

CAL RIPKEN, JR: Thank you, Commissioner Selig and all you do for baseball. And thanks everyone here at the Hall of Fame for this great weekend and honor.

I've really appreciated all the people who have congratulated me in the months since my election to the Hall of Fame. It sure helped me get over a conversation I had recently with a 10-year old boy I was instructing. I was teaching him hitting and he was starting to have success and feeling quite proud of himself. And he asked me, "So, did you play baseball?" I said, "Yes, I played professionally." And he goes, "Oh, yeah, for what team?" I said, "I played with the Baltimore Orioles for 21 years." And he said, "What position?" And I said, "Mostly short stop but a little third base at the end." And he began to walk away and he looked back and said, "should I know you?" That certainly puts all this in perspective.

As I thought about this day, I couldn't help but say to myself you don't get to a place like this and join a group like the men seated behind me without a lot of people supporting you along the way. If I thanked them all individually, I'd keep you here longer than the streak. But I do want to talk about some who stand out in my memory.

A big part of me reaching this Hall was played by my teammates and the Oriole organization. From the front office to the training room and the men I played with through the years, I was a better player because I was part of the Oriole way. And that

way was epitomized by my good friend Eddie Murray with whom I team up again in this Hall of Fame. He led by example and he

inspired me with his play and his friendship. Thank you, Eddie.

And then there are the fans of baseball. And in particular, the people of Baltimore who cheered my successes and stood by me when things weren't going so well. Where would any of us in this game be without the people who love the game and their teams and who even make trips to events like this long after we've put down our gloves and bats? I know some fans have looked at the streak as a special accomplishment, and while I appreciate that, I always looked at it as just showing up for work every day. As I look out on this audience, I see thousands of people who do the same, teachers, police officers, mothers, fathers, business people and many others. You all may not receive the accolades that I have throughout my career, so I'd like to take the time out to salute all of you for showing up, working hard and making the world a better place. Thank you all.

As I played this game, there were special friends who made it possible for me to be the best I could be on the field with their support off the field. There was Jimmy Williams who taught and guided me to the big leagues, and Richie Bancells who kept me and my body on the field and was a great listener in our off the field moments, and Brady Anderson, simply my best friend, and John "T Bone" Shelby with whom I started a life-long

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friendship from our earliest days of struggling together in the minor leagues.

And most of all, I count the blessings of my family. Imagine how lucky I am to call the man whose memory I revere to this day by so many important names, teacher, coach, manager and especially dad. He was for me and many others an example of how

to play and prepare for the game the right way, the Cal Senior way.

And alongside him or in place of him, there was always my mom who to this day shines as an example of devotion to family, community, humility, integrity and love. Mom, the words are hard to find to let you know how much I love you back.

My sister and brothers, including Ellie and Fred, are all members of the Ripken team, and what a bunch of supportive teammates they have been. Another of them, Bill, you know, the serious one, became my team mate on the field with the Orioles and remains my partner and friend in Ripken baseball today. Just saying his name puts a smile on my face.

And our children, Rachel Marie and Ryan Calvin that not only gave me a whole new understanding of life but they also continue to bring me pride as they continue to grow and meet life's challenges. I'm so proud to stand here today and tell them how much I love and care for them.

Next to them is the love of my life. She didn't know anything about baseball or me when we first met, but she has

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learned and stood by me and supported me throughout our years together. Kelly, I hope you know how much I appreciate your love and your always being there for me. I love you and I thank you. Ryan, I might need a little help transporting this (rose given to Kelly Ripken).

My life in baseball has been one giant blessing. But when I finished playing, and I say finished playing rather than retired because I felt that I was not at an ending, but rather at another beginning in my life. I had the opportunity to look back on my playing career and take stock of experience,

knowledge and values that could shape the next stage of my life. Whether it be the last game of the streak or the last day of my playing career, I am a believer that such mile stones open doors of opportunity for new and exciting endeavors.

In the present chapter of my life, I have created a company and helped to organize a foundation through which I have taken all that I have learned as a player and translated it into programs to make the young people of today be aspiring players of tomorrow. And I hope that I set an example for them as men like Lou Gerhig and the remarkable people seated up here have been for me and so many others.

My opportunity to work with children and their coaches across this great country, and for that matter the world, enables me to tell you first hand that the game of baseball is alive and well. I see that as we work to help mold another

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generation of young people into the future scholastic players, professional players and even the big leaguers and Hall of Famers of tomorrow.

We all hear about how baseball imitates life, which held especially true for my dad. He used to say that everything that happens in baseball happens in life and everything that happens in life happens in baseball. He certainly taught us about life through baseball. But I also have to admit that as a young man with a limited view of the world, baseball and life became one for me and it was difficult to see beyond playing the game.

Did you ever stop to think about how your life would unfold or imagine how you would like your life to turn out? One of those reflective pauses happened in my life when I was around 18 years old. I thought I had it all figured out, I would play

big league baseball until about 45 and then worry about the rest of my life after that. It took me a little while, but I did come to realize that baseball was just one part of my life with the possible exception of this weekend, of course. This was never more clear to me than when we had children. I realized that the secret of life is life, and a bigger picture came into focus. Games were and are important, but people and how you impact on them are most important. While we all work to develop into productive people for our own happiness, it is also vital that we do so for the good of society as a whole.

As I came to know the importance of my role in the

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development of my children, I began to sense the impact I could have on other kids. It is all about coming to the realization that we all have within us the power to develop and pursue almost anything we set our mind to, and that is the message and opportunity we want to pass to all children.

We are the ambassadors for the future, just as a baseball player wants to leave his mark on the game and leave it a little better than he found it, we should all try to make this world a better place for the next generation.

When I realized that I could use baseball to help make life better especially for the kids, baseball became a platform. By trying to set a good example, I could help influence young people in positive and productive ways. And some of this became apparent to me in my earliest playing days. So as my major league career unfolded, I started playing a little more attention to my actions. I remember when Kenny Singleton showed me a tape of me throwing my helmet down after a strike out and all he said was, "How does that look?" I remember learning

about a family who saved their money to come to Baltimore to see me play. I got thrown out in the first inning and their little boy cried the whole game. I remember how I reacted with anger when dad was fired after an oh and six start, and after each of those events and others, I vowed to act better the next time. Yes, these were only little things, but as dad used to say, if you take care of all the little things, you'll never have a big

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thing to worry about.

As the years passed, it became clear to me that kids see it all, and it's not just some of your actions that influence, it's all of them. Whether we like it or not as big leaguers, we are role models. The only question is will we be positive or will it be negative. Should we put players up on a pedestal and require them to take responsibility? No. But we should encourage them to use their influence positively, to help build up and develop the young people who follow the game.

Sport can play a big role in teaching values and principles. It can be a huge developmental tool for life. Just think, team work, leadership, work ethic and trust are all part of the game and are also all factors in how we make the most of our lives. So an essential part of the job of every player and of all people for that matter is to help the young people of today learn these lessons so they can live better lives tomorrow.

Today, my friend Tony Gwynn and I officially become members of the Hall of Fame, and I congratulate Tony for all that he has achieved. Tony, I always admired your enthusiasm for the game and your great accomplishments as a hitter, and that same great batting stance you seemed to use day in and day out, something

that I could never be accused of doing. And congratulations to Rick Hummel and Denny Matthews as well.

But this day and all that it represents shouldn't be just

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about us or even about all these great Hall of Famers up here. Today is about celebrating the best that baseball has been and the best it can be. I realize what I'm about to say is ironic since I'm often known for the consecutive games streak that helped define my career and my approach to the game, the streak is marked by a number, a start and an end, but I can assure you it was not accomplished with a view to a given number or end point, and I certainly wasn't aware when I started in this game where it would lead me. You see, I truly believe there are no endings, just points at which we begin again, as players do 162 times a season and if they are lucky, a few more times each fall.

And finally, as I experience another new beginning with this induction, I can only hope that all of us, whether we have played on the field or been fans in the stands, can reflect on how fortunate we are and can see our lives as new beginnings that allow us to leave this world a bit better than when we came into it.

Thank you.

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