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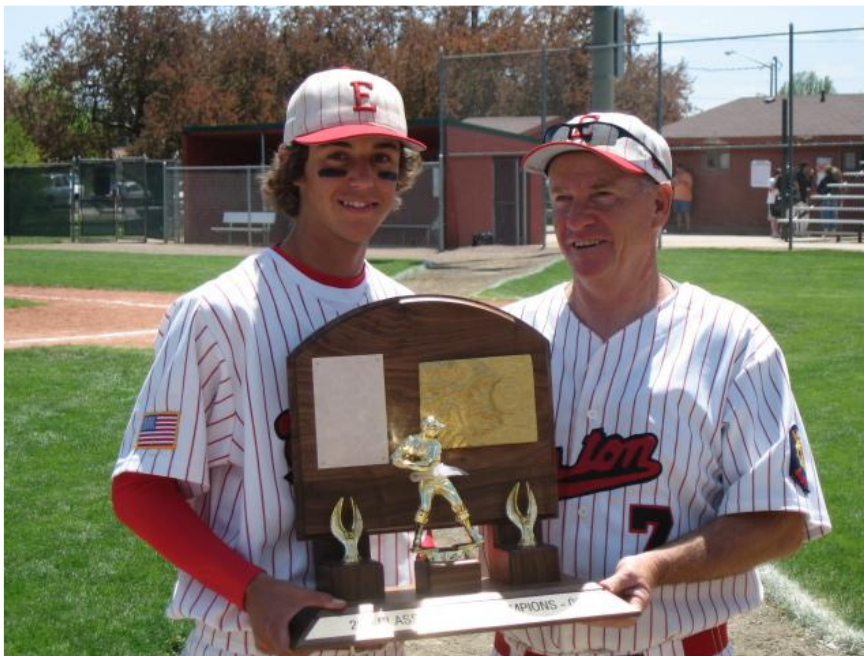
## In a league of their own



by [Colorado's Authority for High School Academics, Activities and Athletics News](http://Colorado's Authority for High School Academics, Activities and Athletics News) | [thealumninews.org](http://thealumninews.org)



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**Eaton coach Jim Danley, right, with junior Seth Jackson after the Reds won the 2008 Class 3A baseball title.**

Yes, Colorado is a football state when it comes to high school athletics. But flying under the radar is another sports passion — a passion for baseball. Colorado is to the breeding ground of many professional ballplayers, including Toronto Blue Jays ace Roy Halladay (Arvada West High School) and Philadelphia Phillies closer Brad Lidge (Cherry Creek High School). Both can arguably be labeled as the best at what they do. Halladay has been the most durable No. 1 starter in the American League over the past decade with 41 complete games and is the early favorite for the 2009 Cy Young. Lidge makes a solid case as the game's best closer, helping the Phillies win the 2008 World Series while converting all 41 of his save opportunities last year.

Colorado has built strong farm systems in Major League Baseball, too. The New York Yankees love utility infielder Kevin Russo (Fairview High School), who might make his Major League debut later this summer, while Luke Hochevar (Fowler High School), was chosen as the No. 1 overall draft pick by the Kansas Royals in 1996.

These players' successes would not have been without the coaches and high school programs that sweat the smell of freshly cut grass and oiled leather.

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So where does all this talent come from? Only we know the answer. The staff at The Alumni has deciphered the five best Colorado high school baseball programs today. Each program possesses the same two characteristics — a dedicated coach and a love for baseball.

### 1. Eaton High School



Since 1996, the Eaton Reds have won nine Class 3A state baseball championships, the most in the country in that timeframe. Who deserves the credit? Coach Jim Danley. Just talk to any of his players, past or present, and they will stress Danley's impact. "He taught be about life outside of baseball," said former third baseman Mike Carrasco.

Eaton has had the winningest baseball program in the country over the past quarter-century, winning more than 86 percent of its games. Carrasco was part of two teams that still hold the state record for consecutive games won with 45, and helped the Reds nail down the 1998 state title.

The Reds also take care of business in the summer, having won five American Legion B state championships since 1997. Notable players: Jeff Meyers, Shane Dyer and Jason Smith.

### 2. Cherry Creek High School



Bruins coach Marc Johnson might never leave Cherry Creek, and for good reason. The Bruins have won seven Class 5A state championships since 1983, in probably the most competitive baseball league (Centennial) in the state. But what is so impressive about the program is the number of ballplayers who have played at the college ranks or the pros. More than 140 ballplayers have gone on to further their baseball career after high school.

Cherry Creek might draw the players, but the Bruins still have to play and the coach still has to coach. If not for the baseball dynasty up north, the Bruins would have our top spot. Notable players: Brad Lidge, Josh Bard and Darnell McDonald.

### 3. Rocky Mountain High School



Three-peat. The Lobos possess a dynasty in the making. Fresh off of their third consecutive Class 5A state baseball championship with a 10-1 victory over Mountain Vista High School, RMHS became the second team in state history to three-peat as big-school state baseball champions. Led by coach Scott Bullock, the Lobos have a 97-23 record since 2004.

Former Lobo and current assistant coach Kaleo Chung praises Bullock: "He gets his players ready to play and they buy in to what he sells," Chung said. Notable players: Andy Burns, Scott Bachman and Keri King.

### 4. Fairview High School



Fairview coach Rick Harig is perhaps the most underrated Colorado high school baseball coach, but that's how he likes it. Harig has coached the Knights for 22 seasons (14 as head coach and 20 as American Legion A head coach). He has scouted for three different MLB teams. His teams have won eight Legion A state baseball championships and one Class 5A state title and have appeared in the Western Region 8 Final Four five times. But it is Harig's style of coaching that sets an impression on his players.

Current New York Yankees infielder and former Knight two-sport standout Kevin Russo loved playing for Harig: "He carries himself as a true professional," Russo said. "He made a huge impact on my baseball career." Notable player: Kevin Russo

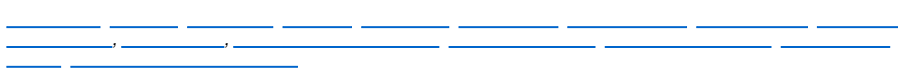
### 5. Rampart High School



Of all the teams on our list, RHS might be the biggest surprise. But dating back to 1983, the Rams have had a rich history of baseball. In '83, Jeff King was selected as the No. 1 overall draft pick by the Pittsburgh Pirates. Since that time, RHS has finished state champion runner-up once (1992), had two state final four appearances and won seven Metro League championships.

Current coach Adam Strah replaced Rams legend Ken Huard in 2006 and has revitalized a program that finished 22-3 in 2009, ending with a state final four appearance. Since 2006, the Rams have a 57-26 (.687) winning record. Notable players: Jeff King, Anthony Pannone and Scott Houin.

**ONDECK:** Fort Collins High School, Broomfield High School, Green Mountain High School, Holy Family High School, Ralston Valley High School and Arapahoe High School.



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