

# Sports

## Break in tradition — a Cardinal sin

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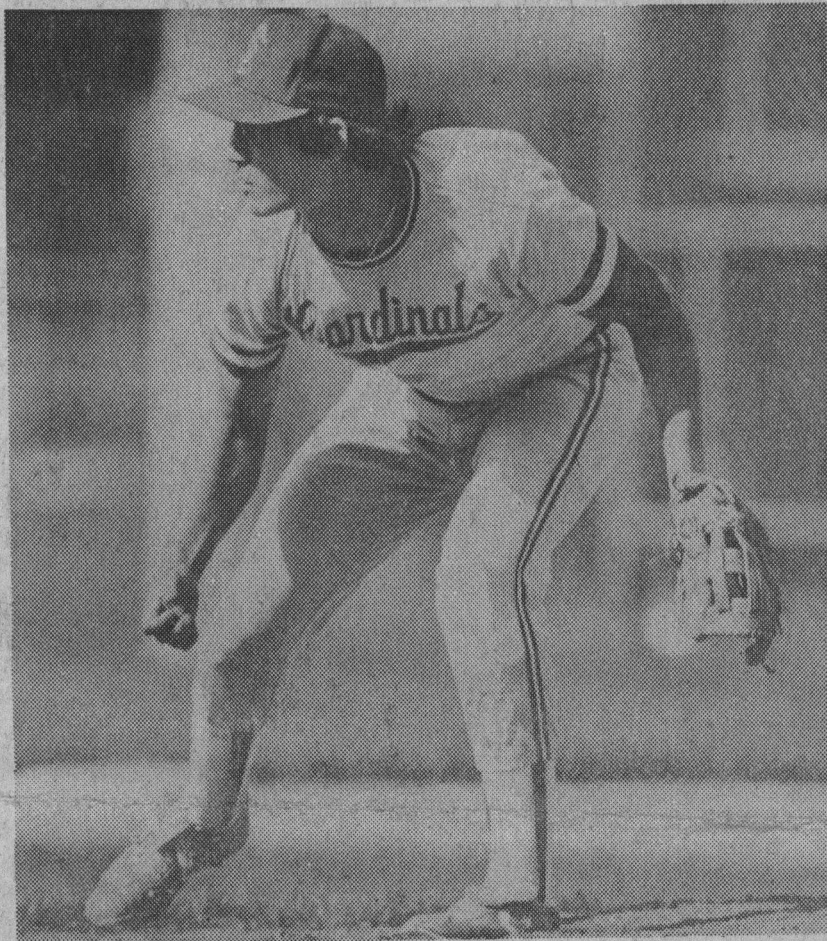
SANTA CRUZ — There is no escaping the deep-rooted tradition of excellence within the Santa Cruz High baseball program. There has been a continuity for nearly 30 years which goes beyond the fact the Cardinals have worn virtually the same style uniform — gray, with red caps and trim — and have depended on a foundation of fundamentals. It's almost as if Steve Smith, the star shortstop of the early '60s, handed down his bat and glove to Al Kensinger, the shortstop of the 1976 league championship team, who in turn handed them down to Steve Glass, the senior standout of this year's Santa Cruz Coast Athletic League champions.

The legend centers around Coach Bill Dodge, now in his 27th season, who has served as the link between the eras. Time has almost stood still as Dodge has compiled 14 league titles. He still stands patrol at the dugout, pacing back and forth, arms folded, his ever-observing eyes scanning the field from behind his dark, horn-rimmed glasses. Then, there's the voice — the Dodge voice — an intimidatingly deep baritone, with which orders are slowly, deliberately relayed. No matter if the players belonged to Smith's era, Kensinger's era or the present era — when Dodge speaks, the Cardinals listen.

"Mr. Dodge has been talking about how he has had great teams in the past," says Gino Panelli, the senior righthander who will start tonight for the Cardinals in the first round of the Central Coast Section playoffs against Del Mar. "He says we have a great team and we want to win for him. And we so have something to prove."

What the current Cardinals feel they have to show — to themselves, possibly, more than to anyone else — is that they have upheld the tradition. Panelli, Glass, first baseman Glen Hill and injured catcher Bill Domhoff have been together for four years, the first at the freshman level (although Panelli was called up to the varsity late in the year) and the last three on the varsity. The four have provided the entire school, in fact, with a solid nucleus of athletes, since three of the four (besides Panelli) have played varsity basketball together for three years, and three of the four (besides Glass) have played varsity football together. But, they haven't won any varsity championships, until this year, and now want to win the CCS title to make up for lost time.

"They worked a little harder as a group and just made up their minds they would win," says Dodge, whose team won its first seven league games, but needed a victory over San Lorenzo Valley on the final day of the SCCAL season to clinch the first Santa Cruz



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

### Card pitcher Gino Panelli and Santa Cruz are CCS-bound.

baseball title since 1979.

"It was a much better league than in the past," Dodge said. "There was always the chance of getting knocked off, even by the lower teams. It keeps the pressure on, and you have to be a better team to win it."

The Cards' overall record of 18-5 doesn't compare, for example, with the Al McCommon-led 1961 team which won its last seven games to go 20-2-1 overall and run away with the old Monterey Bay League title. But, the 1983 Cardinals' dedication, Dodge feels, has been as sound as any previous group's, despite some problems the last couple of weeks. "We've had great practices, even early in the year when it was raining," Dodge said. "They were really staying with it when it could have been easy to let up."

Now, Dodge hopes, that dedication will pay off in the Cardinals' first CCS championship. Santa Cruz has come close, placing second in the CCS in 1968, 1969 and 1976. "The team is looking forward to winning the CCS," Dodge said. "We weren't satisfied with just winning the league. I keep saying, 'One of these years we'll win it.'"

"They know all about the times we've been there before," Dodge says of his team's awareness of the Santa Cruz tradition. "We (Dodge and long-

time assistant coach Ray Hunter) have told them all about it. That has become a goal — to win the next step. To be the first Santa Cruz team to go all the way."

The current Cardinal team isn't the typical championship team, which usually consists of one or two untouchable pitchers and one or two big hitters. By the time a team reaches the CCS playoff level of competition, virtually all the teams can play good defense; it's usually the star pitchers and hitters who make the difference.

Instead, Santa Cruz relies on balance and aggressiveness on offense. It hasn't been unusual — indeed, it's happened more often than not — to have a batter lower in the lineup deliver key hits. For example, while Hill and Glass, two of the class players in the area, have struggled at the plate, guys like second baseman Kevin Grindy have come through. Grindy isn't considered a power hitter, but in an early meeting with Soquel, the league runnerup, he hit a key home run. Rick Munoz, who the speedy Hill could probably lap in a footrace around the bases, managed to score from second on a single in a key victory down the stretch. And Panelli scored from second against Harbor on an infield out.

"That's the object of the game, to put the pressure on the other team," Dodge said. "They go; they're not afraid to. And they haven't made too many mistakes on the bases."

If there has been a constant in the Cardinals' success over the years, it's the fact that Santa Cruz stresses minimizing physical and mental errors. Naturally, Dodge has had teams which have made mistakes, but those teams haven't won championships, either. This year's team is more in tune with the successful teams.

"I think it's part of our character to be a winner," says Hill. "We didn't win it in our sophomore year and our junior year, so we felt we had to win it in our senior year."

Domhoff, the hard-luck kid of the group, has not made it through the end of the season for the third time. In order of disappearances, he's been sidelined by mononucleosis, an injury to his right shoulder, then last week underwent major ligament surgery to his left knee, as a result of a collision at home plate two weeks ago.

While still in pain, Domhoff be in the dugout tonight, monitoring Panelli. "If I start letting down," Panelli says, "he knows how to put me back in my place."

After the Cardinals lost to Soquel last Tuesday, the team seemed to let down, "bickering at each other," Panelli said, Dodge, realizing the team's unity, which has developed along with close friendships over the past four years, couldn't be jeopardized. He asked Domhoff to give the team a pep talk, which, Panelli says, resulted in the players pulling together.

Domhoff didn't relish the role — somewhat of George Gipp giving his own eulogy — but complied with Dodge's request. "It was so hard, just coming back to practice and seeing everyone," Domhoff said. "I wanted to be out there. But, some bad things were happening. We had to get back on a positive note."

"Coach wanted the championship, and all of us did," Domhoff said. "And we finally got it."

Tonight, they take the first step in going after more: A first CCS title. Then, they can stop chasing the Cardinal ghosts of Smith, McCommon, Kensinger, Kris Sorenson, Gary Ghidinelli, Rod Fleming, Dee Herren, Mike Scott...

**PLAYOFF NOTES:** No decision was reached Monday concerning the Monterey High player ineligibility declaration by the CCS. The Monterey City Schools took the CCS to Monterey Superior Court, but a restraining order was not to be ruled upon until today. The reinstatement of Monterey would affect the Toreadores, Watsonville High and Salinas High, and bump Mountain View from the playoffs. Soquel High opens the playoffs Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. at Washington Park in Santa Clara against Capuchino. The game was incorrectly reported Monday as scheduled for tonight.