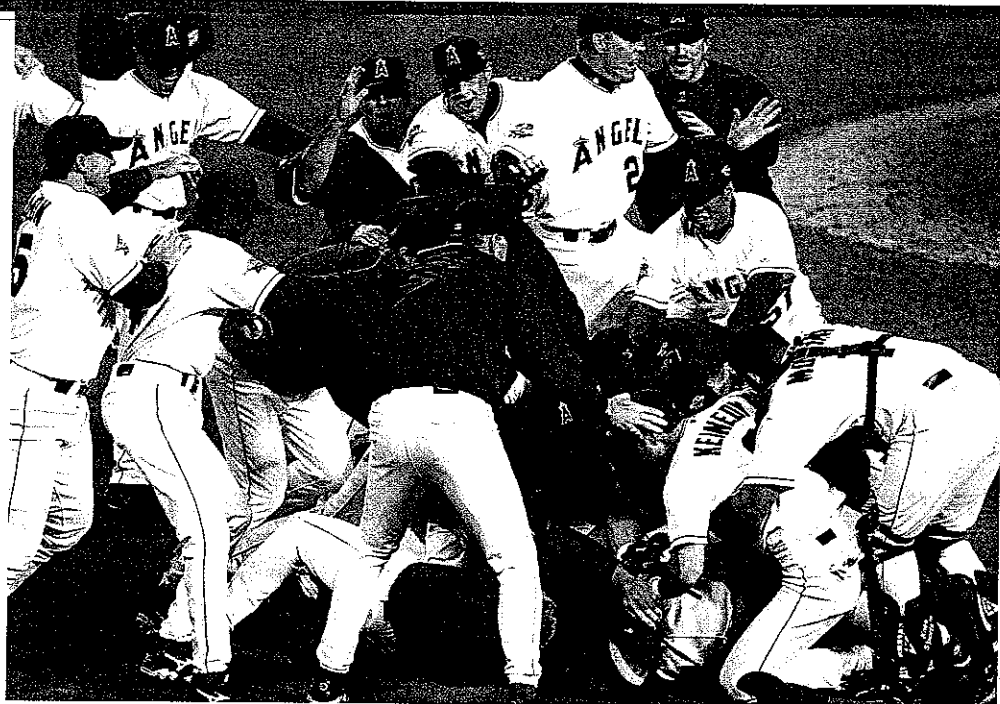


Ravizza (above, left) was the common factor in recent titles for the Titans and Angels (right). Below: The "flush away" toilet.



# MASTER MIND

**S**PORTS PSYCHOLOGIST KEN RAVIZZA HAS PLAYED AN UNDENIABLE ROLE ON SEVERAL CHAMPIONSHIP TEAMS.

BY GABE LACQUES

Cal State Fullerton and the Anaheim Angels are separated by a half-dozen miles of the Orange Freeway. And when it comes to winning championships, they're even more closely connected than that.

The Angels' 2002 World Series title and Cal State Fullerton's '04 College World Series championship had a common contributor, although he didn't lay down bunts or hit fungoes. He's sports psychologist Ken Ravizza, who has been molding the minds of the Titans for parts of the last quarter-century.

Ravizza has also worked with the Angels for 16 years, and helped the Minor League mental development of '02 heroes Tim Salmon, Garret Anderson, Jarrod Washburn and Bengie Molina. His role in the '04 Titans' CWS title was even more crucial.

Head Coach George Horton wasn't using Ravizza early this season, and his Titans got off to a 15-16 start, a major setback for a team with championship aspirations. So Horton made a quick phone call. "We were at the bottom of the barrel," Horton says. "The first statement [Ravizza] made to all of us was that we had a chance to make the biggest turnaround in Titan baseball history. There was nothing else for us to hang our hats on."

Soon, there was. The Titans went 32-6 to finish the season, capping it with the national championship. "Our turnaround coincided with bringing him on board," Horton says.

Ravizza's work gained notoriety during the CWS, when TV cameras captured a miniature replica toilet in the Titans' dugout where players would go to "flush away" bad plays.

Silly? Sure. But it's a big part of Ravizza's philosophy.

"The toilet just symbolizes that you're playing a game with a lot of frustration and failure," he says. "You have to let go of the garbage and laugh a little bit. The vast majority of guys try too hard."

In the ultra-macho Big League climate, players buy in reluctantly because of the stigma of psychology.

"I'll tell them I'm not a psychologist; I'm an educator, a teacher," he says. "The mental game has to be practiced, has to be worked on."

Salmon knows that well. The 13-year Major Leaguer, who hit two home runs in Game 2 of the '02 Series, took several nuggets of advice from Ravizza, including videotaping himself in the batting cage when his swing felt excellent, nurturing a consistent pre-at-bat routine, and trying to let go of failure.

"He opened the doors up in a lot of players as far as routine, which has always been big for me," Salmon says. "When you step out of the box, you wipe the slate clean."

That mentality aided the Titans greatly at a time when Horton said it seemed that everything was going against them. It may be the last time he doesn't use Ravizza from the start of the season, given that 2004 ended in an Omaha dogpile.

"He taught us how to absorb a blow," Horton says. "Absorb it in a positive manner, and when you do something about it emotionally, stay within that for the best chance at success."

*Gabe Lacques covers the Angels for the Los Angeles News Group*

