



By Jeffrey Zaslow

Brett Butler

Tell your kids the truth, even if the news is bad, says the ballplayer. "If you lie, they'll know."

JUST BEFORE this year's baseball season, Brett Butler of the Los Angeles Dodgers called a meeting of his closest advisers. For six years, it's been an annual ritual. "We take a vote," says Butler, 40. "Majority rules."

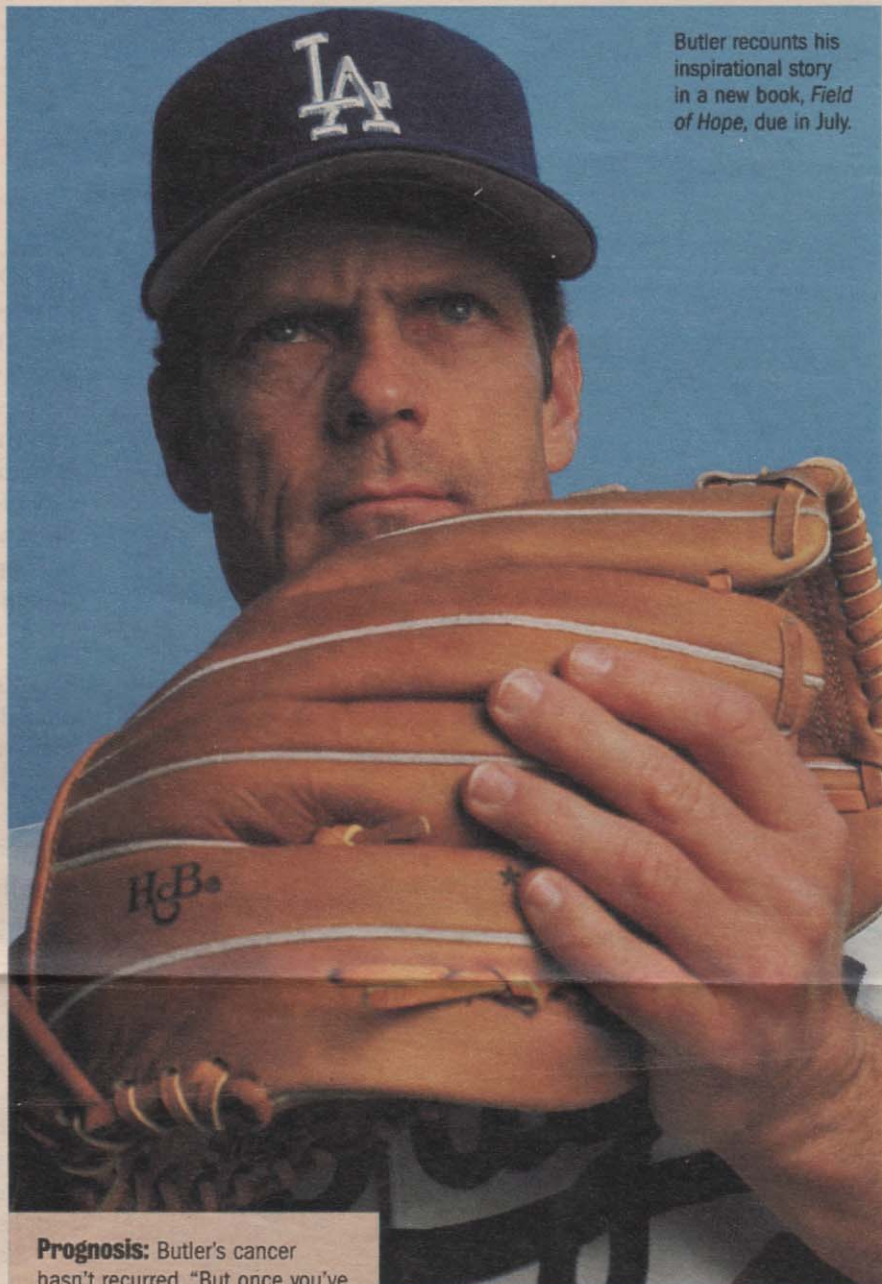
In attendance: his wife, Eveline, their daughters, ages 12, 13 and 14, and their son, 9. The question: Should Butler quit baseball and come home to Atlanta?

Butler's son, Blake, always votes for his father to retire. "Please, Dad," he says. "I want you home." This year, the boy has an added concern: What if his father is out of town and dies?

Last spring, Butler was diagnosed with cancer of the tonsils. Even if he survived, he was told, he'd never play pro baseball again. But after surgery, much prayer and pain, he courageously returned to the Dodgers. He began this season hitting .360, his best start ever.

A shoulder injury put Butler on the disabled list in May, and, no matter what, he has promised his son this is his last season. Butler believes kids should be involved in family decisions. "If you lie to them, they'll know. Kids can read through anything."

Minutes after learning he had cancer, Butler called his kids into the room to ask his doctor questions. Each child handled his illness differently. His eldest prayed to God to give her the



Butler recounts his inspirational story in a new book, *Field of Hope*, due in July.

Prognosis: Butler's cancer hasn't recurred. "But once you've had cancer, you always have cancer. You live with it."

Stellar stats: Among major-league active players, Butler ranks in the top 10 for career hits, runs, walks, stolen bases, triples and games played.

Inspiration: His high school coach, who benched him and told him he'd never make it. "I thank him. He was my driving force. I wanted to prove him wrong."

cancer. His second daughter attended 31 of his 32 radiation treatments. His third daughter rubbed his face and back, trying to massage the pain away. And Blake? "Whenever I felt well, he wanted to play catch."

In retirement, Butler has many options. Handsome and charismatic, he has been approached by Hollywood to take up acting. Adept at baseball's fundamentals, he'll be employable as a coach. But Butler might wait years before accepting any offers. "I'm getting out of baseball to raise my kids. I may just stay home and play Mr. Mom." **W**