

Iron Man Hangs Up His Armour

by Adam GAUTHIER

This past weekend, the game of baseball lost one of its icons and perhaps its most durable player over the past twenty years. Baltimore Orioles third baseman Cal Ripken Jr. played his final game at home Saturday night in front of a sold-out Camden Yards crowd in Baltimore.

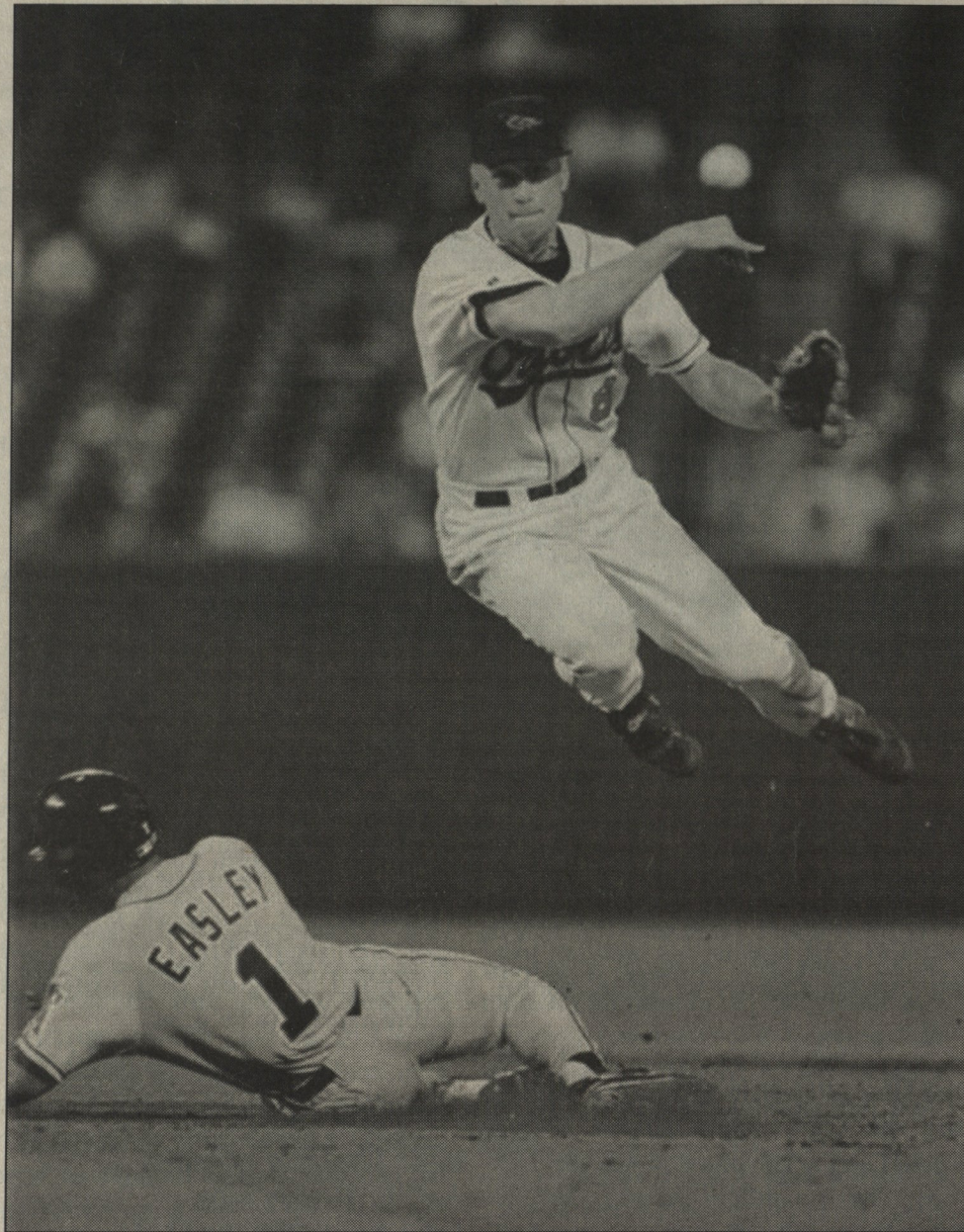
Ripken, who has had the worst season of his career, went 0-3 at the plate against Boston Red Sox pitcher David Cone. The Orioles went on to lose 5-1 to the Red Sox and finish with a 63-99 win/loss record for fourth place in the American League East.

It was a tough year for the Orioles, Ripken, and of course the fans, but it didn't really seem to matter in the end. The Orioles weren't expected to do much this year with a very youthful team and limited pitching capacity. The 2001 season will be remembered as Cal Ripken's farewell tour of Major League Baseball.

Ripken received rousing tributes and standing ovations in every ball park that he played in this year. During a game at SkyDome in September, Ripken came up in the late innings with the game tied and hit a homer to give his team the lead. The Toronto crowd gave Ripken a standing ovation and a "curtain call," even though their team was now behind with one inning left to play (incidentally, Toronto went on to win the game).

In July, during the All-Star Game in Seattle, Ripken hit the game-winning home run which gave the American League team a win over the National League team. Ripken was awarded the MVP in his final All-Star game. It was his eighteenth appearance at the summer classic.

Ripken finished the season with



Cal Ripken works his magic.

a .238 batting average, the lowest of his career and showed signs of wearing down at his third base position. But there were also times of brilliance, like last week against Boston when the 41 year old made a diving stab to his left and made a blistering throw to second base to get the lead runner which led to a double-play.

The careers of most professional athletes end when they reach their early forties, which is why Ripken's retirement doesn't seem that surpris-

ing. But when a person looks at the amount of consecutive games Ripken has played, it's extraordinary that he didn't retire years earlier. Between May 30, 1982, and September 8, 1995, Ripken played in 2,131 consecutive games to break the previous record held by New York Yankee great Lou Gehrig of 2,130 games. Ripken went on to play consecutive games until September 1998, when he voluntarily took himself out of the starting lineup.

Many believe that Ripken will

be remembered as the man who played the most consecutive games in professional baseball. What he should also be remembered for is the other numbers that he put up over his career, which include the most home runs ever by an American League shortstop and two MVP awards in 1982 and 1991. Ripken will also be remembered as a World Series champion when the Orioles won the title in 1982 (his only title). Another amazing statistic about Ripken's career was that he played all of his twenty years with the same team, a rarity in professional sport today.

As Cal Ripken walks away from the game, one can't help but feel that baseball is losing not only one of its superstars but one of its greatest ambassadors. Ripken will always be remembered as a gentleman in the game of baseball. No one can say a bad word about him. He never complained about his salary, which it is customary to do in this day and age. He simply punched his timecard, did his job on the field, and returned home to his family to complete another day's work. How do we know this about Ripken? I think it was best shown the night that he broke the consecutive games streak in 1995. His teammates had to practically drag him out of the dugout that night. Ripken simply nodded to the crowd and took a lap around the field shaking the hands of fans sitting in the seats at field-level. A few innings later, Ripken went back to work by hitting a dramatic home run to send the capacity crowd into a frenzy. But this was nothing new for Ripken. He was a hard worker who loved his job and we loved to watch him do it.

Thanks for the memories, Cal.

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