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## After Further Review: In Color Guard, no one goes it alone

Ben Cates  
Sep 26, 2020

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Members of the Color Guard begin their 10-mile run on Saturday, Sept. 26, 2020. The Virginia 10 Miler was canceled this year, but the Guard completed the course. Photo by Ben Cates.

**W**hen Steve Bozeman began pounding pavement in the early 1970s, the running boom hadn't yet swept across the country.

Sometimes, he was all alone. Other times, he'd see two or three runners on his journeys through Joliet, Illinois. They'd all wave and say hello, as members of any small clan would.

Running is an individual sport. You can go at your own pace, settle some old score or just get the kinks out.

But sometimes it's all for one and one for all.

That's a lesson Bozeman has learned over the years. Watch his Color Guard charge up Farm Basket Hill one year — or better yet, run with them — and you'll leave feeling the same way. Everyone counts. Stick together. No one gets left behind.

Running 10 miles can be a daunting task. So the group, made up mostly of veterans, sings along the way, offering up military call-and-response cadences. They tell stories. They thrive off cheers from spectators.

The Virginia 10 Miler, which was set to be run Saturday morning, was canceled this year.

The course looked awfully lonely. But as I followed the Color Guard, I quickly found out otherwise. Hundreds of people were out running. They cheered and clapped for the Guard with their flags held high. And Guard members waved back. More often than not, smiles overtook the faces of everyone around.

Support, even if it's just a nod or a wave or a hello, can mean the world to someone.

“We all stay together for something bigger than ourselves,” Bozeman told me after the race, a purple Gatorade for refueling in one hand, a bottle of mustard to ward off cramps in the other. “It's not just for self. Some of these folks have not been in the military but they feel the camaraderie that we share as veterans, and first responders are the same.”

Something bigger than ourselves. Like duty to one another. Like bearing each other's burdens. Like making sure our brothers and sisters don't fall through the cracks. That's what this whole American experience is supposed to be about.

So Ryan Zuidema, Lynchburg's police chief, could talk about sacrifice Saturday, because he's seen it on the faces of his Color Guard friends.

"When you've got a group like this," he noted, "you could run 20 or 30 miles. They lift each other up."

So Brian Powers, who spent 7½ years in the Navy, could decide in 2001 he'd help Bozeman start a small group that would run and hoist flags at the 10 Miler.

Theirs was no grand display. No pretentious show. Just folks who had put their lives on the line saying other lives mattered, too.

So men and women in other states who have connections to the Color Guard ran 10 miles Saturday morning as well, knowing they weren't alone, because a little group in Lynchburg was doing the same thing.

And Bozeman, who after he served in Vietnam became a runner before there was a running boom, could look around and smile. He started out competing against himself years ago.

Now he loves to run with others.

There were no world-class runners on the course Saturday. Just world-class individuals.

## After Further Review: Lessons from Ripken's streak still ring true

Ben Cates  
Sep 12, 2020

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**I**n 2008, a former colleague of mine, Nathan Warters, landed what for me amounted to the ultimate interview: a sit-down chat with Cal Ripken Jr.

Man, I was all kinds of jealous.

I wasn't working at The News & Advance back then. No, I was in grad school, an idealistic 20-something punk who thinks he has world figured out.

But when I picked up the sports section that day, I wished I'd never heard of master's degrees. All I wanted was the job Warters had. I mean, what could be better than interviewing your childhood hero?

I've never gotten the chance. Too bad, because I'd have to tell Ripken the truth: That he once made me sick.

Last week marked the 25th anniversary of Ripken surpassing a record once thought unbreakable: Lou Gehrig's streak of 2,130 consecutive games. But that doesn't explain why Ripken was responsible for a kid in North Carolina, whom he'd never met, falling ill for a couple days.

To really get it, you have to understand something: I didn't just idolize Ripken growing up — I *worshipped* the man. I mimicked his batting stances and tuned into Orioles games every night. I studied his defense because my dad told me as a tall, lanky young kid if I wanted to be a good middle infielder I should watch the sure-handed 6-foot-4 shortstop, who, despite being an anomaly at the position because of his height, commanded it with grace.

My grandfather bought me countless Ripken baseball cards. I collected newspaper clippings and magazines. Wore No. 8 on my back in Little League. Humid summer evenings were spent playing baseball in the backyard with my brother, where Ripken often was one of the heroes at twilight, the crickets and cicadas chirping away as his only audience.

You have to understand that, for years, Ripken was everywhere; he was baseball's good guy, a solid role model and the picture of endurance. And, to me, he was already a baseball god long before he broke the record.

All of which brings us to the events of early September, 1995.

The days leading up to Sept. 5 and 6 — when Ripken was scheduled to tie and then break Gehrig's record — lumbered by at a snail's pace for a middle-school kid who had All Things Streak on his mind. After playing in every game since 1982, would Ripken pull up lame just before his big moment? Or would the Iron Man bow out early in homage to the Iron Horse?

No, of course he wouldn't. But baseball was in turmoil those days, attempting to clean up its image after a strike canceled the '94 World Series. It needed a golden boy. So the atmosphere, led by a media blitz, seemed supercharged. My friends ribbed me about whether Ripken would actually break the record. They tried to rile me up and say, if you put streak aside, he was just an average ballplayer; but gold gloves, MVP awards, more home runs than any other shortstop in history and a guy who was on his way to 3,000 career hits told me otherwise.

The whole scene — a teenager's view that this one moment was the biggest deal in the universe — really was ridiculous. But I was just a kid, OK? For days, I was a nervous wreck. Didn't get my schoolwork done. Barely touched my dinner. Couldn't concentrate.

And then I got sick. Not from a cold or mild strain of the flu, probably just from good old fashioned worrying.

For two nights, while Baltimore celebrated and America paused to notice, while the numbers pinned to the B&O Warehouse at Camden Yards changed from 2,130 to 2,131, while my idol took his famous victory lap around the stadium and grown men and women wept in relief, I lay on the couch under a blanket.

But I'll never forget it. I'll never forget the magic that captured the nation's attention. Or the lap Ripken jogged at a slow pace, that too-perfect Americana moment — almost like living briefly in Camelot — when he rounded the stadium, shaking hands and slapping high-fives and saluting fans.

And I'll never forget when he blasted a home run each night. Did Angels pitchers serve up fat pitches on purpose? A lot of people thought so at the time, but I didn't. You see, people always have a way of tearing down incredible feats, and Ripken's were the stuff of dreams. So much so that a sick kid leapt to his feet and screamed in disbelief when the baseball sailed beyond the left-field fence both nights.

But the moment, as ingrained as it's become in the fabric of baseball, would not last. The good ones never do. That was the year I began finding other ways to occupy my time. The year I discovered the Stones and Bob Dylan. The year we all became fascinated with a thing called the World Wide Web. The year before I started high school and fell in what I thought was love for the first time and started reading John Steinbeck and writing bad poetry. But for a brief moment Ripken had been there and taught me a lesson.

Listen, baseball has gone through some tough times this year: botched negotiations between players and owners; a shortened season unlike any other; players sitting out and others falling ill from COVID-19; the deaths of legends like Tom Seaver, Al Kaline, Don Larsen, Lou Brock and Claudell Washington.

Our nation is reeling, too. Nearly 200,000 people have died from the coronavirus. The divisive nature of politics is tearing us to shreds. The American West is burning. And this year we said goodbye to giants like John Lewis, Chadwick Boseman, Kirk Douglas, Bill Withers, Mary Higgins Clark, Jim Lehrer and Kobe Bryant.

We need heroes, perhaps more than ever. Heroes make errors. Strike out. Take plenty of heat when they don't perform up to expectations.

But they are dependable. They teach us perseverance and dedication. That you don't get ahead by complaining, belittling others or caring only about yourself. You don't give up, even when your body hurts and you keep making mistakes and you're in a slump.

You show up, do what's right and keep pushing ahead. That's the only way to live.

Twenty-five years later, during a critical moment that will define our country's trajectory for decades to come, that's a lesson we all should heed.

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## After Further Review: On athletics, school boards failed

Ben Cates  
Dec 19, 2020

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E.C Glass guard Rayvon Graham drives past Salem's Tanner Dallas at E.C. Glass High School in Lynchburg on Friday, February 21, 2020.

Taylor Irby/The News & Advance

**S**chool boards in Lynchburg and Bedford County had a chance this week to prove themselves to young athletes by making competent and informed decisions about the return of sports. Each failed the test.

Just five days before winter sports were set to begin with a slate of basketball games, the Lynchburg board voted to push all contests back three weeks, to Jan. 11. It did so during a rambling 45-minute discussion that bounced from topic to topic and was filled at times with misinformation.

Some board members didn't know games were set to begin within a week. Others didn't realize the basic functions of Phase 2 and 3 guidelines their own return-to-play subcommittee set up months ago.

Boards like Lynchburg's are tasked with making incredibly difficult decisions these days. Their chief concern is the physical and emotional health of students, staff and families, and rightfully so. But that means, even on topics that normally wouldn't be of utmost concern, like athletics, the board needs to remain informed these days. That they weren't was disconcerting.

At one point, Lynchburg City Schools Superintendent Crystal Edwards was asked what games were currently scheduled. "For us?" she replied about the division. "We don't have games scheduled right now."

Actually, area schedules were drawn up and released in October. The Virginia High School League voted in July to bring sports back and in September decided on a Dec. 21 start date. Earlier in Wednesday's meeting, Edwards said she believed games began Dec. 21 but would have to check to make sure.

The board decided teams must return to Phase 2 guidelines until Jan. 11, meaning they cannot share equipment and must work out in small groups of 5 to 10 people, unable to install key strategic components necessary for competition. Some folks making that call weren't sure what those Phase 2 guidelines even entailed, which was alarming.

Watching the meeting's live feed, a buddy of mine contacted me to say board members should phone a friend for proper information. Good advice.

They also could read newspapers like this one, which has chronicled sports developments in detail throughout the entire pandemic.

They could consult athletic directors and coaches employed by the city who have worked tirelessly to put together a plan for sports to return.

They could refer to the VHSL's website, to the metrics available on LCS' own site, to the dozens of news divisions across Virginia devoting time and space to high school sports, or — as my friend suggested — use a lifeline.

Instead, they placed the winter season on life support. COVID cases are expected to rise yet again after the holidays, so it's feasible sports could be put on hold once more, even though only in-district play is allowed in our area to mitigate the virus' spread and athletes have been operating successfully under guidelines set forth by their divisions.

These kinds of week-by-week decisions won't cut it. Seasons are already condensed; soon, it will be too late to begin play.

Meanwhile, the Bedford board took another swing at the matter Thursday.

It did so under the guise of correcting a decision made one week prior, when it voted to allow sports to return but tied them to two key Virginia Department of Health metrics that, based on cases in the county and across the state, will make it awfully difficult for sports to be staged at all this winter.

That original Dec. 10 vote was shrouded in deception. The board heard from students advocating for sports to return and listened as others gathered outside chanted "Let us play!" It was supposedly a message received loud and clear.

So the board signaled its support for moving forward without spectators; but the vote contained language that tied the start of games to the metrics. Then board members patted themselves on the back for allowing games to begin, all the while knowing they most likely won't for the foreseeable future.

It was effectively washing its hands of the matter, placing the blame at the feet of the state instead of taking decisive action.

This week's meeting then, was a chance to correct that decision. But everything was short and sweet. The motion to proceed without regard to state metrics once again didn't garner enough votes.

Our athletes deserve better. They deserve the type of leaders who will look after their well-being but who also won't turn around and use them as pawns in a political game full of misdirection and uninformed decisions.

The teenagers were watching this week and, ultimately, the adults let them down. Since there's now a chance winter sports won't take place, some coaches are concerned athletes will seek out other avenues of competition, like travel and AAU teams.

A mass exodus would decimate the local high school scene.

At some point, local school boards may just look around and wonder where all the school pride has gone.

So stop stringing the kids along. Either let them begin competition or make a firm decision to cancel the season. This whole approach of gathering every week to address public concern gives people hope that sports will begin. Those hopes are always swiftly dashed.

Above all, let's not have simply the appearance of vigorous leadership. Give us the real thing, based on informed decisions. Anything less is inexcusable.