

# Cal: among the truly great

by Thomas Boswell  
The Washington Post  
April 14 2000

For many years, Cal Ripken has been dubbed the Iron Man and known for his 2,632 consecutive game streak. He also has been known as baseball's good and decent man, praised for signing more autographs, shaking more hands and having more actual conversations with fans than some entire major league teams. In the past few years, as he has grayed and balded with dignity, switched to third base and had back surgery, as though to prove he is not bionic after all, Ripken has even become the venerable symbol of the game for many.

Cal has put up with all of this with enormous good grace and that gentle bemused smile that seems too detached to belong to an athlete. Because he was too grateful for his luck and his gifts, and because he is too modest to say how he would really like to be remembered, Ripken has remained silent on one subject. Instead, he has let his mountain of accumulating deeds, most recently his 400th home run last September and his 3,000th hit on Saturday, speak for him.

Ripken, who has always and only wished to be remembered as a baseball player, has now reached the point in which it can truly and incontestably be said that he is one of the very best who ever lived. Not just the most durable or best-conditioned or nicest or most forbearing and responsible. Just flat one of the absolute greatest — leaving aside everything else.

"Everyone thinks of me in terms of The Streak," Ripken has said to me several times, always with some variation on a wince. "That's not how I think of myself."

Of course, he has never, not once, said how he does think of himself. In order to drive himself, he always focuses on his own weaknesses: His lack of speed. His inability to make the acrobatic plays at shortstop that some others could muster. His constant need to dicker with his batting stance to stay out of slumps. While at 6 feet 5, 225 pounds he might have flourished as a forward in the NBA, a tight end in the NFL or a goalie in pro soccer, Ripken always casts himself in his own mind as an overachiever. Because he is so honest and analytical, others fall for this view.

But it's wrong.

The list that ran in almost every paper in America on Sunday told the truth. Only seven players have ever had 3,000 hits and 400 home runs. However, only one other player out of the seven was also a great defensive player at one of the crucial demanding positions up the middle

of the diamond — catcher, shortstop, second base or center field.

That list contains only two players: Willie Mays and Cal Ripken.

Ripken is not one of the two best players in history. That's not the point. We can all spin statistics and records to our hearts' delight. But Ripken is certainly the all-time 20th century American League shortstop. Only Honus Wagner has ever surpassed him at the position. Without Ripken, big athletes with home run power such as Derek Jeter, Alex Rodriguez and Nomar Garciaparra would never have imagined they could be shortstops. Ripken recreated the position. Now, all they have to do is keep up their good work for 15 years and maybe they'll rival Cal.

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Though the Lou Gehrig Chase may have blurred some memories, Ripken was one of the best defensive shortstops in history for more than a dozen years. At his peak, I'd take Ripken as a glove man over any of the aforementioned trio. Garciaparra has a better arm and Jeter makes flashier plays. But Ripken made far fewer errors, turned more double plays and, believe it or not, got to more ground balls. Far more.

Because Ripken holds the record for only three errors in an entire



Baseball's Iron Man, Cal Ripken Jr., celebrates with his teammates after reaching the 3000 hit milestone.

season at shortstop, a .996 percentage, many now assume his range was limited. In fact, thanks to positioning, perfect footwork, a quick jump and a strong arm, his range was far above average.

Assists are an excellent gauge of range. He led the league seven times; no AL shortstop ever had more assist titles. In 1984, he had 583 assists, still the AL record. In stark contrast, last season Jeter, Rodriguez and Garciaparra had 391, 382 and 357 assists, respectively. Ripken averaged 498 assists over a 10-year period. That little edge of 100 over Jeter is probably just a fluke.

As for the double play, it's no contest. Ripken led the league eight times and, by standing in defiantly against all

comers until the last split second, he averaged nearly 115 for a dozen years. Don't expect to see any of today's hot-hitting shortstops hanging around the bag too long when the spikes arrive. Don't risk that next \$100 million contract. Except for A-Rod, they're long gone. Garciaparra turned only 72 double plays last season and Jeter 87. They're not Cal. And it's not close.

As this season began, many wondered if Ripken's back would allow him to hit again as he did last season. The answer isn't final yet. But it looks like "yes." After an early slump, his stance is finally squared away again and his timing is back.

Both his home runs have been the kind of 430-foot bombs that disappeared for several seasons before reappearing in 1999. Barring injury, Ripken looks like a 25-homer, 85-RBI, .280 hitter again.

Many of Ripken's best traits were on display again Saturday. In his big moment, he managed to blend a confident stage presence with an appealing humility. He enjoyed the moment, but didn't milk it. With first-base coach Eddie Murray at hand, Ripken had an old 3,000-hit teammate and career-long buddy to share the first hug. The first Oriole bounding out of the dugout to shake Cal's hand was a large fellow with a grin worthy of a 12-year-old on his face — Albert Belle. Ripken tends to see the best in others and, in turn, that often brings out the best in them.

Finally, Ripken's mother, Vi, congratulated him by phone in a live TV interview.

"Hi, hon. What's new? . . . (At least) you could have shaved for the cameras, (couldn't you)?"

"The way I was going I didn't think I'd get it tonight."

"(Announcer) Mike Flanagan alluded that you hit this at 8:07 (p.m. Central Time). Now, is that prophetic or what?"

"I know," said Ripken, immediately picking up his mother's meaning. "Eight and seven. My (number) and pop's. . . . I was thinking about you, Mom. I love you."

"I love you." Well, we don't do this kind of stuff much anymore. Or we don't do it very well. But the Ripkens still do. It looks just right on them. Perhaps it's natural that a fellow from such a family would forget to mention, in his last thousand interviews or so, that maybe 400 homers and 3,000 hits, with more to come, stands for more than longevity. That's okay. They rest of us can start doing it now.

# NCAA tries to reform men's basketball

by Scott M. Reid  
Knight-Ridder Tribune  
April 11, 2000

The NCAA Division I Management Council approved a landmark series of legislation aimed at reforming men's basketball and reasserting the NCAA's grip on a sport many within the organization fear is on the verge of spiraling out of control.

In recommending nine pieces of legislation during its meeting in Indianapolis, the 34-member council of athletic administrators and faculty representatives hoped to "have a substantial effect of the culture of men's basketball and the way we operate," said Stanford athletic director Ted Leland, the council chairman.

The most controversial of the proposals is a plan that would eliminate the current summer basketball recruiting structure beginning in 2002. Under Monday's recommendations, the current 24-day summer evaluation period would be reduced to 14 days in 2001, with the current summer recruiting system eliminated the following year.

Leland, NCAA executive director Cedric Dempsey and other NCAA officials said their plan is to have in place by 2002 a new summer recruiting structure that diminishes the influence of shoe companies and other outside influences such as AAU coaches.

"We've had a lot of people having an influence on young prospective student athletes who should not be in that position," Dempsey said.

The legislative package approved by the Management Council is expected

to be passed by the Division I Board of Directors on April 27 in Indianapolis.

The board and leading conference commissioners in recent months have increasingly called for sweeping reform for men's basketball especially in regards to summer recruiting following a series of NCAA investigations of top players.

Nearly half of the universities in the top 10 spots in this season's final Associated Press Top 25 poll, seven of the top 25, had key players ruled ineligible for part or all of the 1999-2000 season for receiving benefits in violation of NCAA rules.

In a move designed to improve graduation rates and discourage coaches from running off players, the council approved a legislation that limits to eight the number of basketball scholarships a university can award in any two-year period with no more than five in any one year.

More than a quarter of the 64 universities (18) in this year's NCAA Tournament had 0 percent graduation rates for their men's basketball programs during the six-year reporting period ending in 1999, the most recent NCAA reporting period.

The council also approved sanctions for violations of NCAA gambling rules. Student athletes who engage in activity designed to influence the outcome of a contest or win-loss margins will lose their remaining college eligibility. Student-athletes who bet or participate in organized gambling involving college or professional athletics will be suspended for a minimum of one season.

# Welcome back, Rocker; gets standing ovation

by Bonnie DeSimone  
Chicago Tribune  
April 19, 2000

ATLANTA — Returning from sensitivity rehab is slightly different from checking out of the Betty Ford Clinic. For one thing, there's no accurate blood or urine test for a recovering foot-in-mouth sufferer. Atlanta Braves closer John Rocker, coming off a 14-day suspension and a four-month sojourn in public opinion purgatory, got a 90-second standing ovation Tuesday night from a crowd of 34,903 at Turner Field when he sprinted in from the bullpen to face the Philadelphia Phillies in the ninth inning.

He faced four batters, did not allow a run and tipped his cap appreciatively to fans when he left the field, having preserved a 3-3 tie in a game the Braves won 4-3 on pinch-hitter Brian Hunter's home run in the 12th inning. Hunter was waived after the game. Rocker's toughest audience probably will be his own clubhouse, stocked with veterans who will brook no unnecessary distractions. Rocker abused sensibilities, not a banned substance, but he does have one thing in common with someone struggling to conquer an addiction. People around him will be wary for a while, waiting to see if he'll fall off the wagon.

After the game, Rocker, who had said he would not speak to reporters, told them to "beat it" as he exited the locker room. "We're still watching (Rocker) with a close eye," Braves pitcher Tom Glavine said before the game. "There's no question that guys are still watching to see if there are any signs of a change, anything different than what we'd like to see. But it's not like anybody in here is ready to get into a fight with him."

From a competitive standpoint, the 7-6 Braves have missed the reliever; the bullpen has two blown saves and Atlanta has four pitchers, including stalwart starter John Smoltz, on the disabled list.

"He's on our roster for a purpose," Braves manager Bobby Cox said. "It was like having a free inning for us to have our closer pitch a full inning at home. He did great, but that's nothing new. He comes in hard and gets after them."

Rocker, whose pitches topped out at 98 m.p.h., struck out one and walked one. Phillies center-fielder Doug Glanville ended the inning by rapping a line drive to left.

"What else can you ask for?" catcher Javy Lopez said. "He was in the strike zone. We need him. He's a

big help to us."

There were no organized protests outside the stadium and fans seated near the Braves' bullpen were peaceable. Major League Baseball director of security Kevin Hallinan, who was at the game, said no extraordinary measures were taken but that his staff would monitor the situation when the Braves go on the road.

"We have good listening posts in every city," Hallinan said. Despite Rocker's relatively quiet return, chances are he will not be able to wrap up this episode as easily as he wrapped up 38 saves last season. And for a while, neither will anyone in the Braves organization.

Rocker's disparaging comments about gays, foreigners and others appeared in a December issue of Sports Illustrated. Since then, the discussion about his conduct, and what might constitute appropriate punishment, has widened to include civil rights leaders, constitutional experts and anyone who chose to log on to a special Web site created for venting.

The fallout was analyzed in a lengthy front-page story in Tuesday's Wall Street Journal which, among other things, lauded Braves President Stan Kasten for his crisis management skills.

"That's hardly any recompense," said Kasten, himself the son of immigrants and known for his attention to detail and pride in the Braves' largely impeccable image. "I'm glad the people who we were dealing with felt we were genuinely dealing with their concerns."

Rocker, who made a public apology, received psychological counseling as ordered by Commissioner Bud Selig, but an arbitrator cut the pitcher's suspension in half and reduced a \$20,000 fine to \$500.

That optimism may be stretched when the Braves meet the Mets at Shea Stadium in late June. Agitated New Yorkers, the main target of Rocker's remarks, are sure to express themselves.

Glavine said the team is putting things into perspective. "I think all of us have been consumed with what's going on with Andres," Glavine said, referring to Braves first baseman Andres Galaraga, who is making a comeback from cancer. "That's exciting. 'Every city we go into, there's going to be some curiosity about what's 'really' going on. We can sit here all we want and tell people it's not an issue, but they're not going to believe it till they see it."

# Videotape shows Bobby Knight grabbing player by the neck

Knight-Ridder Tribune  
April 12, 2000

INDIANAPOLIS — A videotape broadcast Tuesday night shows Indiana University basketball coach Bob Knight grabbing player Neil Reed by the neck during a practice at Assembly Hall.

The incident lasts a few seconds, with Reed pushing Knight's hand away. Indiana officials, already investigating Reed's claim that he was choked by Knight in 1997, will use the tape in their review, a university spokesman said Tuesday night. Reed has since left the university.

The tape, aired on CNN, shows Knight at midcourt reaching out and grabbing Reed by the neck.

The player's head snaps back and he tries to backpedal.

Reed's claim was first revealed March 14 by CNN/Sports Illustrated. Nine days later, IU President Myles Brand announced that two university trustees would look into that allegation and other charges about Knight's conduct made on the nationally broadcast report.

The two trustees, John Walda and

Frederick F. Eichhorn Jr., along with two IU administrators, flew to the cable network's Atlanta headquarters Tuesday to view the tape.

"It is clear; it is an important piece of information that does shed light on the incident between coach Knight and Neil Reed," IU Vice President for Public Affairs Christopher Simpson told The Indianapolis Star.

Reed said the altercation occurred during a 1997 practice. Simpson said school officials do not doubt the tape's authenticity.

Basketball practices are taped routinely by student managers. What the trustees learn from the tape will be used along with accounts from eyewitnesses in the university report, which is due in mid-June.

The tape does not affect Knight's status as head coach, Simpson said. Knight, like all university personnel, has been asked not to comment on the case until the investigation ends, the administrator said.

Knight has said he did not choke Reed, but that he does put hands on players to position them during practices.

Reed left the team in 1997 when Knight told he had no future with the

program. Reed claimed then that he faced physical and mental abuse, but he did not offer details until the March 14 broadcast.

University officials and teammates said they doubted the choking claims because they were not made public for three years.

The March report included claims that Knight ordered the IU president out of one practice and that the coach used soiled toilet tissue to motivate players in the locker room. Brand said he never was ordered out of a practice by Knight, and the coach said he did not recall waving soiled tissue at his players.

The week started with a burst of support for the 59-year-old coach. Hundreds of IU fans rallied Sunday outside Assembly Hall in Bloomington, praising Knight for his winning record and for running a clean program. The fans criticized the news media for reports that were harsh toward Knight.

A poll conducted for The Indianapolis Star and WTHR (Channel 13) after Reed's allegations in March showed widespread support for Knight in Indiana. More than 55

percent of respondents said Knight should continue as coach.

But a greater majority, 71 percent, felt Knight should be disciplined for his conduct or the investigation should continue.

That poll was conducted before The Star reported that Knight ordered his boss, Athletics Director Clarence Doninger, out of the locker room area after a Feb. 19 home loss to Ohio State. Knight erupted after Doninger offered a supportive comment. A knowledgeable source said Doninger felt threatened by Knight, and a friend of the two men had to separate them. Knight, whose record puts him among the best of active coaches, has had trouble over his 29-year career at IU.

He threw a chair across the floor during a break in a 1985 game against Purdue. In 1979, he was convicted in abstentia for hitting a policeman in Puerto Rico. He's had three major fines for sportsmanlike conduct. Knight was suspended in 1993 after kicking at his son Patrick Knight, then a player, and shouting vulgarities at people in the crowd who booed him for it.