

# INTENTIONAL

# WALK

AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE  
FAITH THAT DRIVES THE  
ST. LOUIS CARDINALS



INCLUDES INTERVIEWS WITH  
ADAM WAINWRIGHT  
MATT HOLLIDAY  
MIKE MATHENY  
AND MANY MORE

ROB RAINS



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# PRAISE FOR *INTENTIONAL WALK*

“Most times, all fans get to see of the teams they root for is what happens on the field. But *Intentional Walk* goes behind the scenes and gives an intimate look on how members of the Cardinals organization deal with the ups and downs of everyday life. In my time with the Cardinals, I’ve seen numerous examples of guys leaning on their faith. I hope this book will give fans a little bit of insight into how these guys relate to each other and to God.”

— John Mozeliak, general manager of  
the St. Louis Cardinals

“Baseball players are typically defined by what they do on the mound, in the field, or at the plate. However, this doesn’t always accurately define who these men really are. *Intentional Walk* does a wonderful job of painting a picture of members of the Cardinals organization and what they want to define them. As fans enjoy this book, I hope they take notice of the priority these men place on their relationship with Jesus Christ.”

— Andy Benes, fourteen-year Major  
League Baseball pitcher and former  
St. Louis Cardinal

“Rob Rains captures the joy of being a follower of Christ in a fantastic way as he chronicles the faith of over a dozen Cardinals in *Intentional Walk*. Each person featured has a unique story to tell of his relationship with Jesus and how he lives out his walk with Him on and off the field.

“Writing this book was a labor of love for Rob. His desire to share the stories of this group of men is an encouragement not only to St. Louis Cardinal fans but to everyone who enjoys reading about God’s amazing power to change lives in profound ways.”

— Vince Nauss, president of Baseball  
Chapel

“Discipline, humility, good coaching, support during the tough times, faith . . . These aren’t just the building blocks for assembling championship baseball teams; they are the cornerstones for constructing a meaningful life.

“Both goals start with a faith in God, as author Rob Rains demonstrates in *Intentional Walk*, an honest, perhaps controversial look at one of the driving forces behind the 2012 St. Louis Cardinals’ effort to capture a second consecutive World

Series championship. In a high-pressure sport where the best fail seven of ten times at the plate, *Intentional Walk* demonstrates how faith in God and His teachings provided the sort of balance and peace in the Cardinals' lives that allowed them to perform at their best—win or lose. The personal, heartfelt stories Rains shares in *Intentional Walk* are a lesson for all of us, no matter our profession.”

— Curtis Eichelberger, author of *Men of Sunday: How Faith Guides the Players, Coaches & Wives of the NFL*

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ST. LOUIS CARDINALS

ROB RAINS



THOMAS NELSON  
*Since 1798*

NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO

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# PROLOGUE

On the morning of March 5, 2012, the white Chevrolet Suburban pulled into the reserved spot in the parking lot at Roger Dean Stadium in Jupiter, Florida, shortly after 4:00 a.m.

Mike Matheny had not really planned to get to the ballpark that early, but when he had awoken an hour earlier, he knew it would be futile to try to go back to sleep.

Matheny's excitement was genuine. Even though he had already spent a couple of weeks as the Cardinals' new manager, in charge of the daily workouts at the team's spring training complex, this day was different. There was a game to play—against the Miami Marlins—and even though the result of the team's first exhibition game of the spring would be basically meaningless for almost everybody involved, Matheny knew it would be a day he would never forget.

Ever since getting the phone call from general manager John Mozeliak in November 2011, while he was in a barrio in the Dominican Republic, Matheny had thought about this day and had been preparing for it. Mozeliak had called to offer Matheny the job of managing the St. Louis Cardinals, succeeding future Hall of Famer Tony La Russa. It was an offer Matheny quickly accepted.

The offer was not without risk—the Cardinals were the defending world champions, and Mozeliak knew he was taking a chance giving the job to a man who, at forty-one, not only would become the youngest manager in the major leagues, but had never coached or managed a single day at any level above Little League. What mattered more to Mozeliak, and to the team's primary owner and chairman, Bill DeWitt, however, was the character of the man they were hiring. Those intangible skills, both believed, far outweighed the lack of managerial experience. In Matheny, both Mozeliak and DeWitt knew they were hiring a man of principle, a man born and trained to be a leader, a man of God who valued the importance of relationships.

"This is not meant for everyone," Mozeliak said at the news conference announcing Matheny's appointment. "For a lot of people, this might be a very difficult task to tackle. With any decision you make at this level, there are risks. And there are in this as well. But I do think he is very capable of succeeding in this role."

Added DeWitt, who first got to know Matheny as a player with the Cardinals, "All great managers started somewhere. I think the lack of experience is there. Any time you do something new, it's an unknown. What we were looking for are characteristics that would make a manager successful. And he's got those."

At the time Matheny was hired, nobody knew that his close friend, former teammate and three-time National League MVP Albert Pujols, would decide to sign with the Los Angeles Angels as a free agent. Nobody knew that the team's longtime pitching coach, Dave Duncan, would decide to leave the team to care for his wife as she battled brain cancer instead of standing beside the rookie manager in the team's

dugout. As Matheny prepared for spring training, however, he made the decision not to dwell on who was not going to be in the Cardinals' camp, but instead to concentrate on who was there.

It was an attitude and a philosophy he quickly passed on to his players, and one they bought into without hesitation. So instead of writing Pujols's name on the lineup card for that first spring game, Matheny had twenty-three-year-old rookie Matt Adams playing first and batting sixth. The new manager was eager to see a player he had watched tear up Double-A the previous season step onto the major league stage.

As he sat in the quiet of his office that March morning, Matheny did what he had been doing daily since arriving in Jupiter. He used the early-morning hours for personal reflection and to read the Bible.

His occupation might have changed over the winter, but Matheny had not changed. His faith and his family had always been the two most important aspects of Matheny's life, and he was not going to let his new position change that.

He was the same man who, as a twenty-one-year-old Class A player in 1992 in Stockton, California, was one of several players who went to team owner Dick Phelps and negotiated a five-dollar raise in daily meal money for the team. Years later, Phelps recalled that Matheny was the only player who came by to thank him.

"At that age, Mike already had the rest of the players' respect," Phelps said.

He was the same man who, years later, was playing golf at an exclusive country club near St. Louis when one of his shots went way out of bounds and tore a hole in the screen porch of a house overlooking the course. Instead of just dropping a new ball and continuing on, Matheny did something only a select few people would do.

"Mike drove the cart up to the house and left a note with his name and phone number and told the owner to contact him and he would pay for the damages," said Cardinals broadcaster Rick Horton, who was playing with Matheny on that day. "The lady ended up calling him, and he took care of it. That's just the kind of person Mike is."

When Mozeliak had called to offer the Cardinals managing job to him, Matheny was on a goodwill trip to the Dominican Republic with his fourteen-year-old son, Jacob. Two of his other sons, Luke and Blaise, were also on the trip. It was almost fitting that Matheny got the job while coaching a youth team, since that had been his only managerial experience. What Mozeliak, DeWitt, and all of Matheny's friends and former teammates already knew, however, was that the way Matheny ran those Little League teams was, in many ways, similar to how he would run a major league team. The ability of the players might be different, and the stakes a little higher, but the way Matheny went about his business and his approach to life and baseball would not change.

That was evident from a letter Matheny wrote to the parents of the other youths on the first Little League team he managed, a couple of years after his playing career ended in 2006. The letter read:

*I always said that the only team that I would coach would be a team of orphans, and now here we are. The reason for me saying this is that I have*

*found the biggest problem with youth sports has been the parents. I think that it is best to nip this in the bud right off the bat. I think the concept that I am asking all of you to grab is that this experience is ALL about the boys. If there is anything about it that includes you, we need to make a change of plans. My main goals are as follows:*

- (1) to teach these young men how to play the game of baseball the right way,*
- (2) to be a positive impact on them as young men, and*
- (3) do all of this with class.*

*We may not win every game, but we will be the classiest coaches, players, and parents in every game we play. The boys are going to play with a respect for their teammates, opposition, and the umpires, no matter what.*

*With that being said, I need to let you know where I stand. I have no hidden agenda. I have no ulterior motive other than what I said about my goals. I also need all of you to know that my priorities in life will most likely be a part of how I coach, and the expectations I have for the boys. My Christian faith is the guide for my life and I have never been one for forcing my faith down someone's throat, but I also believe it to be cowardly, and hypocritical, to shy away from what I believe. You as parents need to know for yourselves, and for your boys, that when the opportunity presents itself, I will be honest with what I believe. That may make some people uncomfortable, but I did that as a player, and I hope to continue it in any endeavor that I get into. I am just trying to get as many potential issues out in the open from the beginning. I believe that the biggest role of the parent is to be a silent source of encouragement. I think if you ask most boys what they would want their parents to do during the game, they would say, "Nothing."*

*Once again, this is ALL about the boys. I believe that Little League parents feel that they must participate with loud cheering and "Come on, let's go, you can do it," which just adds more pressure to the kids. I will be putting plenty of pressure on these boys to play the game the right way with class, and respect, and they will put too much pressure on themselves and each other already. You as parents need to be the silent, constant source of support.*

*Let the record state right now that we will not have good umpiring. This is a fact, and the sooner we all understand that, the better off we will be. We will have balls that bounce in the dirt that will be called strikes, and we will have balls over our heads that will be called strikes. Likewise, the opposite will happen with the strike zone while we are pitching. The boys will not be allowed, at any time, to show any emotion against the umpire. They will not shake their head, or pout, or say anything to the umpire. This is my job, and I will do it well. I once got paid to handle those guys, and I will let them know when they need to hear something. I am really doing all of you parents a favor that you probably don't realize at this point. I have taken out any work at all for you except to get them there on time, and enjoy. The thing that these boys need to*

hear is that you enjoyed watching them and you hope that they had fun. I know that it is going to be very hard not to coach from the stands and yell encouraging things to your son, but I am confident that this works in a negative way for their development and their enjoyment. Trust me on this. I am not saying that you cannot clap for your kids when they do well. I am saying that if you hand your child over to me to coach them, then let me do that job.

A large part of how your child improves is your responsibility. The difference for kids at this level is the amount of repetition that they get. This goes with pitching, hitting, and fielding. As a parent, you can help out tremendously by playing catch, throwing batting practice, hitting ground balls, or finding an instructor who will do this in your place. The more of this your kids can get, the better. This is the one constant that I have found with players that reached the major leagues . . . someone spent time with them away from the field.

I am completely fine with your son getting lessons from whomever you see fit. The only problem I will have is if your instructor is telling your son not to follow the plan of the team. I will not teach a great deal of mechanics at the beginning, but I will teach mental approach, and expect the boys to comply. If I see something that your son is doing mechanically that is drastically wrong, I will talk with the instructor and clear things up. The same will hold true with pitching coaches. We will have a pitching philosophy and will teach the pitchers and catchers how to call a game, and why we choose the pitches we choose. There is no guessing. We will have a reason for the pitches that we throw. A pitching coach will be helpful for the boys to get their arms in shape and be ready to throw when spring arrives. Every boy on this team will be worked as a pitcher. We will not overuse these young arms and will keep close watch on the number of innings that the boys are throwing.

I will be throwing so much info at these boys that they are going to suffer from overload for a while, but eventually they are going to get it. I am a stickler about the thought process of the game. I will be talking nonstop about situational hitting, situational pitching, and defensive preparation. The question that they are going to hear the most is, "What were you thinking?" What were you thinking when you threw that pitch? What were you thinking during that at-bat? What were you thinking before the pitch was thrown? Were you anticipating anything?

I am a firm believer that this game is more mental than physical, and the mental may be more difficult, but can be taught and can be learned by ten- and eleven-year-olds. If it sounds like I am going to be demanding of these boys, you are exactly right. I am definitely demanding their attention, and the other thing that I am going to require is effort. Their attitudes, their concentration, and their effort are the things that they can control. If they give me these things every time they show up, they will have a great experience.

The best situation for all of us is for you to plan on handing these kids over to me and the assistant coaches when you drop them off, and plan on them being mine for the two or so hours that we have scheduled for a game, or the time that we have scheduled for the practice. I would like for these boys to have

*some responsibility for having their own water, not needing you to keep running to the concession stand, or having parents behind the dugout asking their sons if they are thirsty, or hungry, or too hot, and I would appreciate if you would share this information with other invited guests, such as grandparents. If there is an injury, obviously we will get you to help, but besides that, let's pretend that they are at work for a short amount of time and that you have been granted the pleasure of watching. I will have them at games early so we can get stretched and loosened up, and I will have a meeting with just the boys after the game. After the meeting, they are all yours again. As I am writing this, I realize I sound like the Little League Nazi, but I believe that this will make things easier for everyone involved.*

*I truly believe that the family is the most important institution in the lives of these guys. With that being said, I think that the family events are much more important than the sports events. I just ask that you are considerate of the rest of the team and let the team manager and myself know when you will miss, and to let us know as soon as possible. I know that there will be times when I am going to miss either for family reasons or for other commitments. If your son misses a game or a practice, it is not the end of the world, but there may be some sort of repercussion, just out of respect for the kids that put the effort into making it. The kind of repercussions could possibly be running, altered playing time, or position in the batting order.*

*Speaking of batting order, I would like to address that right from the top as well, seeing that next to playing time this is the second most complained-about issue, or actually tied for second with position on the defensive field. Once again, I need you to know that I am trying to develop each boy individually, and I will give him a chance to learn and play any position that he is interested in. I also believe that this team will be competitive, and when we get into situations where we are focusing on winning, like a tournament for example, we are going to put the boys in the position that will give the team the best opportunity. I will talk with the boys individually and have them tell me what their favorite positions are and what other positions they would like to learn about. As this season progresses, there is a chance that your son may be playing a position that he doesn't necessarily like, but I will need your support about his role on the team. I know that times have changed, but one of the greatest lessons that my father taught me was that my coach was always right . . . even when he was wrong. This principle is a great life lesson about how things really work. I hope that I will have enough humility to come to your son if I treated him wrong and apologize. Our culture has lost this respect for authority, mostly because the kids hear the parents constantly complaining about the teachers and coaches of the child.*

*I need all of you to know that we are most likely going to lose many games this year. The main reason is that we need to find out how we measure up with the local talent pool. The only way to do this is to play against some of the best teams. I am convinced that if the boys put their work in at home, and give me their best effort, that we will be able to play with just about any team. Time will tell. I also believe that there is enough local talent that we will not have to*

do a large amount of travel, if any. This may be disappointing for those of you who only play baseball and look forward to the out-of-town experiences, but I also know that this is a relief for the parents that have traveled throughout the United States and Canada for hockey and soccer, looking for better competition. In my experiences, we have traveled all over the Midwest and have found just as good competition right in our backyard. If this season goes well, we will entertain the idea of travel in the future.

The boys will be required to show up ready to play every time they come to the field. Shirts tucked in, hats on straight, and pants not drooping down to their knees. There is not an excuse for lack of hustle on a baseball field. From the first step outside the dugout they will hustle. They will have a fast jog to their positions, to the plate, and back to the bench when they make an out. We will run out every hit harder than any team we will play, and will learn how to always back up a play to help our teammates. Every single play, every player will be required to move to a spot. Players that do not hustle and run out balls will not play. The boys will catch on to this quickly. The game of baseball becomes very boring when players are not thinking about the next play and what they possibly could do to help the team. Players on the bench will not be messing around. I will constantly be talking with them about situations and what they would be doing if they were in a specific position, or if they were the batter. There is as much to learn on the bench as there is on the field if the boys want to learn. All of this will take some time for the boys to conform to. They are boys, and I am not trying to take away from that, but I do believe that they can bear down and concentrate hard for just a little while during the games and practices.

I know this works because this was how I was taught the game, and how our parents acted in the stands. We started our Little League team when I was ten years old in a little suburb of Columbus, Ohio. We had a very disciplined coach that expected the same from us. We committed eight summers to this man and we were rewarded for our efforts. I went to Michigan, another player went to Duke, one to Miami of Florida, two went to North Carolina, one went to Central Florida, one went to Kent State, and most of the others played smaller Division I or II baseball. Four of us went on to play professionally. This was coming from a town where no one had ever been recruited by any colleges. I am not saying that this is what is going to happen to our boys, but what I do want you to see is that this system works. I know that right now you are asking yourself if this is what you want to get yourself into, and I understand that for some of you it may not be the right fit. I also think that there is a great opportunity for these boys to grow together and learn some lessons that will go beyond their baseball experience. Let me know as soon as possible whether or not this is a commitment that you and your son want to make.

Thanks,  
Mike

Matheny was speaking from his heart in the letter. He wanted to have an open

relationship with the players on his team and their parents, and he knew he could not be anything other than himself. That was how he had always been, dating back to when he was growing up as a Little Leaguer himself in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, a suburb of Columbus.

“The story really starts with two very humble parents who were smart enough to realize the truth,” Matheny said. “God opened their eyes to the kind of life they needed to lead. They were very consistent with how they went about that on a daily basis with two young eyes constantly watching them.”

Matheny’s father, Jerry, was a construction worker who grew up on a farm in the hills of West Virginia, taught to love baseball by his father. Jerry was a good enough baseball player, his son says, to get tryouts with several teams, including the Pittsburgh Pirates, but when nothing came of it, he joined a construction crew, got married, and started raising a family. He passed along his passion for baseball to Mike and his three brothers.

It was from his parents that Matheny learned the value of working hard, and the importance of putting in an honest day of work, in addition to his religious foundation. It was at a church service when he was about nine years old that Matheny made the advanced decision that he wanted to have God in control of his life, that he wanted to have a relationship with Him.

“We had a guest speaker that Sunday, a man from the South,” Matheny said. “He was waving his Bible around and pounding on the podium, and kept saying over and over again, ‘Who is Jesus to you?’ I kept thinking, *This guy is in the wrong place. We know who Jesus is. We are always here, we know all the songs, we know when to sit down and stand up.*

“He kept saying, ‘Who is Jesus to you? I don’t care who your parents are or what your pedigree is—who is He to you? Do you know Him?’”

After the church service was over and Matheny had returned home, the questions kept coming back to him. It had seemed to him that the preacher was looking and speaking directly at him.

“I finally got up enough courage to go out and ask my parents about it,” Matheny said. “I asked them some pretty deep questions, and they got out the Bible and gave me the truth. They opened up the book of Romans and led me through the gospel. I made a decision right then and there that ‘I want this. I want Him, not just in my head, not just knowing who He is, but I want Him in my life.’”

The relationship Matheny started that day with God has been with him ever since, through good times and bad, helping him cope with whatever hand he was dealt in life.

God was there when Matheny made the decision to turn down a contract offer from the Toronto Blue Jays after high school, instead opting to accept a scholarship to the University of Michigan. It was a decision Matheny prayed long and hard about, even as he drove from his home to Ann Arbor for the start of fall classes, and as he unpacked in his new dormitory room. As he prepared to leave the room for his first class, Matheny knew he was making a decision that could affect him the rest of his life. There was no guarantee he would get another shot at playing professional baseball, his dream since he had been a young boy watching games on television. He

knew he was making a commitment to spend at least the next three years at Michigan before he would even have the chance to be drafted again.

“It crossed my mind that I might never get a shot again,” he said, “but education meant a lot to me—and still does.”

Matheny picked up the telephone in his room and called Pat Gillick, the Toronto general manager, to tell him he had made his final decision to go to school. As he grabbed his backpack and headed out the door to attend his first class, Matheny said another quick prayer that God would send him a sign that he had made the right choice.

Almost as soon as he got out the door, a large pigeon pooped directly on his head. Others walking by saw what had happened and started laughing.

“I’m not talking a little bit, I’m talking Nickelodeon stuff,” Matheny recalled years later in an interview with the Michigan student newspaper. “I was completely covered. I was thinking, *God, I asked You to be clear before, but c’mon.*”

Matheny had to go back to his room and change clothes, which gave him one more chance to change his mind and call Toronto and accept the offer of a \$100,000 signing bonus. He did not pick up the phone, and again headed out for his first college class, arriving about twenty minutes late.

Matheny soon realized the sign he had asked God about came in the form of a young blonde woman sitting in that class. He quickly started a conversation with Kristin, a field hockey player from St. Louis. Matheny didn’t know it at the time, but a few years later Kristin would become his wife and the mother of his children.

During Matheny’s sophomore year, former All-Star catcher Bill Freehan, who had spent fifteen years in the major leagues, became the Michigan coach. He quickly identified Matheny as one of the team leaders and a man he thought had a future in the game. One day he called Matheny in for a meeting in his office. Freehan’s instructions were simple. He told Matheny to schedule a meeting with his guidance counselor, and from then on to make certain all his elective courses were Spanish classes. Freehan knew that having the ability to speak Spanish would give Matheny a major advantage if he pursued a baseball career, and he was right.

Matheny went on to earn his degree in sports management from Michigan, with an emphasis in Spanish—a skill he uses on a daily basis.

Matheny played well enough during his three years with the Wolverines that he did get that second chance at a baseball career. The Milwaukee Brewers drafted him in the eighth round in 1991, and within three years he was playing in the major leagues.

One new teammate who began to notice Matheny immediately was Kevin Seitzer, who, twenty-one years later, in 2012, was serving as the Royals’ hitting coach. One day in that first spring training everybody on the team noticed Matheny.

“He was catching, and a hitter tried to charge the mound,” Seitzer recalled. “The hitter never got past the plate. Mike took him down. He was on him so quick the guy never had a chance. That was something that impressed all of us, especially our manager, Phil Garner. We had a catcher get hurt at the end of the spring, and Mike ended up making the club.”

Because Seitzer’s family would not join him in Milwaukee until the school year

was out, he invited Matheny to move into his two-bedroom apartment.

“I had already seen what kind of kid he was,” Seitzer said. “I knew he was a Christian, and I was a Christian. I took care of him as long as he was there. We had a special bond; he was kind of like my little brother. I wouldn’t let him pay for anything, and it drove him crazy.”

The two talked daily about baseball, and almost as often about God and religion. Seitzer shared his testimony with Matheny, about how he didn’t find or develop a relationship with God until he had already been in the majors for several years.

“I reached the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow and realized there was something missing,” Seitzer said. “I was crazy—a partying, cussing, just intense, off-the-charts crazy. I had grown up in church, but never knew anything about having a relationship with Him. Mike was already there. Even then he was very bold and never made any ifs, ands, or buts about where he stands with his faith.”

Matheny went on to play in the majors for thirteen years with the Brewers, the Toronto Blue Jays, the St. Louis Cardinals, and the San Francisco Giants before a series of concussions finally forced him to retire in 2006 at the age of thirty-four. The effects of the concussions lingered for several months, and often Matheny would forget simple things, like what he was supposed to get at the grocery store or where he had left his car keys. One time he was in his car and forgot how to get home. But through all of those trials and tribulations, Matheny’s faith never wavered that one day he would recover.

Matheny’s faith had never been stronger than when he decided to manage the Cardinals. He knew on that day that his faith would be tested in more ways than he could ever imagine, and he prayed that God would give him the understanding and guidance he knew he would need to be successful in his new job. He also made certain that every one of his players knew exactly what they were getting in their new manager.

“During one of our first meetings in the spring, I sat the guys down and made it very clear,” Matheny said. “I made a promise to them. I am who I am. I am not going to shove my faith down your throat, but when the opportunity presents itself, don’t expect me to walk away. This is who I am, and Jesus Christ is at the center of my life. It’s all that I am, every day, every decision that I make. I’m going to stand up and tell you what I believe is true.”

As he had done as a player, and as he had done as a son, husband, and father, Matheny pledged to himself and to God that he would do everything in his power to become a good manager. He didn’t just want to do a good job; he wanted to do a great job because he knew that was what God expected from him.

“I think it is our responsibility to go out and do everything we can, every minute, to excel in whatever arena we are put in,” Matheny said. “I think we should all be very attentive to what is going on around us and the opportunities that are there.

“I believe, in every aspect of my life, that I am called to excellence. I believe through my faith that I am called to high expectations as a husband and as a father. This job is a test to my faith every day, but I believe if I stay consistent with everything I do in my life, I will be the best manager I can be if I am true to who I say

I am. I want to just be consistent with how I serve these guys and be consistent with the effort I put in. I have accountability not only to these guys, but to myself.”

Matheny knew he was fortunate to be taking over a team with a roster filled with strong Christians. During spring training, as many as ten Cardinals gathered two or three times a week at 5:30 a.m. to share their faith with one another. Wednesday night was family Bible study night, open to minor leaguers as well, and the meeting room was always packed.

As the spring came to an end and the dawn of the regular season arrived, Matheny and his players were ready to see what would happen in the 2012 season.