

# CHRIS SWAIN – 2003 GRADUATE – EATON REDS

## THIS IS EATON BASEBALL

*“...I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat. I will never quit. I will never leave a fallen comrade...”*

Chris Swain pledged these words in 2006 as his oath before heading to Iraq as an elite member of the U.S. Army, however Chris had already acted upon these words many years earlier, while still playing baseball at Eaton. This phrase from the U.S. Army Soldier’s Creed speaks to qualities that an elite soldier must often develop as they prepare for war; in Swain’s case, this was just repeating the obvious, as despite being a young man, he had already lived a life that fully embodied these principles of sacrifice and fortitude.

*“...I will always place the mission first...”*

After the Reds graduated a top senior catcher en route to winning the 2002 State Championship, the Reds had a void behind the plate. A couple of players tried out for the position, but 14 games into the 2003 season it was clear that for the first time in decades, the Reds did not have the best catcher in all of Class 3A behind the plate. Despite having a respectable 13-1 record, the Reds were allowing an average of 5 runs a game through the first half of the season, and that simply wasn’t going to get the job done as they approached the postseason. Chris Swain approached Coach Danley and simply stated, “Hey Coach, you know I don’t really like to catch, but if that’s what it’ll take to win this thing I’ll do it.” Already with a top scholarship in hand to be an NCAA quarterback, Swain put his body at risk by going behind the plate to ensure the Reds had the best catcher in the state going into the tournament. Swain knew the path to victory, and he knew it would require him to give up being the best third baseman in the state, and quickly learn to be the best catcher in the state. Chris knew what was needed, and had the willpower to simply go do what had to be done.

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A combination of the Reds playing as poorly as they had in years, and some good ol’ fashioned bad luck, had the Reds trailing by 7 runs in the 6<sup>th</sup> inning of the must-win Regional Semifinals. Facing so daunting a challenge, most players would settle with the notion that they’ve had a great career and this is too bad it’s ending this way, but hey you can’t win every State Championship. Swain would have none of that, and demanded of his teammates that they suck it up and find a way to win this game. The Reds did just that, tying the game in the 7<sup>th</sup> inning, before Swain threw out the would-be go-ahead runner in the 8<sup>th</sup> inning that was trying to steal 2<sup>nd</sup> base. Sure, the Reds’ win streak in elimination games (which would go on to reach 33 straight games) would have to come to an end at some point, but that certainly wasn’t going to happen on Swain’s watch. The following weekend, the Reds went into the final inning down by two runs in the State Semifinals. Despite having two outs and still trailing by 2 runs, no one in the Reds’ dugout didn’t fully expect to still win this game. No one expected victory more so than Swain, and his teammates weren’t going to let the senior down as the bottom of the order had to rally to tie up and then win the game, which the Reds did in heroic fashion.



*"...I will never leave a fallen comrade..."*

The Reds have dedicated a season only once, and that was in 2003, Swain's senior year. Longtime assistant baseball coach Martin Hernandez passed away after a long fight with diabetes, and had chosen to be buried in his Eaton Baseball uniform. Upon hearing the news, Swain immediately convened the players and had them dedicate the season to Coach Hernandez, and to carry a replica of his #9 jersey to hang in the dugout during each game the rest of the season. The Reds wore patches on their jerseys with Coach Hernandez's initials, and after pulling off many of the most heroic comeback wins in Eaton postseason history, Swain made sure that the extra jersey they carried with them was laid atop the State Championship trophy.



The tale of a career in which a player earned every State Championship and earned every award is something that seems too absurd to actually be true...but it was, for Chris Swain, it was. He simply knew what had to be done, then did it, whether he wanted to do it or not, he did it, and he did it with overwhelming determination and fight. When the battle got hot, Chris shined more brightly than all his opponents; for example, on two-strike counts against him, Swain posted a remarkable .455 batting average as a senior. Chris's decision a few years later to walk away from college sports and to serve the military to defend America from foreign threats surprised some people, but frankly it didn't surprise those that knew Chris. When people talk about a guy having "the right stuff", they're simply talking about having what Chris Swain has: an uncanny determination to simply get the job done, no matter the circumstances that prevail. On the battlefields of Iraq, Swain earned numerous medals by displaying the same tenacity and leadership that he did while donning the Reds' uniform.

The Reds have been incredibly fortunate to have a number of special young men wear the Reds' pinstriped uniform, it's quite possible this has never been the case any more so than with Chris Swain. The only ones luckier than the coaches who bore witness to this great player, are his teammates, who not only walked out of Eaton High School with enough gold rings to fill a jewelry department at the local mall, but also lived up to a promise they made to themselves, to win the 2003 Title for Coach H., solely because Swain put the team and the team's goals ahead of everything else, ahead of his own personal goals and desires, ahead of his own fears of failure at trying a new position, ahead of his family's concerns for risk of injury, ahead of all else...Swain was simply going to deliver this State Championship Trophy to the family of Martin Hernandez. Willpower like that is uncanny, sacrifice like that is truly extraordinary.

When asked by the local newspapers to explain how Swain and his teammates had pulled off a three-peat of State Championships against multiple future Major League Draft early-round selections taking the mound against them in the biggest games, the answer was quite simply: "They're just really fine young men. They're just winners in life." Swain's parting quote to the journalists that had followed him for years on the fields where he unanimously won both the Weld County Football Player of the Year and the Weld County Baseball Player of the Year awards showed the first hint that Swain might realize that the success that came naturally to him wasn't something that happens to other people: "I know we're really lucky, but I don't know if I realize how fortunate we are now. Like I said before, in 20 years I'll look back and just say, 'That's amazing. I can't believe that happened in my high school career'".

There is an old proverb that "to whom much is given, much is expected". In this case, Swain was given plenty of raw tools, but anyone who saw Swain compete would say that "to him who giveth everything he has, much is rewarded."