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## 10 minutes with the Iron Man



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**L**ike many of you, my trip to San Antonio for the Sports Turf Managers Association Conference wasn't easy (see "Travel Travails" below). Due to be there at 5 PM Tuesday, I instead found myself Thursday afternoon at the SA airport, finally, impatiently waiting for my checked bag. I was afraid the delays were costing me a chance to interview Cal Ripken, Jr., who was appearing at Jacobsen's booth later. The company's reps had generously set aside a few minutes in his schedule that day for us to talk.

After locating my bag in a pile of luggage 40 feet from the carousel (at least it was there), I dashed to the hotel suite, just in time to accompany the entourage to the exhibit hall. Ripken, baseball's Iron Man, had recently been elected to the Hall of Fame on his first ballot, and now runs his business interests, including ownership of several minor league teams.

I was sure my first question was a good one, and as we climbed into the back of the Town Car I served it up like a Jose Lima hanging curve: "Who are you going to have introduce you at the Hall of Fame ceremony and why?" Ripken replied, "That's football. For baseball I believe the Hall of Fame officials introduce us." A big swing and a miss!

Cheeks now red, I asked a much less penetrating question but one that at least the man could answer, about his favorite and least favorite playing surfaces. "I valued consistency. Both Camden Yards and Memorial Stadium were maintained very well when I played," Ripken told me. "The Jake in Cleveland and the new ballpark in Texas were great, too.

"Fenway Park, despite its ambiance and museum-like qualities, was erratic," he said. "In Yankee Stadium you couldn't see the outfielders from the dugout the slope was so off. But it played pretty true."

I asked him what his proudest moment was on the field, as well as off it.

"Number one is catching the last out in the [1983] World Series. It was the best feeling in the world to have ended it," Ripken said, smiling. "And number two would be the 2131 lap. At first I was worried that it might delay the game, but once I started it was such an incredible one-on-one experience that I didn't worry about anything. It was such a wonderful outpouring of love directed to me."



### Travel Travails Contest

The STMA is having a contest to find the Conference attendee with the "best" travel nightmare story. If you think your travel problems to San Antonio were worth a free, full registration for next year's STMA Conference in Phoenix, please send your story in 200 words or less to STMA HQ by March 31. See more details on page 46.

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