

5 Five-Star Players



Wallace, Hall, Ottoson, McLavey and Pickar in 2008

The Reds and their fans have been witness to the culmination of five of the greatest careers in Eaton history over the past few months, as Bo McLavey and Kyle Ottoson graduated in 2008, and Logan Hall, Bennett Pickar, and Tyler Wallace graduated in 2009. Three of these five Eaton legends have already been drafted by Major League teams, the other two are likely to be drafted over the next year or two. Which one will go the farthest in baseball is still up in the air, but given their toughness and will to succeed, there is no doubt as to how successful all 5 of these men will be in life.

To think that the 2008 Reds' State Championship team included all 5 of them on the same team is quite remarkable, and certainly explains why the Reds never trailed once in the 2008 State Tournament and rolled to a State Championship. Other players filled key roles for the Reds, but there wasn't much question about who was going to step up and take over a game. The answer was clear: each and every one of them would step up. Four of them dominated from the mound, the other dominated from behind the plate, all dominated from the plate as hitters.

This was most apparent in the 2008 State Championship Game itself. Clearly the first recollection of the game is Ottoson striking out 15 batters. The importance of only making the Reds get 6 outs on their own can't be overstated. But with many of those strikeouts occurring on knuckle curveballs in the dirt, Pickar's ability to knock everything down and still throw out each batter at first base was paramount, allowing Ottoson to get those strikeouts by putting the ball where it needed to be for strikeouts. One of the other 6 outs was one of the best plays in State Tournament history for the Reds, as Hall took off like a shot on a ball that the batter was sure would get down for extra bases, but Hall sprinted and laid out to dive and make a tremendous catch to keep the potential game-tying run off base. Another major out was recorded with the game-tying run on 2nd base and no outs. McLavey verbally deked the runner into advancing a couple steps toward 3rd base as McLavey fielded the grounder and then was able to get him into a rundown, with the tag quickly applied by Wallace for the critical out.

At the plate, McLavey drove the in the game's first run to give the Reds the lead. This was the 4th time in the past 5 State Tournament games that McLavey knocked in a 1st inning run to give the Reds a lead they would never relinquish. Ottoson knew he didn't need any insurance runs when he stepped to the plate in the 5th inning, but he drew a walk to load the bases that would then lead to one more insurance run for the Reds. Hall's 1st inning double led to the Reds' first score, and his single in the 5th inning knocked in an insurance run for the Reds, before Hall then scored for the 2nd time in the game. Pickar's RBI double in the 2nd inning would go on to be the game-winner, and his single in the 4th inning nearly knocked in another run. Wallace had the greatest season statistically in Eaton history in 2008, and he went 2-for-2 in the State Title game, also drawing an intentional walk, thus advancing 3 of the 4 runners that would score for the Reds.

These young men didn't step up in only this game, they stepped every time a postseason game was on the line throughout their storied high school careers. Everyone who attended an Eaton game, including the many dozens of Major League scouts, saw that these were special ballplayers. The coaches, however, got an even closer look at what a group of tough competitors these players are. Admittedly, 20 years from now, the legends of these players will have grown and been exaggerated to where no one ever hit a ball out of the infield against McLavey, no one ever even put a ball in play against Ottoson, a ball never landed in the outfield with Hall out there, no one ever even took a lead with Pickar behind the plate, and Wallace never hit anything less than a double in any at-bat in his life. That will happen, as legendary players like this have turned in careers where there's frankly much more truth in those claims than there is not.

But for now, with these players all having been in pinstripes within just the past 20 months, we can state as a matter of fact, that there is no exaggeration in the following brief accounts that let fans know a bit more about these uniquely gifted, and driven, young men. These quotes were serious, not meant to ever be posted in this manner or to impress anyone, simply to state things the way that they saw them, as they prepared to go win the State Championship.

Bo McLavey – “I don’t need that finger, I’ll use my bandsaw on it before I let some doctor take this thing away from me.” Following the 13-3 win over Erie that qualified the Reds for the State Championship Game the following weekend, McLavey tried to hide how swollen and black his right (throwing hand) little finger had become. McLavey had tried to induce a double-play call via runners’ interference on a ball that he threw from so low off the ground (knowing the runner would beat the play at first base) that as he released it, his finger struck the sliding player’s helmet with enough force to appear to have broken the finger. When told by one of the coaches that we’d have to get that checked out to find a way for him to swing a bat the next weekend during the State Championship, McLavey couldn’t have been more serious than to say there wasn’t a man (or group of men) on this planet that could make him risk letting some doctor declare him medically unable to play the game over just something trifling like his little finger, and threatened to cut it off to eliminate the problem if he couldn’t take a good round of batting practice by Monday. McLavey then went on to pitch a dominant game the following Friday, en route to setting the Reds’ all-time lowest postseason ERA, and knocked in an RBI in each of his 1st inning at-bats on the weekend to effectively give the Reds a commanding lead (given the pitching the Reds had on the mound, one run was enough, two runs was plenty) to earn his Ring.

Kyle Ottoson – “Good, we’re 7 innings away from it then.” With the Reds in a position where they only had to win one of two games on Championship Saturday to take home the trophy, after some debate about whether to save him back for the “If” Game, Coach Danley chose to call Ottoson the night before to let him know the Reds were just going to get right after the opposing Lamar Savages. After stating, “Kyle, we’re going to hand you the ball first thing tomorrow morning”, Ottoson responded with the cool, and earned, confidence of knowing that the Reds were certainly only playing 7 innings the following day. Fifteen strikeouts later, the Reds were crowned State Champions.

Logan Hall – “Coach, we are.” After Coach Danley lectured to the guys before the ‘09 Elite Eight about the risk of there being a letdown if they didn’t take every opponent seriously enough, and relating that to why frontiersmen would carry a rifle loaded for bear even when they left to just go birdhunting, Hall returned the next day and handed Coach Danley the cover of the American Hunter magazine that simply read “Loaded for Bear”. The Reds then scored 40 runs over the first two days of the tournament.

Bennett Pickar – “Coach, how come you’re not all over my case anymore?” Midway through the undefeated ‘09 season, Pickar was at a loss for why Coach Danley wasn’t criticizing him in the way that he typically does Eaton catchers, in order to make them better as catchers, in turn making Eaton’s pitching much better. After hearing everything in the book for the last two years, Pickar honestly wanted to know what was stopping the Ol’ Coach from getting on his case, thinking maybe it was because now he was a team co-captain. Coach Danley’s response was simple: “Bennett, it’s because you’re doing all the little things right.” Pickar, genuinely wanting to consistently improve, responded to that saying, “OK, well I kind of liked it more when I knew what I needed to still get better at, so don’t hesitate to jump all over me again Coach.”

Tyler Wallace – (half-jokingly, with a chuckle and grin) “OK, just wanted to make sure the Ol’ Coach wasn’t going to screw this whole thing up at this point.” Coach Danley tells every pitcher to be mentally prepared to get the start the night before a game, as anything could happen and the final decision won’t be made until the morning of the game. When Wallace heard Coach Danley tell a younger pitcher to be ready to go the next day (in the ‘09 State Championship or “If” Game), Wallace wanted to make sure the ball would be in his hand and Hall’s hand—and no one else’s—the following day as the Reds went to complete their undefeated season. Laughing, Coach Danley assured him that, “Yes, T-Wall, they’re going to have to beat our two big horses to take this away from us, but you gotta have everybody ready, just in case.” No one took this Title away from the Reds.

