



# WHAT'S *on*

## D E C K ?

Now that he's through playing baseball, how is Ripken going to spend his time in the next phase of his life? Playing baseball, of course



JUST PAST 8 A.M., UNDER AN ALREADY SCORCHING PRAIRIE SUN, THE WAIT BEGINS. It's early August, and 100 kids, ages 10 to 18, have flocked to opening day at the Ripken Baseball Camp at the Mid-American Sports Complex in Shawnee, Kans. Cal Ripken Jr., in town for the Orioles' four-game series against the Kansas City Royals, is scheduled to make an appearance today, the first session of the three-day camp. So as younger brother Bill makes a few introductory remarks, the campers look around for Cal, constantly glancing at the gates of the complex, hoping to catch a glimpse of the Iron Man, waiting.

The campers do some light running, but still they look around. They throw some warmup tosses. They look around. They receive instruction from seven former big leaguers. They look ... and then, finally, at 1 p.m., a figure appears in the distance. Flanked by his agent and a police officer, he strides into the complex.

Balls are dropped. Bats are pointed. The kids stare as Ripken climbs atop a ladder behind home plate and surveys the various drills that are quickly restarted on the field. None of the campers know it, but as Ripken stands there in a black T-shirt and black sweatpants, observing the action as a conductor observes his orchestra, they're looking at the future of Cal Ripken Jr.

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WHEN THEY reach the winter of their careers, many professional athletes don't have a well-developed plan for their postathletic life. A few will do TV work, a few will land jobs with their former employers, but some will stumble blindly into the future. Ripken is not one of those. "I'd be going crazy right now if I didn't know what I was going to be doing once I leave the game,"

*by* L A R S A N D E R S O N

*Illustration by* STEVE MUSGRAVE

says Ripken, sitting under a tent in Shawnee less than two months before he will play his final game. "That's why I've been preparing for retirement for quite some time."

The sounds of baseball that surround Ripken as he's talking—the cracks of bats, the shouts of players—will also be the background noise of his retirement. In his hometown of Aberdeen he will soon preside over a youth baseball facility that will rise out of the Maryland countryside to attract young players from around the world.

"I've always thought that one of the best things about being a player is that feeling you get the first time you walk out onto the field at a place like Camden Yards," says the 41-year-old Ripken. "It's completely overwhelming. My idea is to create youth stadiums that will give kids that same sort of feeling."

Forty-one miles north of Baltimore, on a 112-acre swath of land just off I-95, construction has already begun on the Aberdeen Project. The crown jewel of the as-yet-unnamed

complex (corporate sponsorship is being sought) is a 6,500-seat stadium that will open in April 2002 and play host to a minor league team. (Ripken plans to purchase controlling interest in a Class A affiliate, preferably from the New York–Penn League, and move it to Aberdeen.) Among the youth fields will be a mini–Camden Yards, complete with a redbrick "warehouse" in rightfield. There will also be five other youth-sized fields modeled after famous big league parks.

The complex will cost more than \$35 million to build. Ripken has received \$14 million in state and local government grants and bond issues, but he is personally responsible for the rest. He hopes to cover as much as possible through private investors and corporate sponsors, and the rest will come out of his own pocket, which is deep. (He has made \$56.4 million over the past 10 years in salary alone.) "The whole thing started back in 1995 when the players' association gave me a \$75,000 gift in honor of the Streak," says Ripken. "It was money

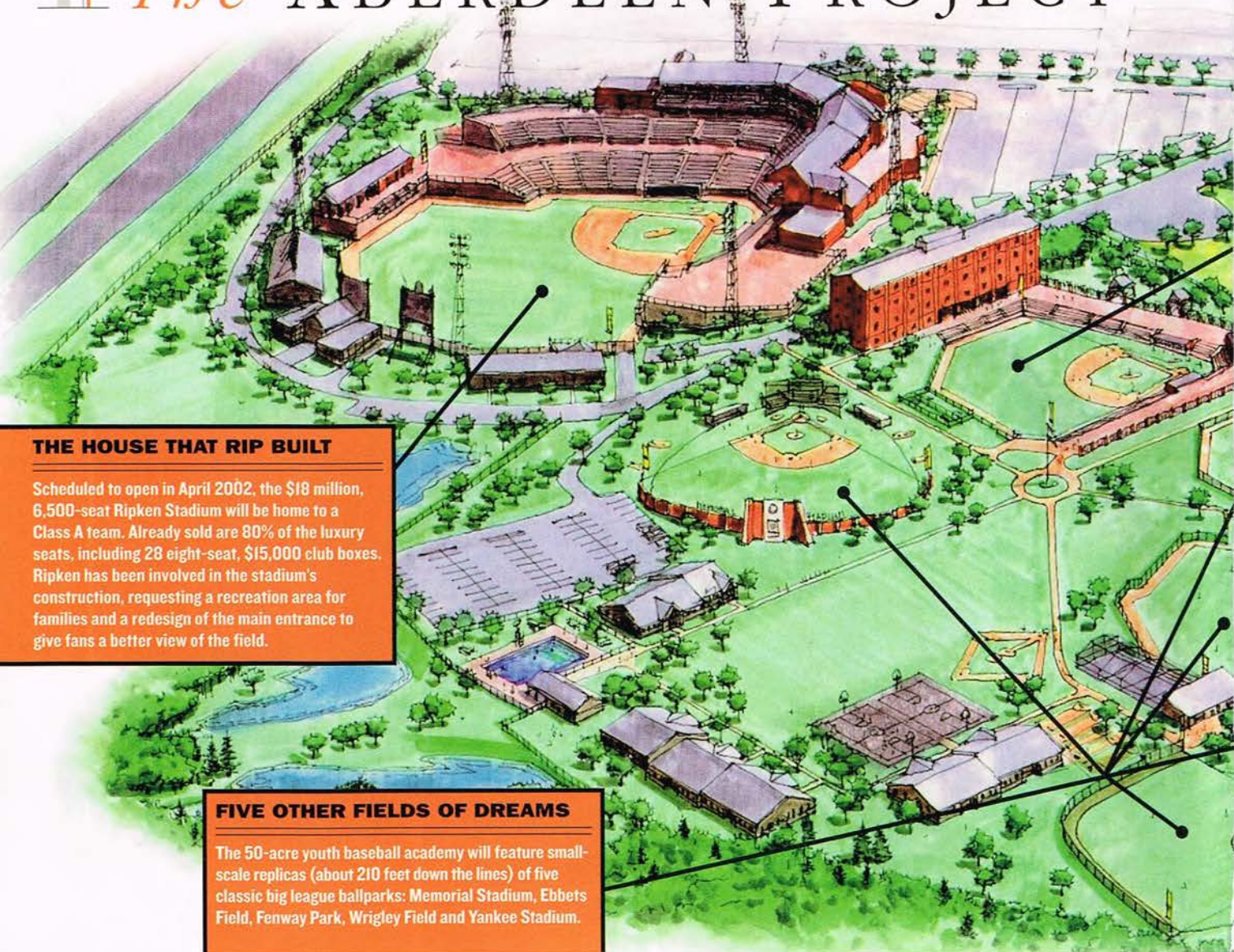
## The ABERDEEN PROJECT

### THE HOUSE THAT RIP BUILT

Scheduled to open in April 2002, the \$18 million, 6,500-seat Ripken Stadium will be home to a Class A team. Already sold are 80% of the luxury seats, including 28 eight-seat, \$15,000 club boxes. Ripken has been involved in the stadium's construction, requesting a recreation area for families and a redesign of the main entrance to give fans a better view of the field.

### FIVE OTHER FIELDS OF DREAMS

The 50-acre youth baseball academy will feature small-scale replicas (about 210 feet down the lines) of five classic big league ballparks: Memorial Stadium, Ebbets Field, Fenway Park, Wrigley Field and Yankee Stadium.



[designated by the MLBPA] to build a field in my hometown. Don't take this the wrong way, but \$75,000 for one field doesn't go very far. I wanted to make it bigger. So I talked to people, and the project grew. Then I started thinking about my dad and the youth camps that he used to run at Mount St. Mary's College [in Emmitsburg, Md.]. I wanted to combine what he did with what I was trying to put together. It gained momentum, and it basically turned into the Aberdeen Project."

Ripken's vision is that starting in 2003 the complex will attract about 400 players, ages five to 12, each week from late spring through early fall (at a cost still to be determined) for instruction at the Ripken Youth Baseball Academy. The plan is for a portion of the revenues to go to the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation to sponsor future participants in the academy.

This summer brother Bill, 36, ran three-day camps in Shawnee, Sarasota, Fla., and Moses Lake, Wash., to spread

the gospel of Ripken Baseball. When campers come to Aberdeen two years from now, they will also be taught the doctrine that began with Cal Sr. and has become known as the Ripken Way. "We teach the fundamentals," says Bill, a 12-year major league veteran who will be the academy's on-field director. "We want you to have fun, but everything stems from knowing the basics. That's the underlying message of what our dad taught us. It may not sound like much, but I think this thing will really take off. It could grow to be the biggest thing out there in youth baseball."

Each August for the last 55 years Williamsport, Pa., has hosted the Little League World Series, featuring 11- and 12-year-olds. In 1999 Babe Ruth League, Inc., a competing youth program for players ages five to 18, changed the name of its five-to-12-year-old division; what had been

called the Bambino Division became the Cal Ripken Division. (Babe Ruth was founded in 1951 for 13- to 15-year-olds; the Bambino Division was added in '82.) With 2.7 million U.S. players in 2000, Little League is about three times as large as Babe Ruth. (Most communities offer one program or the other in a particular age group.) But that gap is narrowing: Since Ripken lent his name, membership in his division has grown about 7% each year. And starting next summer, the championship game of the Cal Ripken World Series will be broadcast live on Fox from Aberdeen's mini-Camden Yards. The date for that game is not yet set, but in each of the past two years it has been played on the same day as the final of the Little League World Series.

Right now Little League doesn't exactly feel threatened. "We've never

looked at any of the smaller programs as competition," says Lance Van Auken, director of media relations. "We support any organization that's providing programs for youth. We're just gratified that the majority of the communities choose Little League."

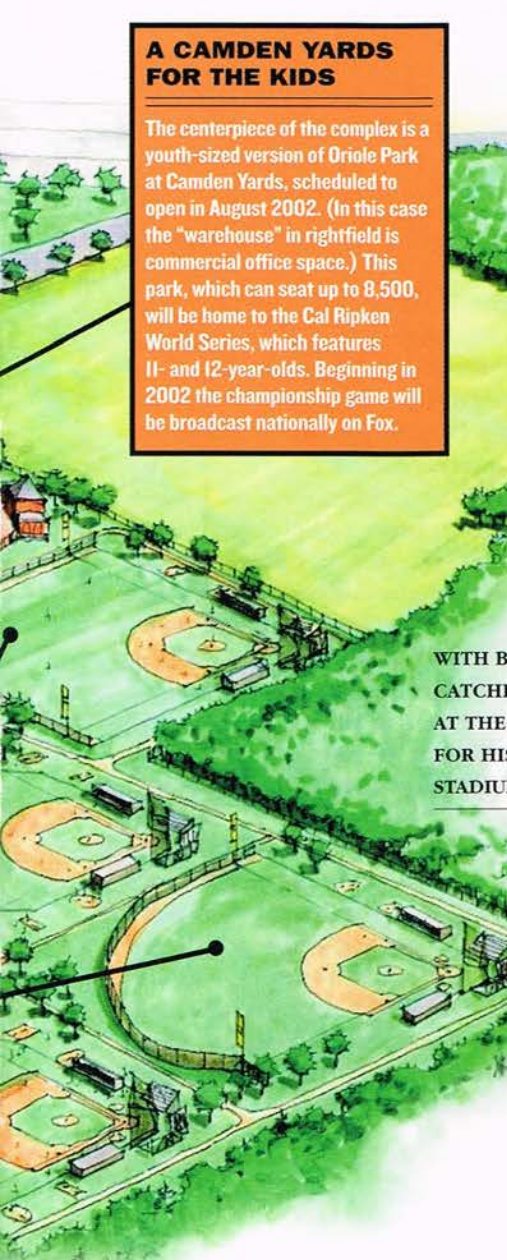
Babe Ruth feels that with Ripken it has the right man to help make the game more fun and more accessible. "The Cal Ripken Division emphasizes fun, which is in line with the Ripken Way," says President and CEO Ron Tellefsen. "We never let a kid leave a practice without hitting the baseball. And Babe Ruth gives communities more flexibility on how they organize their leagues. We don't curtail other baseball activities, and we allow teams to compete in tournaments outside our program. We want kids to have fun and play as much baseball as possible."

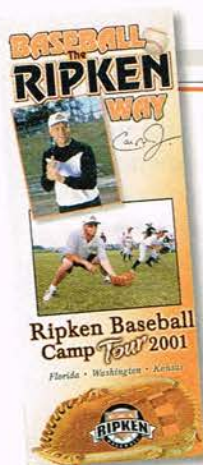
DESIGN EXCHANGE ARCHITECTS (LEFT),  
AMY DAVIS/BALTIMORE SUN

### A CAMDEN YARDS FOR THE KIDS

The centerpiece of the complex is a youth-sized version of Oriole Park at Camden Yards, scheduled to open in August 2002. (In this case the "warehouse" in rightfield is commercial office space.) This park, which can seat up to 8,500, will be home to the Cal Ripken World Series, which features 11- and 12-year-olds. Beginning in 2002 the championship game will be broadcast nationally on Fox.

WITH BROTHER BILL CATCHING, CAL STEPPED UP AT THE GROUNDBREAKING FOR HIS NAMESAKE STADIUM LAST OCTOBER.





While Ripken aspires to someday rejoin the major leagues in an executive position (“I’ve always wanted to test my baseball knowledge at the highest level, and I’d love to do it with the Orioles,” he says), that dream will be put on hold until Aberdeen is firmly established as a horsehide hotbed.

“I absolutely believe we can be as big as the Little League World Series,” says Ripken, an impish grin spreading across his face. “Competition is good. It makes everybody better.”

COAKLEY’S PUB on St. John Street in Havre de Grace, Md., sits in the heart of Ripken country. Five miles east of Aberdeen, in the town where Ripken was born, Coakley’s is the most popular swizzle stick within 20 miles. On a late-summer afternoon the talk at the bar was, not surprisingly, all about the Iron Man taking his final swings.

“Cal is a god in this part of the country,” says Margie Coakley-Logan, the bar’s owner. “People love him because of his loyalty



**AS HE FOLLOWS IN HIS FATHER’S FOOTSTEPS, RIPKEN STRESSES THE IMPORTANCE OF FUN AND FUNDAMENTALS.**

and his work ethic. He may be a millionaire, but he doesn’t act like one. I think the way he acts comes from his dad. Cal Sr. loved baseball and the kids playing it. Cal is the same way.”


Ripken’s immense popularity derives largely from the fact that fans view him as a regular joe, a hard worker who’s as approachable as your next-door neighbor. This gleaming reputation is no accident: Since 1992 Ripken has employed his own marketing and public relations firm. Tufton Sports and Management, which has a staff of 15 working exclusively for Ripken, is the caretaker of the Iron Man’s image.

“We were founded because of all the requests that Cal was receiving,” says Ira Rainess, president of Tufton and a partner of Ron Shapiro, of Shapiro & Robinson, Ripken’s baseball agency. “[Shapiro & Robinson] had about 50 clients,

and Cal was getting 80 percent of the requests. It wasn’t fair to the other clients, so we started Tufton.”

Business opportunities have flowed steadily into Tufton since 1995, when Streak fever struck the nation. Yet perhaps the most important thing Tufton has done over the past six years is what it hasn’t done: Rainess and his staff reject nearly every offer that comes across their desks. Yes, Ripken has 17 endorsement deals that bring in more than \$10 million annually, he owns a fitness center in Baltimore and he has a stake in Towne Hall, a new restaurant in Lutherville, Md. But unlike the Michael Jordans and Tiger Woodses of the world, Ripken will never be accused of being overexposed. “If an advertising agency wants Cal to do things that aren’t Cal, no matter how much money is offered, we turn it down,” says Rainess. “We don’t want to make Cal something he’s not.”

Ripken only puts his name behind businesses or products that coexist with his image as a hardworking, clean-living athlete. So while he pitches for the Got Milk? campaign and Chevrolet, he turns down opportunities to hawk underwear, beer, tobacco and casinos. Ripken has never been a

*“WE CAN be as big as the Little League World Series,” Ripken says. “Competition makes everybody better.”* 

darling of Madison Avenue, which prefers the more flamboyant athlete, but his wholesome policy has never wavered. And it certainly hasn’t hurt his popularity on Main Street.

The latest illustration of Ripken’s ever-growing celebrity may be the most unexpected. In early September, Dover Downs International Speedway announced that it was renaming the MBNA.com 400, scheduled for Sept. 23; for this year it will be the MBNA Cal Ripken Jr. 400. Driver Bobby Labonte planned to repaint his green Pontiac with the colors orange and black and put Ripken’s likeness on the hood. It marked the first time in the 53-year history of NASCAR that a race has been named in honor of an athlete. Which makes one wonder: If Ripken can penetrate the highly lucrative, highly insular world of NASCAR, then what in the world will he venture into next?

“My main focus for the next few years is going to be the Aberdeen Project,” he says, ever careful. “I’m very excited to teach baseball.”

At his August camp in Shawnee, Ripken explained his late arrival, saying that the previous evening he didn’t leave Kansas City’s Kauffman Stadium with the rest of his team. Instead, he climbed into the stands after the game to sign autographs and chat with fans. For more than an hour, Ripken chatted and signed, signed and chatted. If it seems that, after 23 years in the Orioles’ organization, he’s having a hard time walking away, it’s because he is. “It’s not easy,” Ripken says. “But it’s time for the next phase.” □