's baseball-crazy, small-town jewels, stands tall on the diamond with its beloved high-school Reds.

**E**ATON — They like to tell you they haven't changed their baseball uniforms for 27 years.

Presumably, they have peeled them off for laundry purposes. Maybe a few others because of rips and tears that no longer could be sewn, and, of course, when inevitable, physical growth by young ball-players being raised on or near farm land necessitates a fresh set of red pinstripes.

But the point is, Eaton's Fightin' Reds are consistent.

"We're a one-uniform town," veteran Eaton coach Jim Danley said, "and we have hundreds of them."

Indeed, the reigning power in Colorado Class 3A baseball lies in a rich

yet common area of about 2,000 down-to-earth folks located about 7 miles north of Greeley, which may have more pinstriped duds in closets than Chicago and Harlem in the 1930s.

### Sunday Focus

By Neil H. Devlin

Denver Post Sports Writer

are on a glorious run, one of the best in state annals on any level.

How good have these guys been?

"Very good, oh, yeah," Kent Denver coach Bill Boatman said. "They're the Big Red Machine."

Dominance in Colorado high-school

Truth is, these Reds and many of the ones before them have been a menace to opponents in Colorado-schoolboy baseball's mid-range level. They

baseball wasn't always relevant. For example, state records, which began in 1950, indicate that no school came close to Revere (Class EA), which won five straight championships in the same classification from 1969-73.

It took years and two big booms in the Rockies, which resulted in urban sprawl, for any instate program to stand up and handle parity. Technically, Colorado dropped its number of classifications from four to three in 1978 (Classes EA and WA became A) and it remained that way until 1991. A switch to five classes lasted for four years and it was dropped to four in 1994.

As a result, baseball, arguably the last holdout against the other 16 sanctioned sports, caved in and joined the haves-and-have-nots club.

Some have taken advantage. Case in point: Centennial League members have won every big-school championship this decade save for 1994 (Arvada West), led by Cherry Creek's four in a row since '95 and another in '92.

Lamar won five titles in six years in the mid-range enrollment group. La Junta (AA) won three straight in 1986-88.

Now in 3A, Paonia won the most recent three in 2A, from 1996-98.

As for Eaton, it has been right on Reds.

For instance:

■ The Reds have won three 3A titles in five years. Championships have come in 1994, '95 and last season.

■ Heading into the weekend, Eaton had won 32 consecutive games, eight in 1999. The Reds were the only unbeaten team in the state last season.

■ John Elway was a senior quarterback at Stanford University in 1982. Seems like a long time ago, doesn't it? It's also the last time Eaton didn't qualify for the playoffs. Hence, they've been just plain good for years in three, four or five classifications.

■ Eaton scored in double figures in 21 of 24 games last season. The Reds have done it seven times in eight tries this season.

■ The 1999 Reds have beaten two 3A teams (Greeley West and Thompson Valley) and two 4A teams (Sheridan and Windsor).

■ In 28 years as head coach of the Reds, Danley and his kids have piled up a 426-120 mark.

# Jim-dandy

T.M. Fasano, [fasano@greeleytrib.com](mailto:fasano@greeleytrib.com)

April 28, 2002

 [Comments \(0\)](#)  [Print](#)  [Email](#)

EATON -- The last thing in the world Jim Danley wants to talk about before he preps his baseball team for the postseason playoffs is himself.

The next to the last thing that Danley, the Eaton High School head baseball coach for the past 31 years, wants to talk about is the number.

The number in question that no other high school baseball coach in the history of Colorado has ever reached is 500. As in 500 victories. As in the first win of Danley's coaching career at Eaton began during the Richard Nixon presidency, an 11-4 win over Lafayette on March 18, 1972, in the second game of a doubleheader.

Danley's been at 500's front doorstep all season, but he'd rather sneak in through the back door with the lights off at 3 a.m. when everyone's asleep.

It's too late now, though. A 12-3 victory over the Platte Valley Broncos in Class 3A Northern Plains Conference action at Eaton High School on Saturday vaulted Danley into the nation's elite.

Danley became the first Colorado high school baseball coach in history to win 500 games.

"It hasn't really sunk in yet. I know when I sit down and think about all the years and players, it'll probably dawn on me the enormity and the length of time I've been out here," said Danley, who was presented with an autographed baseball bat from his Eaton squad commemorating the milestone after the victory.

"Those wins belong to the kids. It's been a wonderful and long experience."

Eaton's head baseball coach Jim Danley, left, keeps a close eye on the game while standing with his assistant coaches during the last inning of a doubleheader against Platte Valley. On Saturday, Danley became the first Colorado high school baseball coach to win 500 games.  
[jrydbom@greeleytrib.com](mailto:jrydbom@greeleytrib.com)">Jim Rydbom / Greeley Tribune

According to the 2002 National Sports Record Book published by the National Federation of State High School Associations, only 61 prep baseball coaches in the United States had more victories than Danley before the season started. We're talking all-timers here. Not one of those 61 coaches is from Colorado.

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According to the record book, Danley's ranked 14th in winning percentage (79 percent) among the nation's coaches with 500 or more victories, and fifth in winning percentage among the nation's coaches in the 500 club who are still active.

Platte Valley first-year coach Rob Westerfield would like to get into Danley's select company in the future. His Broncos (10-9) upset the Reds (16-3) 7-1 in the first game of Saturday's doubleheader making patient fans out of those who came to see win No. 500 in the first game.

"Hopefully, that's where I can go. I've got 490 more to go," laughed Westerfield after his team split a doubleheader against the Reds.

It's ironic that Danley, a 1964 College High School graduate who stands just 5 feet-8 inches tall, towers over every high school baseball coach who ever coached an inning in Colorado.

Old No. 7 in the red pinstripes doesn't want any attention directed his way, though. Weeks before Danley cracked win No. 500, Danley's oldest son, Jimmy, said his father would be happy if the No. 500 story appeared on the back page of the last section of the newspaper.

"He's very humble, and he tries to shy away from a lot of the media attention," Jimmy Jr. said. "He'd rather have the 500th game be reported that Eaton beat whomever 3-2 in the bottom of the seventh, rather than Danley wins 500th."

Danley requested that it get lost in the classified section somewhere.

He doesn't want the attention. He doesn't need the attention to validate his wonderful career at Eaton.

"It's just a function of time, and time plays tricks on you," said Danley, whose Reds are 107-9 since the start of the 1998 season. "When you start out, you never think of goals like that."

Danley said coaching continues to be a challenge for him. His wife of 34 years, Linda, said coaching is a mental challenge for her husband.

"He loves it because of the intelligence involved in the game.

There is so much strategy involved in baseball," Linda said.

Danley admits that coaching isn't just throwing out the bat and glove and holding a two-hour practice with games on weekends.

"In some ways, it's very difficult to attain and maintain because expectations are always high. It's always tough dealing with people and their kids," Danley said. "It's a difficult job, but I like the challenge of it. I'm unapologetic about teaching kids to be successful."

Danley's leading hitter on this year's team, Justin Ginther, said the 3A defending state champion Reds would be in the dumps without Danley.

"If we didn't have him, I guarantee you we wouldn't be in the spot we're at," said Ginther, a catcher who is hitting .629 this season. "He brings a certain knowledge of baseball to the game. I owe 100 percent of our victories to him."

When your record from 1972 to now is 500-133-1 with four state championships, six state runners-up, a state-record 45-game winning streak and the current string of nine straight Final Fours, the Danley approach should be copyrighted.

"Coach Danley is a genius. It's just the little things he does. He gets you playing with a lot of confidence," said Mike Carrasco, a former Reds batboy and 3A player of the year who currently is the starting third baseman at the University of Northern Colorado.

"He makes baseball fun, and he knows how to win."

With the success Danley continues to have, he can't hide from the attention. The 55-year-old Weld County native, who grew up on a farm in Gill, would like to, though.

Danley would rather talk about the hot bat Ginther is swinging, or his team's hits-to-runs ratio. He'd rather talk about how his young pitching staff is trying to perfect the knuckle curveball, the pitch that helped put Eaton baseball on the map.

Danley would rather talk about the Eaton community and school support he's received through the years. Or maybe he'll tell you a baseball story that only he can spin. Or maybe he'll talk about how a player such as Reds third baseman Chris Swain started playing T-ball in Eaton at age 5 while being coached by one of Danley's high school players. Twelve years later, Swain and his teammates are returning the favor by coaching future Reds in the Eaton youth baseball summer program.

Yeah, Danley will talk about all of this. But he looks as though he's ready to have a root canal when the attention is directed toward him.

Eaton baseball coach Jim Danley, right, is congratulated after winning his 500th game by teammates, family and friends after a doubleheader against Platte Valley. Danley became the only Colorado high school coach ever to win 500 games on Saturday afternoon.  
[jrydbom@greeleytrib.com](mailto:jrydbom@greeleytrib.com)">Jim Rydbom / Greeley Tribune

Let one of the best players to ever come out of Eaton talk a little about Danley. Mike Anderson, the former Eaton and University of Northern Colorado star, was an eighth-round draft pick by the California Angels. The 1983 Eaton graduate spent four seasons in the Angels' organization, and he is in his eighth season as an assistant baseball coach for the University of Nebraska. Danley is much more than a baseball coach to Anderson.

"Beside my father and mother, he is one of the most amazing individuals I have ever met. The impact he's had on kids' lives is tremendous," Anderson said. "There are Danley kids out there left and right. I don't care if they're doctors, baseball coaches, policemen, they all have Jim Danley stories."

The one thing that Danley prides himself on is that he's more than a teacher of baseball.

"His avenue is baseball, but what he does is teach life. Baseball is only an avenue to get to the kids," Anderson said. "He's a storyteller from 25 years back, and there's always a point to the story. Guys will look back on their life and say, 'You know, Danley told me that was going to happen.'"

Bob Ervin started coaching the high school team at Eaton with Danley in 1972 and retired following the 2000 season. If there's someone who knows Danley the baseball man, Ervin is it.

"Baseball is his passion. He is a baseball coach, not that he is not a good counselor or wasn't a good teacher. It's more than a job to him," Ervin said. "He works very hard at doing the very best that he can. The first day of 1972 was the same as he was yesterday."

Danley is as humble as they come. The fact that he is so humble reflects on how opposing coaches view him.

Lamar Savages baseball coach Dave Fassiotto is 1-1 against Danley in state championship games. The Savages snapped the Reds' 45-game winning streak in a 10-2 win over the Reds in the 3A state title game in 1999, a year after losing to the Reds, 3-1, in the '98 state championship game.

"His teams are always mentally and physically prepared to play the game. His teams always play the game the way it's supposed to be played," Fassiotto said. "They go out and play baseball with a mission. They've got classy players, and Jim keeps them that way."

One coach in the state whose record mirrors Danley's is 30-year Cherry Creek coach Marc Johnson, who was 458-112 heading into this season. Grand Junction High School's Bill Fanning, who finished his career with 467 victories, is another Colorado prep baseball coach who came close to 500 wins.

The 57-year-old Johnson, who has won seven state championships with two state runners-up at the big schools level, has all the respect in the world for Danley.

"I think you have to have an absolute love of the game and a commitment from the kids who have played for you. I know that Jim is extremely well respected by his ex-players because I've had a chance to talk to some of them," Johnson said. "Nobody respects what he's done more than I do because I understand it."

He and I are probably kind of a different breed."

How much longer Danley continues to coach the Reds is anyone's guess. He plans to retire as a guidance counselor after the school year, but he said he will remain as the Reds' baseball coach. As far as Danley ever moving on to coach somewhere else, he said he looked at a few college coaching opportunities, but he felt that Eaton was the best place to raise his two boys, Kirk and Jimmy, with Linda.

Kirk and Jimmy say their father is a success because of his attention to detail, his anticipation to what the other team might do, his intense scouting reports and the way he teaches the game.

Kirk knows exactly when his father will give up the game.

"If he ends up dying waving a guy home to score the winning run, I think that will probably be his preference," Kirk said.

Knowing Danley, he would cringe in baseball heaven having to read about his own accomplishments in the next day's obituaries.

### **Road to 500**

WIN NO. DATE OPPONENT SCORE

1 March 18, 1972 Lafayette 11-4

100 March 23, 1981 Windsor 4-2

200 March 30, 1987 Platte Valley 16-2

300 April 3, 1993 Poudre 9-6

400 March 28, 1998 Wray 23-4

500 April 27, 2002 Platte Valley 12-3

## Amidst celebration, Danley misses opportunity to teach

T.M. Fasano, [fasano@greeleytrib.com](mailto:fasano@greeleytrib.com)

April 29, 2002

Something was sorely missing when Eaton baseball coach Jim Danley's 500th victory celebration came to an end. You better check the Reds' dugout. Danley might still be in uniform holding the 500th victory commemorative baseball bat waiting to talk to his players.

After the handshakes, back slaps and hugs came to an end Saturday at Eaton High School, Danley was left with his family, some friends, 500 victories and no baseball team to give a speech to. Danley's been known to give longer postgame speeches to his players than the actual game they played in. That's after the Reds just 10-runned somebody, too.

"If there is one thing he's known for it would be his after-game speeches. Anybody who played at Eaton knows about those," said Danley's oldest son, Jimmy, a 1992 Eaton graduate who played outfield for his father. "You may play a game that lasts an hour and a half, but if something bad went on you're going to sit there for two hours. You're going to go through every pitch, if necessary."

Jimmy said some of Danley's most memorable speeches have come after victories.

"We'd come in and everybody's excited. We'd just 10-runned some team," Jimmy said. "We may sit there for an hour and a half going through every last thing. A lot of times in those victories is where we make most of the mistakes."

Danley won't dispute the fact that his players put in overtime listening to him after games.

"I've gone past midnight on a few summer occasions. To me, the time to correct things is right away when it's fresh in my mind. I don't like the teaching moment to get away from them," Danley said. "It doesn't have anything to do with the score. It's about playing the game correctly. Baseball is comprised of so many little things that if you let them get away from you at the time, they tend to get away from you all together."

Danley briefly talked to his troops following the Reds' 7-1 loss to Platte Valley in the first game, but didn't deliver the verbal goods after win No. 500, a 12-3 victory over the Broncos.

What happened?

"They had prom, so they had to get their stuff. I didn't get to run them, either," Danley said.

Watch out for that speech before today's practice, though. Danley wasn't happy with how his team played in the first-game loss, and he'll probably have a few things to say about what his players did wrong in the win.

"I know it was a milestone, but it's still the little things that we messed up on are what we're going to go over Monday," Danley said. "I'll tell you that."

When Danley retires from coaching, he'll be remembered for all those wins and all those speeches after games. Danley could go on the public speaking circuit when he's through and command big dollars by going into dugouts after games and giving speeches.

Put him in a dugout with 15 or 20 sweaty players and Danley turns into Tony Robbins.

"It's just not in the spring. It's even worse in the summer. When we played Legion B in the summer, we'd get done playing a game at 10 o'clock at night and we wouldn't leave until 11:30 and we'd beat a team 15-0 or 15-1," said former Reds star Mike Carrasco, who plays third base for the University of Northern Colorado.

Danley just doesn't work his oratory skills after games.

"Even before practice, we'd get to practice at 3, and we didn't actually start practice until 4:30," Carrasco said. "He'd be in the dugout talking to us about what he saw in the paper or on TV about baseball. He's such a good speaker, that I think it's just natural that we wanted to listen to him."

Danley wants to make sure his players are aware of every aspect that went on in the game they just played.

Danley has always given the speeches throughout his 31 years at Eaton. Former Reds standout Mike Anderson, a 1983 Eaton graduate who is an assistant coach for the University of Nebraska baseball team, remembers Danley's speeches from 20 years ago.

"He would have his dang notebook out and write things down. It was a given that after a game you were going to sit down and talk and learn things," Anderson said. "I'm a baseball coach today because of Coach Danley and because of those meetings."

- BETTER WITH AGE . It took Danley nine years (1972-81) to win his first 100 games, six years (1981-87) to win his second 100 games, six years (1987-93) to go from Nos. 200 to 300, five years (1993-98) to reach No. 400 and an incredible four years (1998 2002) to go from Nos. 400 to 500. The way the 55-year-old Danley is pumping out the wins, he should hit No. 600 by his 60th birthday.



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## *Greeley Tribune Article*

### **So long Coach H.**

#### **Eaton bids adieu to well-known volunteer**

*EATON - Martin Hernandez wore his love and passion for Eaton High School baseball to his grave.*

*Hernandez, who died last Friday, was buried in his Eaton Reds baseball uniform Wednesday as the entire team and coaching staff attended the funeral. When the Reds travel to Burlington for a Class 3A Patriot League doubleheader Saturday against the Cougars, a duplicate of Hernandez's No. 9 pinstriped jersey will hang in the dugout. Reds' head coach Jim Danley said the jersey will hang in the dugout for home and away games the remainder of the season as a tribute to Hernandez, who served as a Reds' volunteer pitching coach for 13 years.*

*"That was one thing he was very adamant about. He wanted to be buried in his uniform," said Todd Hernandez, Martin's only son who coaches and teaches at Highland High School. "He loved Eaton baseball."*

*Todd, a 1991 Eaton graduate, was an outstanding first baseman for the Reds. He understood exactly what his father was talking about when Martin asked to be buried in the red-and-white pinstripes.*

*"Coach Danley always talked about that when you put on a jersey with Eaton on the front it should mean something, and it always did for my dad," Todd said.*

*Reds third baseman Chris Swain said Danley told the team last Saturday that Hernandez wanted to be buried in his Eaton uniform.*

*"Right there our jaws dropped. It was like, 'Wow.' We realized that we've got to win for coach," Swain said. "He would always be smiling, and he'd always lighten up the mood. Our team has dedicated the season to him."*

*The two-time defending 3A state champion Reds also will honor Hernandez, who died of a heart attack at the age of 64 after complications from diabetes, in another way. The Eaton players will wear a white patch with black lettering spelling out Hernandez's initials (JMH for J. Martin Hernandez) on their right shoulder of their uniform.*

*"Growing up in the program, playing there since I was 5, having a chance to coach some of those kids who are on that team and seeing what a difference he made to all of those lives, I couldn't be prouder of my father and the man that he was and always will be," Todd said.*

*Danley said after the Reds won the state championship last year, the team went to Hernandez's house because he couldn't make it to Denver.*

*"We pulled a 60-passenger school bus up in front of his house, and we presented the trophy to him," Danley said.*

*Reds senior rightfielder Junior Barrios was especially close to Hernandez. He said Hernandez helped him fit in when he was a freshman and sophomore.*

*"He'll be with us wherever we go now. He's in a better place, and he'll be watching over us," said Barrios, the younger brother of former Reds standout Mike Carrasco. "He was always there to make us smile."*

*Carrasco, a 1999 Eaton graduate and starting third baseman for the University of Northern Colorado, said Hernandez was the guy the players could go to if they had to talk about something.*

"Coach Hernandez was an outlet for us who we could go to and converse about life and girls," Carrasco said. "He was always there to lean on. He was a mentor for us all. He's one of the big reasons why Eaton baseball's on the map."

Reds senior left-handed pitcher Eric Kelly said Hernandez was one of the biggest influences in baseball that he's had.

"There was a good vibe around him. No matter what happened, he was always happy," Kelly said. "The only way I could ever picture him was with the biggest smile, especially when we were out on the baseball field."

Danley said the loss of Hernandez, who also assisted Danley with Eaton's Legion B summer program, will be hard to take because Hernandez was so much a part of Eaton's success.

"He was 100 percent all day, everyday Eaton baseball. He'd call me up in the middle of November and say, 'Hey, I just got to thinking about that lineup we talked about last week. If they throw a left-handed pitcher, do we want to change hitters four and five?' We were our own Hot Stove League," Danley said. "He knew how to break in kids gloves by tying them, putting them in water and putting on all the ingredients in exactly the right order and right day."

Hernandez suffered from diabetes for the last 26 years and had his right leg amputated in January 2002. Todd said his father's kidneys were failing him, his eyesight was going and he had congestive heart failure the last two years.

Hernandez was a standout pitcher for Greeley High School when the program won the state title in 1957 under head coach Pete D'Amato, and he also pitched for the semi-pro Greeley Grays.

The last time Hernandez sat in the Eaton dugout for a game was at the regional championship game against University at Butch Butler Field last May. Having the No. 9 jersey hanging in the Eaton dugout will be special for Todd.

"Not being able to go out there and be with the kids and experience the game bothered him," Todd said. "Now I'd like to think he has a front-row seat being able to watch them play."

Danley knows his former coaching friend will have the best seat in the house.

"I spent thousands and thousands of hours with him the last few years. He was the greatest supporter Eaton baseball ever had. He was a gentle, kind and warm-hearted fellow who I can't imagine had an enemy in the world," Danley said. "He's irreplaceable. I won't know who to call up in the middle of winter in the middle of the night to talk baseball."

### Haircut out of respect

EATON - Not too many adults can get through to a teenager when it comes to their hair.

Count Martin Hernandez, the former Eaton Reds pitching coach who died a week ago, as one who could. Reds senior left-handed pitcher Eric Kelly, 18, recalls the last time he talked to Hernandez, and it had nothing to do about pitching.

"I remember the last thing he ever told me was to cut my hair because I had really long hair," Kelly said. "I'd grown it out since the beginning of school and it was really long at the end of basketball season."

Kelly said Hernandez told him he didn't like long hair. "He said, 'Make sure you go to the mall and get your haircut.' I went the next day and got it cut for him," Kelly said. "I didn't want to cut it, but I had to do it for coach."



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If you wish to view rankings for a different sport and year, you must change the sport and year above.

Note: To re-sort data in table simply select the column header you wish and click.

Rank	School	State	Overall	League	Rating	Strength	Mov.	More
1	Eaton (CO)	CO	17-0	10-0	15.2	4.4	+1	[+]
2	Cherry Creek (Greenwood Village, CO)	CO	14-5	10-4	13.4	6.8	+2	[+]

3	Rocky Mountain (Fort Collins, CO)	CO	14-4	10-0	12.7	6.8	-2	[+]
4	Fort Collins (CO)	CO	11-2	7-1	12.6	7.6	+1	[+]
5	Granada (CO)	CO	8-0	6-0	12.4	1.9	+5	[+]
6	Cherokee Trail (Aurora, CO)	CO	18-4	10-4	12.3	6.5	--	[+]
7	Rampart (Colorado Springs, CO)	CO	18-1	15-1	12.2	2.3	-4	[+]
8	Green Mountain (Lakewood, CO)	CO	15-2	8-0	11.7	6	--	[+]
9	Mountain Vista (Highlands Ranch, CO)	CO	15-3	9-1	11.6	5.1	+2	[+]
10	Regis Jesuit (Aurora, CO)	CO	15-3	9-2	11.1	4.3	-1	[+]
11	Holy Family (Broomfield, CO)	CO	16-1	12-0	10.4	0.8	+10	[+]
12	Fairview (Boulder, CO)	CO	14-4	8-2	10.3	5.7	+1	[+]
13	Grand Junction (CO)	CO	15-2	8-1	10.2	3.3	+3	[+]
14	Chatfield (Littleton, CO)	CO	12-5	6-2	10	5.3	-7	[+]
15	Broomfield (CO)	CO	17-1	15-1	9.8	2.2	-1	[+]
16	Mountain View (Loveland, CO)	CO	17-2	14-2	9.7	1.8	-4	[+]
17	Smoky Hill (Aurora, CO)	CO	11-8	9-5	9.5	6.6	+3	[+]
18	Brush (CO)	CO	14-4	9-2	9.3	4.3	+13	[+]
19	Caliche (Iliff, CO)	CO	12-0	2-0	9	0.7	+27	[+]
20	Mullen (Denver, CO)	CO	12-6	9-5	9	5.6	-5	[+]
21	Grandview (Aurora, CO)	CO	12-6	9-4	8.9	6.5	-3	[+]
22	Ralston Valley (Arvada, CO)	CO	13-5	5-3	8.7	4.6	-3	[+]
23	Dakota Ridge (Littleton, CO)	CO	9-6	7-1	8.7	6.6	+1	[+]
24	Arapahoe (Littleton, CO)	CO	10-9	6-8	8.5	6.9	-7	[+]
25	Doherty (Colorado Springs, CO)	CO	13-4	11-3	8.3	2.7	-3	[+]

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1 | Next

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Rank	School	State	Overall	League	Rating	Strength	Mov.	More
1	Mater Dei (Santa Ana, CA)	CA	17-3	7-3	17.1	11.4	+3	[+]
2	College Park (The Woodlands, TX)	TX	18-3	10-1	17.1	11.1	+8	[+]

3	Edison (Huntington Beach, CA)	CA	16-3	9-1	16.5	10.1	+3	[+]
4	El Toro (Lake Forest, CA)	CA	17-3	9-1	16.4	10.2	+1	[+]
5	Eau Claire North (Eau Claire, WI)	WI	5-0	1-0	16.2	7.1	--	[+]
6	Desert Ridge (Mesa, AZ)	AZ	22-5	5-1	15.9	10.4	-3	[+]
7	Bishop Gorman (Las Vegas, NV)	NV	29-2	13-0	15.7	5.1	+9	[+]
8	Crown Point (IN)	IN	12-0	5-0	15.6	5	+22	[+]
9	JSerra Catholic (San Juan Capistrano, CA)	CA	17-4	8-2	15.6	11	+6	[+]
10	Highland (Gilbert, AZ)	AZ	22-7	8-4	15.6	11.2	-3	[+]
11	Owasso (OK)	OK	24-3	4-1	15.5	7.2	+62	[+]
12	Kenowa Hills (Grand Rapids, MI)	MI	6-0	0-0	15.5	5.5	--	[+]
13	Pinnacle (Phoenix, AZ)	AZ	22-5-2	5-2	15.5	9.3	+22	[+]
14	Central Mountain (Mill Hall, PA)	PA	12-1	12-1	15.3	8.2	-1	[+]
15	Bellefonte (PA)	PA	10-2	9-2	15.2	9.2	+132	[+]
16	Eaton (CO)	CO	17-0	10-0	15.2	4.4	+252	[+]
17	Georgetown (TX)	TX	24-7	10-3	15.2	10.7	--	[+]
18	St. Francis de Sales (Toledo, OH)	OH	3-0	0-0	15.1	7.4	--	[+]
19	Marina (Huntington Beach, CA)	CA	18-3	8-2	15.1	9.4	-7	[+]
20	Horizon (Scottsdale, AZ)	AZ	19-9	3-3	15.1	12.1	-18	[+]
21	Wheaton North (Wheaton, IL)	IL	16-0	9-0	15.1	7.4	+33	[+]
22	Divine Child (Dearborn, MI)	MI	5-1	3-1	15	9.3	--	[+]
23	The Woodlands (TX)	TX	13-6-1	8-4	15	11.7	-14	[+]
24	Kirkville (MO)	MO	12-1	6-1	14.9	7	+64	[+]
25	Cy-Fair (Cypress, TX)	TX	11-5	7-1	14.9	12	-17	[+]

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2	Anselmo-Merna (Merna, NE)	8-0	11	124	D2 District 8 (8 Man)
3	Ablene (TX)	8-0	7	127	5A Region 1 District 3
4	Bingham (South Jordan, UT)	8-2	3	170	5A Region 3
5	Arnold (NE)	8-2	20	206	Six-man (6 Man)
6	Ansley (NE)	7-1	24	242	D2 District 8 (8 Man)
7	Eden Prairie (MN)	10-0	2	247	Lake

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