

Ripken Visits Queens As Parent, Not Player

by Ivan Pereira
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Baseball's "Iron Man" held a special town hall meeting at John Adams High School in Ozone Park last Thursday night to talk about a growing concern in youth sports.

Cal Ripken Jr., the retired Baltimore Orioles infielder who holds Major League Baseball's record for the most consecutive games played, talked to a group of students, coaches and parents about the dangers of pressuring young athletes.

The father of two, himself the son of a major league baseball player, feels that some parents and coaches push their kids too hard into sports—doing more harm than good.

"There's a lot going on where parents

work to get their kid to be like Derek Jeter or Alex Rodriguez," he said. "That's the wrong philosophy because it will wear them out."

Ripken said that parents who lash out at coaches for benching their children in games not only embarrasses their children, but also hinders their development as an athlete and mature adult.

"If I dealt with a kid 12 years or older (who was benched), I wouldn't want to intercede for them," he said "I would want the kid to talk to the coach themselves, because you build a man who can talk and deal with their issues."

Ripken turned his attention from the ballpark to the classroom when Grace Zwillenburg, the principal of John Adams High School, asked him about the role of education in sports. Ripken, who said he never

went to college, encouraged student athletes to have "a good base academically," because very few athletes make it to the professional level.

"It's great to dream, but you have to have a backup plan," he said. "Sports teach valuable lessons, but if you get hurt, look at your secondary dream. More than likely the back-up will move to the first plan."

Even though the town hall meeting was part of a multicity promotional tour for his new book "Parenting Young Athletes, the Cal Ripken Way," Hr gave helpful advice on his sport. Ripken told the audience, which included John Adams' varsity baseball team, that the best way to improve as an athlete is to put the emphasis on

practice and not on game performance.

"When you practice well, you create good habits," the future hall-of-famer said. "You can still have fun, but it's about your habits in batting practice. The game is the test, but the practice is the work."

Once again, Ripken emphasized that too much work can hurt the player more than help them. "It's better to do 20 reps the right way than 100 the wrong way," he said.

The varsity players enjoyed Ripken's advice, and said they will take it to heart.

"I thought it was good," said Christian Rodriguez, 17, a John Adams junior who is a pitcher and plays second and third base on the varsity team. "He motivated me to practice more."

Others were impressed with the fact that the baseball legend came to John Adams to share

"It's great to dream, but you have to have a backup plan."

—Cal Ripken Jr.,
former Baltimore Orioles infielder



Cal Ripken Jr., who played the most consecutive games in baseball's history, addresses aspiring athletes at John Adams High School in Ozone Park last Thursday.

(Ivan Pereira)

his insight and give the players a rare opportunity to interact with a big leaguer.

"It's good that he's taking time off his busy schedule to see our players," said Phyllis Saraceni, a school aide.

"This was exciting because this was the first time meeting a major leaguer," said Nelson Cruz, 17, a senior who plays center field on the school's team.

Ripken, in turn, was impressed with how the players and other audience members contributed to the town hall meeting.

"The kids were lively," he said in an

interview after the meeting. "I wanted it to be real because you have kids talking with you and asking questions (about the game) and it's great."

Ripken said this was the only time he has visited Queens aside from playing against the Mets at Shea Stadium, and he found the South Ozone Park neighborhood very friendly and comfortable.

"It's got a very small-town feel to it," said the Maryland native. "I'd love to come back and play some ball on these (baseball) fields." □