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The Sporting News  
Presents  
Mark McGwire  
Mac Attack!

by  
Rob Rains

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*Back cover photo: Matthew McGwire gives his dad, Mark, a high five after*

*McGwire hit his second home run of the night against the Arizona Diamondbacks, Tuesday, April 14, 1998, at Busch Stadium in St. Louis. McGwire hit three home runs against the Diamondbacks that day. (AP photo/Harold Jenkins)*

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A portion of the proceeds from the sales of this  
book will be donated to the  
MARK MCGWIRE FOUNDATION.

## Chapter One

### Making a Decision

A couple of days after his disappointing 1991 season ended, Mark McGwire got into his car to make the 5 1/2 hour drive from Oakland to Los Angeles, a trip Mark estimates he had made at least 25 times.

As he packed the car, Mark was glad to be putting the worst season of his major-league career behind him. Kids from a school near his home had turned their cheers into taunts. His manager, Tony LaRussa, had intentionally not played him in the

Oakland A's final game, avoiding Mark the embarrassment of seeing his already puny .201 batting average drop below the .200 mark.

Mark's mind was filled with questions and self-doubt. What had happened to the player who had blasted 49 homers as a rookie in 1987? Where was the confidence of the man who put fear into opposing pitchers just because of his 6-foot-5, 225-pound stature? Was he washed up after only six years in the majors?

When Mark slammed the lid of his trunk shut and slid behind the steering wheel, his mind kept racing from one dilemma to the next. For 5 1/2 hours, the entire trip from Oakland to Los Angeles, he faced all of his problems one-by-one as they passed through his mind like the exit signs on the highway.

For the entire trip, Mark never turned on the radio or tape player. He had a built-in sound system

that turned the silence of the car into a deafening roar.

When Mark pulled up to a friend's house and got out of the car, his life was about to be changed forever.

"I had to face the music," Mark said. "It was the turning point of my life and it just happened to be the turning point in my career too. No matter who you are in this world, sometimes you have to get slapped in the face. Something has to happen to make you wake up."

For Mark, it was the realization that he wasn't happy. He wasn't enjoying his life, personally or professionally, and he knew he couldn't continue living that way. He had to get help.

"It would have been easy for me to hide and put my head in a hole and sit down and sulk and say 'poor me,'" Mark said. "But I didn't have time to do that. I wanted to turn my life around."

Mark had just celebrated his 28th birthday. A lot of great things had happened in his life. He thought back to his days growing up in southern California, when he often wondered about the future. Suddenly those days didn't seem that long ago.

## Chapter Two

### Growing Up

Mark didn't pay much attention to baseball as a youngster. He remembers playing for the first time when a neighbor was playing and asked Mark to join him. He was eight years old at the time.

Soccer was the most popular sport when Mark was growing up in Claremont, California, a suburb of Los Angeles. He played on a soccer team, and also was introduced to golf at an early age by his father, John, who was a dentist.



A youthful Mark McGwire from his college days at USC.

"I played all the neighborhood sports," Mark says. "It wasn't as organized as it is today."

John was interested in all sports, and had trained as an amateur boxer. He still pounded away on the speed bag in the garage when Mark and his four brothers were growing up.

When John was a boy himself, seven years old, he was forced to spend several months in bed suffering from an illness that left one of his legs much shorter than the other. He never had a chance to play organized sports, but he once did ride a bicycle from San Francisco all the way to San Diego, a distance of more than 500 miles.

John and his wife, Ginger, encouraged their boys to play sports, and they also tried to emphasize the importance of always trying to do their best, no matter if it was in school or an athletic field, to be polite and to respect other people. Those are lessons Mark still tries to follow today.

Three of Mark's four brothers played baseball when they were kids, but all of them gave up the sport by the time they got to high school, preferring to concentrate on other sports. One of his brothers, Dan, became a quarterback at the University of Iowa and San Diego State and was selected in the first round of the NFL draft by the Seattle Seahawks and went on to a pro football career.

One of the reasons Mark was uncertain if he would be able to have much success in sports was because of problems caused by poor eyesight. He recalls having to sit less than a foot in front of the television or he would not have been able to make out the picture. He finally got glasses when he was eight years old.

"I have the worst eyes you could possibly have," Mark says. "No lie. Without contacts or glasses, I can't even see the big E on the eye chart."

Mark began wearing contact lenses when he was a freshman in high school and through a series of eye exercises has improved his vision, with his contacts, to 20-15.

One of the incidents that convinced Mark and his parents that he needed glasses came in one of his early baseball games, when he was pitching. He walked so many batters that his dad, who also was his coach, had him switch places with the short-stop. The view from that position was fuzzy, and Mark had his eyes checked shortly thereafter.

After playing pee-wee ball for a couple of years, Mark joined his first official Little League team when he was 10 years old. He still remembers exactly what happened the first time he came up to bat he hit a home run.

Mark thought of himself more as a pitcher in those days, however, but he never tried to pattern himself after any major-league player. He enjoyed

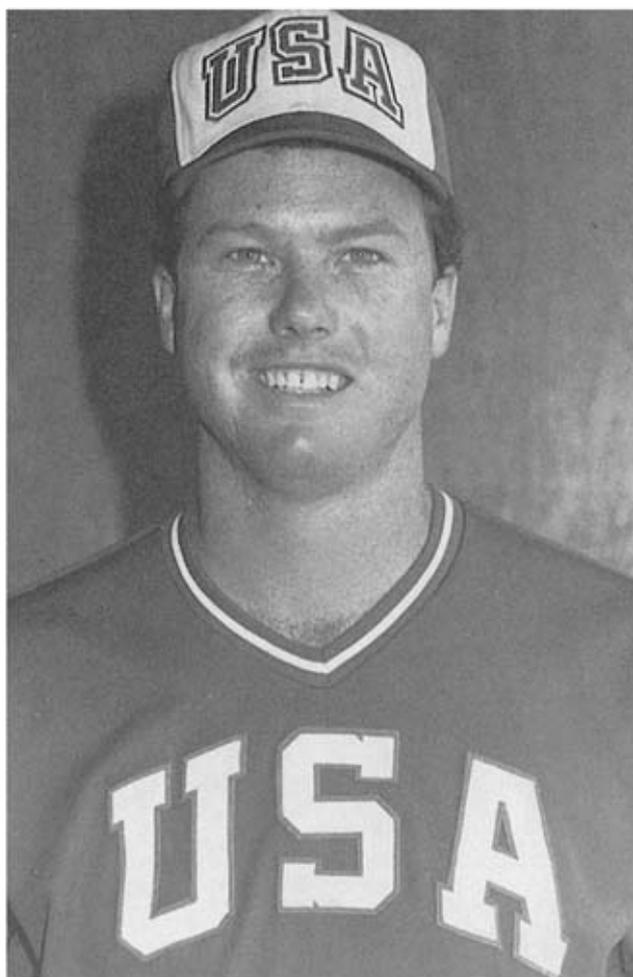
watching games, and went to the games of the nearby California Angels as much as possible. Mark never had a favorite player or team.

"I'm glad I didn't pay any attention to players when I was a kid," Mark says now. "Today kids pay too much attention to what big league players are like and they want to be like them instead of being themselves. The first and foremost thing is you can only do what God gave you. God didn't give you the ability to copy somebody. He gave you the ability to swing a bat or throw a pitch in your own style.

"That's why I'm glad I didn't sit back and idolize or try to copy somebody when I was a kid."

Even at that early age and lack of experience, Mark's ability was very noticeable to his father.

"The surprising thing was he had an innate sense of how to play," John said. "He knew where to position players, he just knew. It was



After college Mark went on to play for the U.S. team in the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles.

spinetingling, his understanding of the game at such an early age."

By the time he reached high school, Mark had grown to 6-foot-5 and weighed more than 200 pounds. He had become such a proficient golfer than he had lowered his handicap to 4 and even thought seriously for a while that he would pursue a career in that sport.

Playing golf on such a regular basis began to bore him, however, so Mark turned his attention back to baseball and other sports.

Mark also played basketball at Damien High School in La Verne, California, and was the starting center on the varsity team for two years. He played mainly because he enjoyed it and because his friends were playing.

Despite his size, Mark didn't play football in high school.

"I thought it was a waste of time to have all of that practice for just one game," Mark said.

It was during his junior year that Mark first began to seriously think he might have a future in baseball. He was drawing attention from some pro scouts and college coaches as a pitcher.

One of the college coaches who came to watch him was Marcel Lachemann, a future major-league manager who at the time was the pitching coach at the University of Southern California.

"I saw him pitch three times," Lachemann said. "Each time I saw him pitch he hit two home runs. I was looking at him as a pitcher, but you still couldn't discount that."

Lachemann saw enough ability in Mark that he recommended USC offer him a scholarship. Mark's fastball was in the high 80s, and Lachemann thought that with some instructions and refinement Mark would be able to add more velocity and become

a better pitcher as he grew older and stronger.

"Everything that I did was totally self-taught," Mark says. "I loved pitching."

The Montreal Expos thought enough of Mark's pitching and hitting ability to make him an eighth-round draft choice after he graduated from high school in 1981. Mark listened to the Expos' offer, but decided he would rather go to college.

Lachemann came to the McGwire home and sold the family on the baseball tradition of USC, where Hall of Famer Tom Seaver had pitched before going on to the major leagues and other future stars had played, like Dave Kingman, Fred Lynn and Steve Kemp.

Mark was convinced, and he was ready to begin his college career.