

## McGwire hits the Mark

It was a five-year reunion of sorts last weekend in Kansas City, Mo. when the Oakland Athletics came to town to play the Royals.

No, it wasn't a player-player reunion nor one between managers. It was more special than that.

This reunion was between player and reporter, a type of relationship that can often look like a catfight, but usually more resembles a friendship.

I would consider my relationship with Oakland slugger Mark McGwire more of the latter.



Jeff  
Singer

McGwire and I, both graduates of Damien High School — a 1,200 student, all-male catholic school in La Verne, Calif. — met previously in 1987.

McGwire was an unknown rookie first baseman who had just come up from the minor leagues in the spring of that year. I was completing my sophomore year at Damien, and was a sports reporter with the school paper, the Laconian.

I thought it would be a good idea to interview McGwire, whose A's were playing the California Angels in Anaheim, Calif., because this former Spartan was believed to be a flash in the pan and with Oakland on a temporary basis. (McGwire went on that season to set the American League's rookie record with 49 home runs and hasn't looked back since).

With most of the fans at the "Big A" on that sunny, smoggy Saturday afternoon hounding such Athletic stars as Jose Canseco and Dave Stewart, it was easy to contact the unheralded McGwire.

As I introduced myself as a Damien student, McGwire's response was "that's unfortunate." He was probably referring to the problem that haunts Spartans of past and present, who by attending an all-male high school have had their sexual preference constantly questioned by the public schools in the league.

But overall, McGwire was courteous during our short conversation, which ranged from talking about Damien teachers to that afternoon's game.

Through that talk, I could tell that McGwire was a Damien brother, a feeling shared by students and alumni alike who carry that Spartan torch with them everywhere they go.

But since this meeting last decade, the 6-foot-5 McGwire has developed into a perennial all-star, while I have gone on to become a senior sports reporter with the Daily Nebraskan.

Which is the greater accomplishment? Who's to say.

But how friendly would McGwire be, who is currently Major League Baseball's home run leader, now that he has surpassed expectations and become a multi-million dollar player.

Well, it didn't start out well, as during batting practice last Friday, I went up to the Oakland first baseman and asked him for an interview after introducing myself as being a fellow Damien-alumnus and being with the Daily Nebraskan.

His response was "that's unfortunate," and since he was neither a UNL student nor administrator, I figured he was once again referring to Damien as he did five years ago, and not the DN.

He told me that an interview wouldn't be possible on that day, and said I should try back some other time.

A fellow reporter saw my inability to get some quotes, to which he told me, "Don't let it get you down — McGwire's a tough guy to talk to," he said. "We're just like flies to them."

As I was standing on the Royals turf watching the Athletics continue their batting practice by hitting balls over the outfield fence and into Royals Stadium's famed waterfalls, I felt like my biggest baseball hero had just let me down.

I have learned from previous experience that when a person you look up to shuns you away, there is no worse feeling a person can go through.

But no matter how big of a star McGwire had become, I knew Mark still had his Damien fire burning in his heart and wouldn't let me down.

I was right. Following the game, in which the A's lost 6-5 despite McGwire's 32nd home run, I went into Oakland's clubhouse to again talk to McGwire and hope the result would be different than before the game.

Seeing the red-haired giant sitting at a table by himself eating some sort of unidentified substance, I decided this would be the best opportunity to speak with this future hall of famer.

As I walked up to McGwire and again asked him for an interview, he responded by saying that it could only deal with that night's game. But after a little persuasion, McGwire gave in and a pleasant conversation followed, reminiscent of the one we had in California five years ago.

Topics of Damien's influence to baseball's salaries came into our discussion.

Such memorable quotes from our talk from McGwire included "nobody believed I could've been a big league ballplayer," "the more money you make, there's a lot of unhappiness because people think they can live off you," and "I didn't play the game to be a role model, but it's something that comes with the territory."

This conversation helped me realize why McGwire is an inspiration to myself as a Damien alumnus and to a lot of others as well.

Thanks, Mark, for showing that unlike many of your colleagues, you'll never forget where you came from and will always be a Damien brother at heart.

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## Gill returns to Huskers

By Jeff Singer  
Senior Editor

With the hiring of a new quarterbacks coach, the Nebraska football team is hoping that Turner Gill can help breathe some life into finalizing who will take the helm as Nebraska's top signal caller this fall.



Gill

Gill, who was hired last month to coach the Cornhusker quarterbacks, left Southern Methodist University as receivers coach to return to the school he led to three consecutive Big Eight Conference titles from 1981-83.

The three-time All-Big Eight quarterback said getting the chance to coach the Huskers and work

with Nebraska Football Coach Tom Osborne is exciting.

"It's a great feeling, and I feel comfortable here," Gill said. "I'm glad to have this opportunity, and I respect Coach Osborne as a coach and as a person."

This won't be Gill's first chance to work on Osborne's staff, as he served as a graduate assistant with Nebraska in 1990. He went on to Southern Methodist the following season.

Gill said knowing the Husker system from his previous experiences will help him for the upcoming season.

"Even though I've come in late, I'm glad I already know the system," Gill said. "Now I hope I can get a guy to come in here and help stabilize the position."

The position Gill was referring to is at quarterback, which is expected to be contested between senior Mike Grant, redshirt freshman Tony Veland and standout recruits Tommie Frazier and Ben Rutz.

This season, Gill is going to split quarterback coaching duties with Osborne, who has coached the quarterbacks during his 20-year tenure as head coach.

But Gill's duties won't be limited to Memorial Stadium, as he will focus on recruiting during the off-season.

The Fort Worth, Texas native said recruiting in his home state is vital in college football.

"Everybody recruits in Texas, so you try to go in and get a couple out of there each year," Gill said.

The 29-year-old Gill, whose new team has been ranked anywhere from third to 14th in pre-season polls, said he's looking forward to this year.

"I think it's going to be a great season," Gill said. "We're definitely going to have the chance to win the Big Eight and even the national championship, and when you have those opportunities, it's a terrific situation."

## Volleyball team ranked seventh in poll

From staff reports

Volleyball Magazine has ranked the Nebraska volleyball team seventh in its 1992 preseason top-10 list.

The Cornhuskers, who are picked to win the Midwest Region and advance to the Final Four in December in Albuquerque, are scheduled to play

three other schools this season in the top-10 rankings.

The Huskers will play fellow top-10 opponent Pacific in September during Nebraska's First Tier Invitational, and will compete against top-ranked UCLA and No. 9 Southern California in November's Big Eight-Pac 10 Challenge in Los Angeles.

The rest of the schools included in the top-10 list include Long Beach State, Hawaii, Stanford, Louisiana State, Brigham Young and Florida.

Big Eight foe Colorado is included in the magazine's "others to watch" category, as are other 1992 Husker opponents Illinois, New Mexico, Ohio State and Texas.

## North Platte hopes to bring professional baseball to city

NORTH PLATTE (AP)—Representatives from three major league baseball teams were in North Platte earlier this week to assess the city's potential to be host to a minor league team in the proposed Rocky Mountain Rookie League.

Farm directors of the Oakland Ath-

letics, Milwaukee Brewers and San Francisco Giants met Tuesday with North Platte Baseball Inc. members Larry Haneborg and Brent Thompson to discuss North Platte plans for a team.

The group also toured Bill Wood Field.

"The potential is here," Brewers farm director Fred Stanley said. "There are a lot of things North Platte has going for it to attract a major league franchise."

Officials are hoping to get the final notice of league approval in 60 to 120 days.

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