



# *rounding* HOME

*Three tales from a major league proving ground*

by JIM MORRISON

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**F**rom the start of spring training to the end of the playoffs, baseball is the longest season. With 162 regular season games in the major leagues, plus spring training, and the postseason, fans – and writers – get to know players more intimately than those in any other sport. There's no hiding. So when you cultivate the reputation that David Wright has since he broke into the bigs in 2004, there's no faking it. Wright is one of the game's upstanding citizens, the guy who says and does the right thing, whether it's signing autograph after autograph or appearing at more charity events than seems humanly possible.

Ask Wright how he's done it and he'll point to his background, growing up playing baseball in Hampton Roads – his parents, his coaches, and his teammates. "I always say my family was the biggest influence on me growing up and are the biggest reason I made it to the big leagues," he said during spring training this year. "My dad spent countless days throwing batting practice to me and hitting me ground ball after ground ball. My mom gave up a lot of the things she wanted to do so she could take us to our practices and games. My first memories of baseball were playing Wiffle Ball with my grandfather in his backyard."

Wright, of course, is part of a stellar late 1990s collection of teammates who competed with and against one another in the area. They're major league stars now, familiar names: B.J. Upton, Justin Upton, Ryan Zimmerman, Mark Reynolds, and Michael Cuddyer, the eldest and the pioneer. Their baseball personalities and their characters were formed on area fields, places like the diamonds on Butts Road in Chesapeake; with coaches like Marvin "Towny" Townsend, Nick Boothe at Virginia Wesleyan College, Tony Guzzo at Old Dominion University; and with supportive parents and teammates.

Here are the stories of three of them, men whose closest connection to the major leagues isn't a box seat but something deeper, more intimate. They're a coach, a teammate, and a father.

