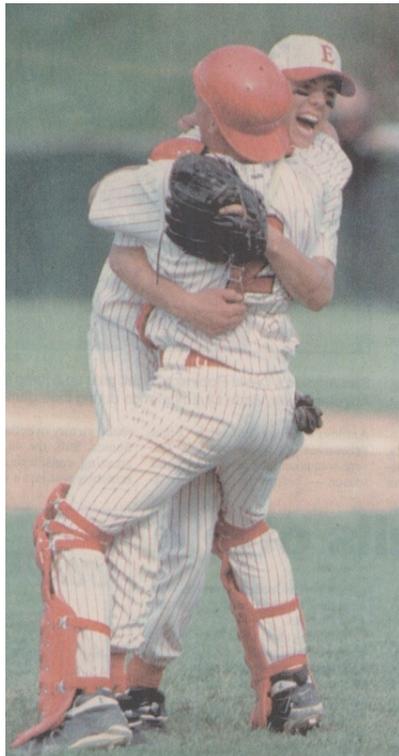


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*Russ Shelton pitches Reds to '95 State Championship, earning his 5<sup>th</sup> postseason win of the season*

# LEGENDARY RED'S HARD WORK LED TO A STATE TITLE THEN, AND ALL KINDS OF SUCCESS NOW

The Reds' history is filled with a number of legends that have put together storied careers in leading the Reds to great victory. Some Reds' pitchers have almost single-handedly won huge games for their Reds' teammates. A select few have done that throughout the course of an entire season. Arguably no one though has ever put together a single season as Russ Shelton did in 1995.

Shelton not only earned the Reds' record—that still stands today—with 5 postseason wins, and a 12-0 record on the season, Shelton pitched in every critical situation throughout the entire season.

In 1995, the Reds went 22-1. Of those 22 wins, Shelton earned 12 of them. In the remaining 10 wins, Shelton closed out 3 of them to hold onto late-inning leads. In the District Semifinals, in a must-win game, Shelton threw a complete-game four-hit shutout against Valley, allowing no runners to even reach 2<sup>nd</sup> base. Shelton also doubled home two runs and scored to take a commanding lead. Then in the District Championship, Shelton entered the game in the 7<sup>th</sup> inning to send the game into the 8<sup>th</sup> inning, where the Reds then scored before Shelton retired the side in order for his 2<sup>nd</sup> win of the day.

The following weekend in Regionals, Shelton wasn't needed in the first game of the day, as the Reds scored 8 runs in the first inning to put the game away early. In the Regional Championship, Shelton doubled home two runs to give the Reds a 6-0 lead in the 2<sup>nd</sup> inning. Shelton then finished the complete-game shutout on the mound allowing just two hits the rest of the way, including the game-ending hit as the Reds rolled to a 10-0 win over Denver Christian in 5 innings.

Then in the State Semifinals. Shelton allowed only 4 hits through 6 innings before the Reds had taken a commanding 8-run lead over Kent Denver. By not having to throw the 7<sup>th</sup> inning, the Reds saved back Shelton's arm for the State Championship Game that would be played only hours later.

With the Reds going for back-to-back State Championships, Shelton started the game at DH and drew a walk to load the bases that later led to the Reds taking a 1-0 lead. Shelton then took the mound in the 3<sup>rd</sup> inning with two runners on and no outs. Shelton then retired the top of Salida's batting order consecutively, without allowing a ball out of the infield. He then mowed through batters in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> innings. Going into the bottom of the 6<sup>th</sup> inning though, the Reds were tied 1-1, and had managed only 1 hit on the day. After the Reds used a walk, a sacrifice bunt, a wild pitch, and a sacrifice fly to take a 2-1 lead, Shelton took the mound again in the 7<sup>th</sup> inning with a chance to secure the State Championship. After a groundout, a single put the tying run on base, before Shelton induced another groundout that moved the tying run into scoring position.

Facing Salida's leadoff hitter, with two outs and the State Championship on the line, Shelton had already thrown 170 pitches on the day to get the Reds to this point. He wouldn't need many more pitches though, as he threw a pair of the best knuckle curveballs of his life to get within a strike of the Championship. Then after wasting a fastball high, Shelton fired a knuckle curve that snapped right into the bottom of the strike zone for the final out to send the Reds to their 2<sup>nd</sup> straight dogpile.

Shelton was named Tournament MVP and Class 3A Player of the Year for his efforts. Those votes had to be unanimous amongst the members of the media, as they certainly would have garnered unanimous votes throughout the Eaton dugout as well. The Reds had provided Shelton with offensive support of just one hit in the State Championship Game, and just two runs. But that was enough for Shelton to do the rest.

In addition to simply winning every meaningful battle throughout the year, Shelton also hit over .450 and slugged over .700 as one of the few power hitters on a team of scrappy singles hitters that set Reds' records for on-base percentage, walks, and hit by pitches. This was no better exemplified than in the State Championship when the Reds scored their first run on a bases-loaded full-count walk with two outs, and then scored after two sacrifice hits gave the Reds the lead again in the 6<sup>th</sup> inning. Playing hard wasn't asked of these players, it was simply demanded by the players themselves of each and every other Red on their team.

Shelton's hard-nosed approach on the mound led him to great collegiate opportunities, first playing the summer after high school on the Greeley Bears, as one of only two players on the roster that hadn't yet experienced college baseball, and then with a scholarship to pitch at Doane College, a 4-year university in Nebraska. At Doane, Shelton quickly moved up during the fall season to become the #3 starter on the team, behind only two senior starters. Shelton would have probably surpassed them too by spring, but circumstances changed for Shelton and he was given an opportunity to start raising a family with his high school sweetheart that had followed him to Doane as well.

Walking away from baseball is incredibly difficult for any baseball player, but Shelton kept his priorities in clear sight. Russ married Emily in December of that year, and they gave birth to their first child, Madeline (Maddy) the following spring. To support his family, Russ drew upon the work ethic that he had grown up with, and that had shown its benefits for the Reds in 1995. (In 1994, Shelton suffered a broken foot that sidelined him for the summer; he spent the entire fall and winter throwing thousands of knuckle curves to master the pitch in the way that only a couple of his predecessors had been able to do.)

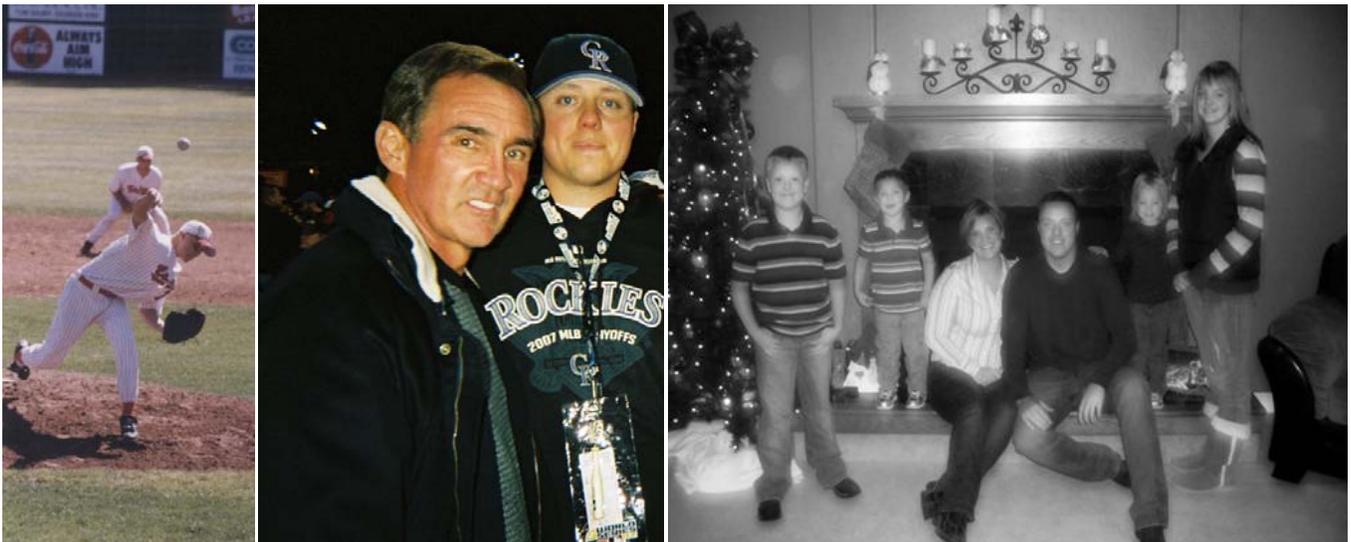
Shelton didn't just go to work to make some money for his family, he also took college classes from 8am to 1pm each weekday. He then went to work at 6pm and worked through to 6am as a dispatcher at Monfort Transportation. His 17-hour school and workdays continued throughout 1996. Shelton then advanced his career by going to work at American Eagle, a Budweiser distributor in Fort Collins. Shelton worked hard there as well to earn a promotion to route supervisor. To earn additional money for his family, Shelton then took a job in the oil and gas field that had him work 6 days a week from 6am to midnight or later each day.

17 or 18 hours of work a day must not have seemed too difficult for a guy that once carried the entire Reds' team on his back, and that pitched in every meaningful situation, including throwing over 170 pitches to win the State Championship. It likely would have killed most of us mere mortals, but not Russ. By 2001,

Shelton had advanced to where he began working for Badger Daylighting, which is North America's leading hydrovac excavation contractor, providing excavating, shoring, potholing and trenching services.

Shelton moved from the local Badger franchise to working for Badger's corporate office, working in business development. By 2007, Shelton was promoted to Regional Manager for the entire Southwest United States. By 2008, Shelton took over the entire Western U.S. for the company.

To win the State Championship, Shelton had to earn wins along the way against private schools Denver Christian and Kent Denver, with players from a more privileged background. Shelton was just a workhorse that outmuscled and outfought these opponents. Blue-collar defeated blue-blood back then, and Shelton has worked hard to ensure more of the same after his playing days. Shelton has received promotion after promotion to where he now oversees operations for the entire Western United States for Badger and the staff that handles business development, safety, maintenance, and parts and inventory in 14 locations from California to Texas to North Dakota and back to the West Coast.



*Shelton pitching in '95 State Championship; Shelton and his former Reds' teammates actually had to walk from his '07 World Series seats up a few rows to take a photo with Broncos' Coach Mike Shanahan; the Shelton family*

While there is nothing blue collar about the huge house the Sheltons now enjoy in Eaton, Shelton's success is simply a product of the work ethic and commitment to winning that was fostered throughout his days in the pinstripes. Russ's wife, Emily, was a star athlete at Eaton as well and is the sister of one of the Reds' other legendary players, Paul Loftis, that spent an entire offseason with Russ developing the knuckle curve to help lead the Reds to the then-state record of 45 straight wins. Russ and Emily have four children: Maddy, 14, Austin, 10, and twins Weston and Brooklyn at 4 years of age.

Russ hasn't just helped coach the Reds in the late 1990's as an assistant and pitching coach, he also is now coaching the Reds' 10 year-old team, to once again give back to the Eaton Fightin' Reds Baseball Program.

**From one of your former teammates and lifelong friends:**

***Congratulations Russ on All of Your Success, and for Once Again Giving to the Eaton Baseball Program***