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McTyre: Heroes still found on the field

■ Continued from Page 5
 close the gap to 7-4. With two
 outs and the bases jammed,
 Rice belted his second home
 run of the inning to win the
 game 8-7.

I went completely bonkers.
 All I talked about the whole
 way home was "Jim Rice this
 and Jim Rice that." I probably
 made my dad not like Rice,
 because it was all that came out
 of my mouth.

That happened 17 years ago,
 when players were players
 instead of money mongers with
 attitudes to fit. Today, the ath-
 letes seemingly could give a
 shit about the fans prior to or
 after a game. They do anything
 they can to dodge the public —
 from not coming onto the field
 until almost game time to tak-
 ing a back exit after the game.
 Sometimes it is understandable
 but usually not.

Well don't despair, because if
 you know a youngster or are
 one yourself, just look to the
 college ranks where the athletes
 haven't been bit by the money
 bug — at least most of them
 anyway.

A few weeks ago, six-year-
 old Jeff Nelson and his mother
 Joni were writing his birthday
 invitation list, which consisted
 of eight friends and one Oregon
 football player — Ricky Whit-
 tle. Jeff insisted his mother
 send an invitation to the tail-

back because he was his hero.

"It all began last year when
 Oregon played Arizona State in
 Autzen Stadium," Joni said.
 "My husband Arno was unable
 to attend the game, so I took Jeff
 with me — his first game. After
 the game, we went down to the
 field to get autographs and the
 first player we met was Ricky
 Whittle. Ricky signed Jeff's
 ticket and then took off his
 wrist bands and asked Jeff if he
 would like to have them. Jeff
 was in awe of Ricky from that
 day forward."

Joni told him that "Ricky is a
 very busy person and probably
 wouldn't be able to attend." But
 Jeff insisted, so he and his
 mother took the invitation to
 the Casanova Center.

"All week long he kept asking
 me if I thought Ricky would get
 the invitation and if I had heard
 from him, as the other kids had
 R.S.V.P.'d," Joni said. "Finally
 his birthday had arrived and we
 hadn't heard from Ricky. As the
 party was winding down, an
 unrecognizable car pulled into
 the driveway — It was [Ricky]
 with A. J. Jels."

The two spent an hour with
 Jeff and the kids, eating cake
 and talking. During the time,
 Whittle asked Jeff for a glass of
 water. When the two football
 players left for that day's game
 some of the water remained in
 the glass, Joni recalled. Jeff

looked at the water and then at
 his mother and said, "Whittle-
 water." The water was saved
 for a while but eventually was
 spilled out.

These are the type of things
 the sports world needs right
 now, especially as the media
 tries to find the wrong in an
 athlete instead of pursuing the
 good. Whittle's action shows us
 what type of guy he is — one
 with class.

When Ricky was at Jeff's
 party Joni asked him why he
 decided to show up.

"I am enjoying my life more
 than ever playing football for a
 great school," Whittle told her.
 "It could be over tomorrow and
 I wouldn't be somebody. If I
 can make a difference in young
 kids lives by [helping them] see
 how important sports are, then
 they can choose sports over the
 negatives in life, and I have
 done something good, really
 good."

Now every Sunday morning
 Jeff grabs the paper and cuts
 out anything about Whittle. Jeff
 says he wants to play for the
 Ducks one day and be just like
 Whittle.

That is what sports used to
 be about and hopefully this is
 the beginning of its second-
 coming.

Mark McTyre is the Assistant
 Sports Editor of the Emerald.

Piniella snags AL manager award

■ **BASEBALL:** The Mariners' skipper is
 honored after taking Seattle to its first
 postseason action

By Trevor Kearney
 Sports Editor

Seattle Mariners' manager Lou Piniella was
 named American League Manager of the Year
 Monday after guiding the Mariners to their first
 playoff appearance in the team's history.

The Mariners' AL West crown was enough
 to push Piniella past Boston manager Kevin
 Kennedy, who actually received more first-place
 votes than Piniella, but finished with 74 points,
 12 less than Piniella's 86 points.

"I'm proud of this," Piniella said via telecon-
 ference on Monday afternoon. "It is nice to be
 recognized. I never thought I would feel this way.
 So many managers did so well this season, to be
 picked by the writers is an honor."

Piniella's Mariners rallied late in the season
 to finish tied for first place in the American
 League West with the California Angels. The
 Mariners then won a one-game playoff and went
 on to beat the New York Yankees 3-2 in the open-
 ing round of the AL playoffs. But in the league
 championship series, the Mariners fell to the
 Cleveland Indians four games to two.

"This here is an individual award, but I don't
 see it as that," Piniella said. "I see it as an orga-
 nizational award. It feels good, not in a pompous
 way or a proud way, but in a very humble way.
 "I felt good for the players, the organization
 and the city of Seattle. They are the ones that
 made it possible," he said.

The race for the award proved to be a close
 one, as Cleveland's Mike Hargrove finished in
 third place with eight first-place votes and 71
 total points. But Piniella outlasted the two other
 AL division title managers and earned the first
 Manager of the Year award of his career.

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