

Chapter 1 : Giants Review: Rookie Dereck Rodriguez is biggest bright spot of down year | NBCS Bay Area

Every Bay Area fan knows that the only thing better than watching sports is arguing about the - picking the best, the worst, and who will come out on top. And no region tears its sports teams apart like we do in Northern California.

July 27, Updated: July 27, at The 50 greatest coaches in bay area history. Yep, we went there. The journey was as difficult as one might imagine. Over the last couple of months, a committee of current and former Tampa Bay Times sports reporters gathered twice in person, and deliberated extensively via phone and e-mail, before settling on our 50 and some committee members remain unsettled. We limited our discussion only to head coaches or managers at the prep, college or pro level sorry, Little League and AAU coaches. We placed a big emphasis on championships, while also considering program influence those who "changed the culture" at a place and historical impact. Hey, there was room for only Let the debate rage until kickoff, or longer.

Wrestling In the ESPN-produced documentary *The Streak*, Brandon High wrestling coach Russ Cozart recalls the vote of confidence "or perhaps, ultimatum" school administrators gave him upon his hiring in Despite surrendering 13 pounds, he won a starting spot in the pound division, and became captivated by the sport. Just his absolute love of being around it, not just coaching but being in that atmosphere, is surpassed by nobody. One of his wrestlers Franklin Gomez became an Olympian. To keep himself conditioned and glean new techniques, Cozart "who wrestled at the University of Alabama in the s" competed in senior events until his early 50s, winning seven Veterans World Championship titles. He only stopped because he feared an injury at his age ultimately could impede his ability to coach. Certainly no one in the county, nor the state. Russ Cozart is carried off by his wrestlers after Brandon High School set the national record for consecutive wins then in any sport. Times file, 2. He managed pretty well. After a shaky first two seasons of experimenting, losing and 96 games, Maddon led the Rays on a remarkable run, to a stunning American League East title and a World Series berth in , and four trips to the playoffs in a six-year window overall. What made it more remarkable was that he did much of it his way. He flaunted baseball convention in limiting batting practice and travel day dress codes. He implemented innovative defensive shifts and maximized platoon advantages and positionally versatile players provided by the front office. He spoke in big words and on non-baseball topics such as philosophy, wine, cycling, literature and rock music. And he searched constantly for ways to put his players in the best position to succeed, whether it was making motivational comments; breaking up the routine by bringing in a menagerie of pets including a foot snake , magicians and musicians; and organizing themed dress-up road trips. He showed he knew a little bit about baseball, too, often making unconventional moves that worked out, winning two American League manager of the year awards in leading the Rays to a record over nine seasons. Dundy took over a Bucs team that had 13 straight losing seasons, and led it to the playoffs four times in five years to set up a Super Bowl season. Dundy has the best winning percentage of any coach in Bucs history . As a leader, Dundy continues to prove himself as one of the best the area has known. Tampa Bay Lightning Sport: Hockey Remember him, for he was the lion tamer and the lion. Tortorella has seemed a loud, disappointing caricature at times since those days, but he was beyond real when he took over the Lightning in the middle of the season, when the franchise represented the dregs of hockey. That was the talk. John Tortorella shut yaps. In a virtuoso performance, he galvanized young stars and seasoned veterans into the passion that carried them to new heights. Whether it was tough love for Vinny Lecavalier or no love at all, or skating his entire team into the ground in training camp, Tortorella left no doubt where he stood, which was behind a team out to stand alone. No way we win without that man.

Football The highest-ranked prep football coach on our list never played the sport. When Plant hired Weiner to resuscitate its once-proud program in , he arrived with nary a battle scar or bum knee. But the prerequisites that mattered "smarts, compassion, servanthood and motivational chops" brandished themselves immediately. By his third, the Panthers were undefeated Class 4A state champs. Presiding over this unprecedented run no other bay area public school has won more than two state titles is a former Jesuit High tennis player, football manager and student body president with an insatiable love of literature and poetry. But he loved the English language. Many, in fact, pegged Weiner to ultimately replace Ciao. Fate had other plans,

steering him 5 miles down Himes Avenue instead. Four state crowns, victories and 13 district titles later, he remains as indefatigable as ever. Plant coach Robert Weiner watches the last moments of the Class 5A state semifinal game against Lakeland. Times file, 6. Football Of all the football coaches to make a stop in the area, only one can boast the image still easily evoked of Gruden, smiling proudly with the Lombardi Trophy hoisted high, having brought a Super Bowl championship to Tampa Bay. That, all by itself, is a strong resume line. The Bucs have played 41 seasons, with a grand total of six playoff wins, but three of them came in a span of 15 days in January , with Gruden cementing a place in NFL history for an otherwise unremarkable franchise. Tony Dungy raised the expectations for the Bucs to become a consistent playoff team, but it was Gruden that executed that elusive final step, beating his old team the Raiders and doing it resoundingly, No matter what the score is on a given Sunday, no matter what the record is at any point in any season, Bucs fans will always have that moment. In a glistening year career at Berkeley Prep , , Dagostino collected wins and 15 state titles while developing a nationally hailed club program Tampa Bay Juniors he built from scratch. Terrapins coach Carol Chalu and Dagostino were married for more than a decade before divorcing in The Terrapins-Bucs showdowns seemingly had the potential to become ugly. The two seemed to make each other better, combining for 27 state championships. Boys basketball Northeast girls basketball coach Will White took a sports and American history class years ago as a graduate student at USF. He played at Gibbs from during the height of integration. He coached his first game at Lakewood the year America celebrated its bicentennial. And his year tenure outlasted five presidents. Wright took over a struggling Spartans program that had gone in , the lone win coming via forfeit. He turned Lakewood into a juggernaut with his brand of up-tempo basketball. His teams pressed and trapped and ran up and down the court. Petersburg, I would step down and become an assistant the next day. Pete coach Chris Blackwell, who played for Wright from and was an assistant with the Spartans from Volleyball Chalu â€” then Carol Dagostino â€” arrived in the area from Chicago in the late s with then-husband Randy, and essentially helped kick-start a Tampa Prep athletic program in its crawling stage. A year later, Randy left to become athletic director and baseball coach and eventually volleyball coach at Berkeley Prep. In 21 years as Terrapins volleyball coach, she compiled a record, won 12 state titles and finished as runnerup on two other occasions. Defying the prototypical volleyball roster, her teams atoned for their lack of height with heart, often employing middle blockers well under 6-foot and emphasizing defense. For 20 consecutive seasons , either Berkeley or Tampa Prep â€” or sometimes both â€” won a state title. Softball Hired in as Canterbury was about to enter district play, Moore barely had enough players to field a varsity squad, much less one in middle school. The former Kissimmee Osceola standout placed the fortunes of her new team in a promising yet inexperienced group of sixth-graders, some of whom had never played softball. Canterbury won a district title that year â€” and has been to the playoffs every year since. Postseason berths were not enough. In , Canterbury made the state semifinals for the first time. That started a run of eight semifinal appearances in the past 11 seasons. Canterbury has won four state titles, the most among local high school programs. Roughly a decade later, Urso returned to his alma mater, where he has compiled a record. Many of his rosters have been built with D-I and junior college transfers, who typically arrive with chips on their shoulders. Sort of like their coach. A member of no fewer than three halls of fame, Haley coached 10 boys state championship cross country teams, five runner-up squads and four individual state champions from In that same span, he helped develop eight individual state track champs. Toss in 17 total conference and 16 district crowns, and Haley has arguably the most impressive bio â€” in terms of titles won â€” on this list. Hockey He was never a rail splitter, but Cooper did start out as a lawyer. The most famous graduate in the history of the Thomas M. Cooley Law School in Lansing, Mich. He still is looking to win one with his biggest client. Cooper, whose quick mind and quicker wit and strong jaw oh, that chewing gum have been his Lightning trademark, has guided Tampa Bay to the playoffs in four of his five full seasons and to the conference final three of the past four seasons. The Lightning won 54 times last season, a club record. And Cooper has more wins than losses in his NHL career In , the Hawks won the first of consecutive state titles, becoming the first Hillsborough County public school to win a state crown in 34 years. He retired after the season with a record in 27 years. Baseball A Leto High and University of Tampa alumnus, Crumbley makes our top 15 for winning state titles at two strikingly different programs: In this file photo, Jesuit baseball

coach John Crumbley celebrates his th win on March 16, In 21 seasons, Ennis led the "Long Red Row" by which Leto CC came to be known and feared to 20 state meets, seven state championships and 17 consecutive district titles. Tampa Bay Buccaneers Sport: Numbers hardly tell the story.

And no region tears its sports teams apart like we do in Northern California. Veteran sportswriter Cam Inman takes you inside the best debates in Bay Area sports. Covering the 49ers, Raiders, Giants, A's, Sharks, Warriors, and beyond, every question you want to debate is here - as well as a few surprises.

You might have concluded that such lack of inspiration from the visor to the helmets cannot be matched by any other team. You might have decided that this is as low as it gets. So have the 49ers. So has every team at one point or another. So, truth be told, the Raiders might not actually be the worst team in football, despite the almost universal disgust they inspired Thursday night. Draft picks come and, if you think about the Raiders, go. This is about the visceral feeling that the team you might follow is the very best at something, even if it is being the very worst at the thing you thought they were trying to do. This, then, is the reason to watch the rest of their season despite the horrors that will confront you. You knew there was a point to this. Your task is to see if this Raiders team can stand up to the worst the NFL offers now, and if so, can it exceed it. In short, can they be the Browns, who just fired a former Raiders coach? Can they be the Bills, who cannot score points but are quite adept at allowing others to do so? Can they be the Giants, bizarrely tied to a quarterback in Eli Manning whom they both love and hate at the same time? Can they be the Cardinals? Well, first, you have to figure out how they win another game and then you have to figure out how they are superior to a team that twice beat the team that just beat the hell out of them. But at least there are other people in the game, which we could not have imagined Thursday night. The Raiders are not alone at Floor Zero, you see. On the golf course, while carpooling to work, in team meeting rooms and, yes, even on the sidelines. Gruden and Guenther are together on so much, including a belief the Raiders defense has fallen country miles below expectation. Guenther said this winter he thought Khalil Mack would be rushing off the edge, NaVorro Bowman would man the middle and Eddie Vanderdoes a perfect scheme fit, Guenther says and Justin Ellis on the defensive interior. The first guy got traded, the second never re-signed and the last two have been hurt all season but are coming back soon. The Raiders plan to remake this defense, as they did before the Mack trade. The Raiders have significant draft capital, including three first-round picks, and tons of salary cap space to add talent at vital positions, including edge rusher they need more than one linebacker they need more than one and safety they need more than one. During his four years as Cincinnati defensive coordinator, the Bengals were never worse than 17th in scoring defense and were in the top 10 twice. They were middle-of-the-pack in yards allowed, bottoming out at 22nd in His patience is certainly being tested. The Raiders want to grow through the draft and free agency, with players who fit these defensive schemes. Hopefully we can just keep getting better every week.

Chapter 3 : Cam Inman (Author of The Best Bay Area Sports Arguments)

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How did the Minnesota Twins, an organization forever in need of more talent, let Dereck Rodriguez get away? Rodriguez was 25 at the time, with a Hall-of-Fame pedigree, a developing repertoire and solid minor league results. Even Giants people seemed surprised that Rodriguez was available, but they had done their homework and were prepared to chase him the minute he became a free agent. The end result was the best development of the season. Rodriguez spent much of his first season in the big leagues as a Rookie of the Year candidate and leader of the rotation. He then went to Triple-A Sacramento and continued to pitch well, and on May 28, not long before he could opt out, he had his contract purchased. It looked like Rodriguez might serve as temporary depth for the bullpen, and his first appearance was rushed when Jeff Samardzija walked off a mound at Coors Field. In 21 appearances — 19 of them starts — Rodriguez posted a 2. He had the seventh-lowest ERA among NL pitchers who threw innings, and until a rough finish in September, he spent much of his season ranking right there with Max Scherzer and Aaron Nola, who will finish second and third for the Cy Young Award. What stood out most about Rodriguez was his consistency. He became the first Giant to throw at least six innings and allow two runs or fewer in 13 of his first 16 starts, and with a stretch of nine straight such starts, he became just the third rookie in the last 60 years to pull off the feat. Lefties hit him a little better. What Went Wrong Pitching deep into September for the first time in his career, Rodriguez gave up nine earned over nine innings in his final two starts, which might cost him some down-ballot Rookie of the Year votes. Per Brooks Baseball, his average fastball went down every month, from His max fastball dropped about two MPH over the course of the season. At the plate, Rodriguez was just 3-for with 16 strikeouts. The Future For nearly his entire rookie season, Rodriguez pitched like an ace. Some of the metrics — a low strikeout rate, 3. You could make the argument either way. Barry had a big question for Willie McCovey. Mac loved our family unconditionally. And I want to thank Mac for letting me hit a bunch of baseballs in his cove. Through , there have been 78 splash hits with home runs smashed from Giants into the cove. Bonds alone has 35, easily the most by any Giant. Gaylord [Perry] is on the mound. Tito [Fuentes] at second base. Dave Rader was catching at that time when I was a little boy. The Giants were honoring Hunter Pence, and Zaidi decided to watch. That was the embodiment of what this organization is. Larry Baer let Bobby Evans go with a week to go in the season in part because he was eager to start the search for a new head of baseball operations, and from the very beginning, Zaidi was one of three to four names at the very top. The Giants cast a wide net, even as Baer hoped to zero in on names at the top of his wish list. He consulted with Major League Baseball and friends around the game. Baer even briefly considered one candidate who works as an executive in another sport. Zaidi was a priority from the start, but Baer could not interview him until after the Dodgers completed postseason play. The Giants did not want to sit around for a month if Zaidi was not interested, though, so MLB and the Dodgers worked together and made Zaidi available to Baer for a minute phone call during the postseason. That was enough to assure Baer that Zaidi did have interest, and last Friday, the two finally sat down face to face. The meeting was supposed to last two hours. Zaidi gave his vision for six and a half hours. He met again with team officials on Monday, this time with a focus on getting to know Brian Sabean and the people who run the business side of the organization. On Monday, Zaidi was offered the job and a five-year deal. By Tuesday evening, he had been announced as the new president of baseball operations. On Wednesday afternoon, he was introduced. Wednesday, he flew back to Los Angeles to head down for the final night of the General Managers Meetings. He was going to stay in Oakland, but while jogging near his home, he had a panic attack. He realized he had to take a leap of faith. This time around, there was much less to think about. Zaidi and his family wanted to come back to the Bay Area. He said his first baseball game was at Candlestick Park on August 10, This is a full circle moment for the year-old.

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Cam Inman is the author of Best Bay Area Sports Arguments (avg rating, 0 ratings, 0 reviews, published) and The Best Bay Area Sports Arguments .