

# JEFF MEYERS – 1999 GRADUATE – EATON REDS

## THIS IS EATON BASEBALL

*“You don’t have to play perfect, you have to try perfect.” 3-Time World Series Champion Manager Tony La Russa*

As a man with his doctorate degree, 1999 Reds’ graduate Jeff Meyers must cringe at this usage of the English language. As a star athlete, Meyers knows exactly what this phrase means, as Meyers employed it diligently long before La Russa ever quipped it.

Most coaches ask players to give it their best, though few players ever find the upper limits of their very best. Even the greats find only the best that they can be today...the legends though, they find the upper limits of anyone that has ever competed, and strive meticulously to top those lofty marks. Jeff Meyers is one of those very few legendary Eaton Reds.

As only a 5<sup>th</sup> grader, Meyers spent nearly every summer evening taking groundballs, but not with his own classmates, instead with the varsity infielders. He did this under the lights, on the Reds’ old all-dirt infield, and he did it after 8pm games ended around 10pm. In a battle called Golden Glove, Meyers took his position amongst the 16-18 year-old starters, as one player hit ground balls as hard as they could at these fielders. If you made an error, you were out of the Golden Glove competition. If you were the first one out, you had to go hit, and the only way you got to drop the bat and return to fielding was to make the next guy error, thus everyone was smoking ground balls as hard as they could, aiming to create bad hops to get the ball past a fielder. Finding tough hops on a rock-laden all-dirt infield was not a difficult task. But the rules of this game didn’t allow for anything to be considered an infield single...the rules were simple, if the ball was hit within the range of a top high school shortstop, then you had to catch it and make a timely, accurate throw. After taking one in the chest, the eye, the nose, sometimes the cup, any typical middle schooler would have had enough with this challenge against players 5-7 years older than him. Well, no one ever said Jeff Meyers was typical.

Jeff took some lumps as a 5<sup>th</sup> grader, usually only losing a Golden Glove competition because he didn’t make the throw in time, as he and his fellow classmate Mike Carrasco were after all competing against varsity players. But almost never did Jeff miss a ball, regardless of the speed of it, or the terrible hops that it would take, Jeff simply gloved everything. He won the competition most of the time as a 6<sup>th</sup> grader, and by the time he was a 7<sup>th</sup> grader, he infuriated older players by winning it nearly all the time. By the start of the summer after 8<sup>th</sup> grade, Jeff was no longer the kid playing against the varsity players—Meyers had already earned the starting varsity shortstop position, something that had happened at Eaton only once before, and never since, for a kid his age.

It was clear that the game of baseball came easily to Meyers, who had superior hand-eye coordination and quickness, but he never settled for just being great, he wanted to be the best...the best there ever was. Throughout the next four years, Meyers turned in the greatest career at shortstop that the Reds had ever seen. And no one has topped him yet.

He strove for perfection, and perfection isn’t just making the spectacular plays, it’s also making all the routine plays too. When a ball was hit anywhere near Meyers, you as a hitter were simply out, and if you had a runner on first base, your teammate was out too.

Legends do grow over time, and the remarkable is remembered as the impossible years later by those fortunate enough to have witnessed a legendary player in his prime. Thus, the following is an excerpt from a state championship winning opposing coach, taken from the time, to ensure that the saga of Jeff Meyers career isn’t exaggerated now years later:

*“He’s solid and he plays with a lot of confidence. You can tell that he’s having fun out there which makes it even fun for me to watch him. He’s out there just making plays.”*

He also was a great hitter and base runner for the Reds, as Jeff earned all sorts of All-State honors, and the Colorado Rockies chose him for the Top 40 Game, after posting a career in which he not only led the Reds back from behind to win the 1998 State Championship Game against Lamar, he also hit the game-winning home run against that same opponent in 1997 against a future Major Leaguer to advance the Reds to the State Final Four. Jeff posted some of the top statistics in the history of Eaton Baseball not only on defense, but also on offense.

In 1998, Jeff's pursuit of perfection led to just that, a perfect season, the Reds' first, with a record of 24-0. The Reds went on to win 45 straight games, setting the all-time Colorado record for most consecutive wins.

Meyers had instincts that you can't teach, he knew if he had time to throw a runner out at home, exactly how much time he had to turn a double play, when as a runner he could pick up an extra base...Meyers made the very most of every gift he had been given to play this game. He didn't seek to be the best he could, nor even the best that Eaton had ever seen, he sought perfection, and in that quest, came closer to perfection than any player the Reds have ever seen. In college, Meyers was no different, starting all four years at Cal-Lutheran, and going on to be selected to the school's All-Decade team. He set the school home run record with 27, and completed his career 3<sup>rd</sup> on the all-time hits list. As always, he was one of the best infielders in school history, especially with his near-perfect defense.

In 2012, Meyers was diagnosed with Stage 3 Hodgkin's Lymphoma. He immediately received an outpouring of support from his numerous friends and family, including the Eaton Baseball Family. Many Reds playing today who had never been as fortunate as to watch Meyers play over a decade ago moved into action and ordered another #1 Eaton jersey for Meyers and placed their signatures and well wishes on it. At the risk of looking a bit cocky, the Reds delayed mailing the jersey to Jeff until the end of May, as the Reds were optimistic they'd be able to add a few words to the front of the jersey, which they did, by becoming 2012 State Champions, just as Jeff had done for the Reds 14 years prior.

Jeff is now a history professor at the University of Idaho, and will be completing his 12<sup>th</sup> and final round of chemotherapy treatments in the coming weeks. He recently completed his 8<sup>th</sup> round of these treatments, and has been diagnosed as cancer-free, and already in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of patients that are projected to never have the cancer return. Jeff could just begrudgingly undertake the final painful chemotherapy treatments with a negative attitude now that he's already cancer-free, but being at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile never appealed to Jeff...the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile isn't perfect, and Jeff will settle for nothing less than enthusiastically trying perfect, as he's done all his life. When asked by many if this experience with cancer has affected his view on life, Jeff's sincere response has been simply: "No, why would it? I never thought it was going to beat me, so it hasn't changed anything."

One former opposing player sent the following to Jeff: "Little taken back when I heard the news old friend... my thoughts and prayers definitely go out to you and yours... this illness picked the wrong S.O.B. to mess with though... because the Jeff Meyers I knew, respected, and admired just didn't know how to lose... You take care and bring the fight Meyers... Pulling for you Jeff."

A luxury car maker talks about the pursuit of perfection, but Jeff Meyers, he simply lives the pursuit of perfection.

