

**2018  
NEW ENGLAND  
PATRIOTS**



**FEATURE CLIPS**

## Table of Contents

Chairman and CEO Robert Kraft.....	3
Head Coach Bill Belichick .....	11
Offensive Coordinator Josh McDaniels .....	18
Linebackers Coach Brian Flores .....	25
Offensive Line Coach Dante Scarnecchia.....	28
Safeties Coach Steve Belichick.....	31
TE Dwayne Allen.....	35
C David Andrews .....	40
QB Tom Brady .....	42
DL Malcom Brown.....	51
T Trent Brown .....	55
DL Adam Butler.....	57
S Patrick Chung .....	60
DB Keion Crossen.....	62
FB James Develin .....	65
QB Danny Eting.....	67
DL Trey Flowers .....	71
CB Stephon Gilmore .....	73
K Stephen Gostkowski .....	76
TE Rob Gronkowski .....	78
DL Lawrence Guy.....	83
WR Chris Hogan .....	86
QB Brian Hoyer .....	91
OL Shaq Mason .....	93
DB Devin McCourty.....	96
RB Sony Michel.....	98
WR Cordarrelle Patterson .....	102
WR Matthew Slater .....	105
OL Joe Thuney.....	110
LB Kyle Van Noy .....	113
RB James White .....	114
DL Deatrich Wise, Jr. ....	117

## Chairman and CEO Robert Kraft



### **Robert Kraft steady at the helm**

**Patriots' owner has navigated franchise through 20 years of highs and lows**

By Jackie MacMullan

January 15, 2014

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. -- Robert Kraft is having company and he's got some tidying up to do. The owner has been away, and just days before his Patriots were to host the Indianapolis Colts at Gillette Stadium, his office is littered with unopened mail, gifts, items earmarked for charity and a stack of business correspondence.

The room is already cluttered with mementos and framed photographs of his extraordinary run as owner of the New England Patriots.

There's the framed picture of Tom Brady in the Tuck Rule Game, personalized by former Raiders coach Jon Gruden with the inscription, "It was a fumble!" ("I'm going to auction that off," Kraft says). There are shots of Kraft with various dignitaries, including his friend, former President George H.W. Bush, who, Kraft says, plans to continue his birthday tradition of jumping out of an airplane when he turns 90 in June.

The most prominently displayed photographs are those of his four sons and his wife, Myra, who lost her battle with ovarian cancer in July 2011.

Her death left him disconsolate, lonely and dispirited. His sons, who were initially deeply concerned about their father, say while the sadness of losing his wife of 48 years lingers, the veil of grief is finally lifting. Kraft, who will turn 73 in June, gives no indication he has any immediate plans to retire.

### **Two Decades Of Dominance**

In the 20 years since Robert Kraft purchased the team, the Patriots are near the top of nearly every category associated with sustained success.

"After the love of my family," said Kraft, "there's nothing more important to me than winning football games. And I will do whatever I have to do to put this team in position to do that."

Next week will mark the 20th anniversary of Kraft purchasing of the Patriots, providing an occasion to sort through two decades of memories that began when he paid James Orthwein \$172 million for a franchise that had posted a dismal 19-61 mark (worst in the NFL) over the previous five years. At the time, the purchase price was the highest of any franchise in sports history.

Today, according to Forbes Magazine, the net worth of the Patriots is more than \$1.8 billion, second in the NFL only to the Dallas Cowboys (\$2.3 billion). Kraft has deftly molded the New England Patriots brand into an empire that includes the open-air shopping center Patriot Place, and he has done it with private funds.

He is one of the most powerful men in football, viewed as both a tender philanthropist and a ruthless businessman. In the past 20 years, he has been lauded as the man who saved the NFL and denigrated as the man who eviscerated the city of Hartford, Conn.

The success of his football team under his watch is indisputable. Since Kraft purchased the team in 1994, the Patriots have won more Super Bowls (3), more conference (6) and division (13) championships and more playoff games (33) than any other NFL team. Their sellout streak is at 216 and counting, with a lengthy waiting list of eager consumers raring to buy into the action.

While the team has reached dizzying heights, there have been some numbing lows, including the Spygate scandal and the incarceration of former Patriots tight end Aaron Hernandez on murder charges.

True to the "Patriot Way" of leaving the past in the past, the team has successfully scrubbed itself clean of any Hernandez remnants. The Patriots initiated a program in which anyone could turn in a No. 81 Hernandez jersey for a different team jersey for free. It was a clever public relations maneuver that cost the team almost \$250,000.

Players have been ordered to refrain from speaking about their former teammate, who was one of Brady's favorite receiving targets.

The current Patriots roster, set to play the Denver Broncos for the AFC championship on Sunday, has earned its moniker as a plucky team that has defied odds as one significant player after another -- Vince Wilfork, Jerod Mayo, Rob Gronkowski, Tommy Kelly -- was lost for the season.

"This is a team with real mental toughness," Kraft noted. "I don't know what's going to happen, but it reminds me of our '01 group. We didn't have the best players, but there was a sense of togetherness that was special."

That team won the first Super Bowl in franchise history in surprising fashion. The 2013 team may or may not bookend that feat. So what has Kraft learned about the business in between?

"I've learned not to be surprised when unexpected negative things come along," Kraft answered in a wide-ranging interview last week. "Everyone is there for the good times. It's how you handle the difficult times that will separate you.

"It's like keeping a family together. Let's be honest: This is a sick business. [The NFL] is going for parity. Your games get scheduled in terms of how well you did. You draft according to how well you did. You're punished for excellence, in a sense.

"You all have the same household budget you can spend, so you have to be wise. You have physical injuries that happen that are acts of God beyond anyone's ability to predict. You have to be very, very artful in how you design the team.

"It's like managing a business portfolio. And in the bottom third of that portfolio, the bottom third of your team, you need to be looking for specials that other people don't know about. Players like [defensive tackles] Chris Jones and Sealver Siliga.

"We've had a lot of those. Our football people have done a great job. But you can't rest. Once you think you've got it knocked, look out."

Kraft was blindsided by the charges levied against Hernandez, who, upon signing a five-year, \$40 million extension in August 2012, kissed his team's owner, vowed to be a role model, then donated \$50,000 of his new contract to the Myra H. Kraft Giving Back Fund.

"It's the saddest, most unfortunate part of our history with the team," Kraft said solemnly.

It is one of the lone blemishes on an otherwise brilliant success story in which Kraft transformed a football doormat into a juggernaut.

### **Resuscitating a franchise**

Kraft had his sights on purchasing the Patriots as far back as 1985, when he bought an option on a parcel of land adjacent to the team's stadium. Three years later he bought the stadium out of bankruptcy for \$25 million, which included the stadium's lease to the Patriots.

In 1994, Orthwein offered Kraft a \$75 million buyout of his lease so he could move the team to St. Louis. Kraft, who had tried in vain to purchase the Red Sox, refused.

He was among a who's who of groups interested in buying the Patriots that included Walter Payton, Donald Trump, Paul Newman, author Tom Clancy and Robert Tisch.

"I told Myra I was going to buy the team," Kraft recalled. "She asked, 'How much?' I told her, 'It's \$115 million, but it might go as high as \$120 or 125 million.

"Then I got out there and it was a take-it-or-leave-it price of \$172 million. I had to do it. You don't always get a second chance.

"Myra went cuckoo on me when I got back.

"It was one of the few times that we had conflict over a business decision of mine."

Kraft inherited coach Bill Parcells, quarterback Drew Bledsoe and 23 pieces of pending litigation against the team.

"I had trouble finding a Boston law firm that wasn't representing someone who had complaints against us," Kraft said.

### **Parcells era: 'Division within'**

Parcells was a dynamic leader, but he resented Kraft's interference in his personnel decisions. He was enraged when Kraft and vice president of player personnel Bobby Grier drafted Terry Glenn in 1996 over his objections. That sparked Parcells' famous utterance, "They want you to cook the dinner, at least they should let you shop for the groceries."

Parcells and young Bledsoe led the Patriots to Super Bowl XXXI, but following the 35-21 loss to Green Bay, Parcells did not travel back to Massachusetts with the team and soon after was hired by the New York Jets.

"Sustaining success is so hard, and the one thing I learned you can't have is division from within," Kraft said. Both men have since expressed regret on how they handled their tenure together. "We have a great relationship now," Kraft said. "It wasn't so much Bill Parcells, but how he operated.

"We can only deal with people who are thinking long term. Bill was day to day. He'd go down to Jupiter [Fla.] and play his doo-wop music and decide whether he wanted to come back the next year.

"Well, we have a salary cap and we have [a cornerback] Ricky Reynolds and these other people who are waiting for answers and we need to know.

"Bill had already won his Super Bowl. He had his reputation, to be honest.

"He did a lot for this franchise. He taught me a lot on how to get ready for the NFL. I'm lucky I had him.

"But I learned you can't be good in this business continuously unless you are thinking long term. Most football coaches are only thinking about what they have to do this Sunday."

### **Enter Belichick and Brady**

Kraft has tried to balance the all-business-no-sentiment approach of coach Bill Belichick by investing in personal relationships with his stars. When former linebacker Tedy Bruschi awoke in the hospital after suffering a stroke, Kraft was there, waiting.

One of the more emotional days of Kraft's tenure was when Belichick permanently replaced Bledsoe, a Kraft favorite, with an untested Tom Brady.

Robert Kraft stayed out of the way when Bill Belichick traded one of his favorite players, Drew Bledsoe, but made it clear the coach would be held accountable for the decision.

"I stayed out of it, but I weighed in," Kraft said. "When the head coach says, 'Tell me what you want me to do,' I say, 'I want to hold you accountable for this decision.'

"When we traded Drew, I wanted to make sure it was a place where he'd get his full contract value. I valued his loyalty. He gave our franchise credibility."

Kraft promised Bledsoe he would one day be feted by the Patriots. Last winter, he was inducted into the team's Hall of Fame.

In the meantime, Brady quickly established himself as one of the greatest quarterbacks of his generation, leading the 2001 team to the Super Bowl against St. Louis and the Greatest Show on Turf.

The Patriots stunned the heavily favored Rams by building a 17-3 lead off turnovers. Late in the game, quarterback Kurt Warner fumbled at the Patriots' 3-yard line and safety Tebucky Jones scooped up the ball and ran 97 yards for a touchdown, but it was called back on a holding call against Willie McGinest.

"When Tebucky [recovered the fumble and ran to the end zone], I said, 'It's all over!'" Kraft said. "Then they called the penalty and it goes back to the Rams and they score, and I thought of the ball going through Bill Buckner's legs."

Warner scored a rushing touchdown, then tied the game 17-17 with a touchdown pass to Ricky Proehl with 1:30 left. Commentator John Madden suggested the young Patriots should run the clock out for overtime.

Instead, Brady marched the Patriots 53 yards down the field with no timeouts and Adam Vinatieri kicked the Super Bowl-winning 48-yard field goal as time expired.

"I wouldn't even allow myself to consider we might win until the kick went through," Kraft said. "Then we had to rush down to the field and I forgot what we were going to say."

With red, white and blue confetti settling on the Lombardi trophy, Kraft told the assembled crowd, which had witnessed the first Super Bowl since the Sept. 11 attacks, "At this time in this country, we are all Patriots."

### **Two Super Bowl losses and a scandal**

New England won two more championships in the next three seasons, then lost two Super Bowls to the Giants in 2008 and 2012.

The first diminished a 2007 undefeated regular season. The key play in the game was a throw under pressure by Eli Manning (who was nearly yanked down by Jarvis Green) to David Tyree, who held on by pinning the ball against his helmet.

"They could have called that [Manning] was in the grasp," Kraft said. "And if Asante [Samuel] holds on to the ball before that [on a potential interception], we take a knee, and it's ours."

"It hurt so bad. I'm into history and legacy, and if we had won that one we would have accomplished something that I think would be almost impossible to happen again. But for some reason it wasn't meant to be."

The 2007 season was also marred by Spygate, the scandal that cost Belichick a record \$500,000 fine after his team was caught videotaping the signals of Jets coaches. The team also was fined \$250,000 and docked a draft pick. It opened up the Patriots' franchise to an avalanche of scorn and ridicule.

"I asked Bill, 'On a scale of 1 to 100, how much did it help?' and he told me, '1'" Kraft said. "That was a tough time. I was mad. It could have ripped this organization apart. But we got through it."

Because of Spygate, the Patriots must endure criticism that they haven't won a Super Bowl without cheating. It is, Kraft said, a ludicrous notion.

"Spygate meant nothing," Kraft said. "Look how we've done. We've had the best record in the league since then. We've been to the Super Bowl twice since then."

Kraft said the loss to the Giants in Super Bowl XLVI is the one that still haunts him, in part because Myra had passed away before the 2011 season.

"That one was even harder," he admitted. "The team was wearing Myra's initials on their uniforms. I wanted that one more than '07. I wanted it for Myra."

### **Flirtation with Hartford**

While Kraft is universally recognized as a shrewd businessman, there is one region in which his name will forever be mud. Kraft wanted a new stadium in 1999, preferably in downtown Boston, but the Massachusetts lawmakers were lukewarm in their support.

Kraft brokered a deal to move the team to Hartford which included a \$374 million waterfront stadium that would leave him debt free.

The tentative agreement fell apart when Massachusetts pledged \$70 million toward the infrastructure surrounding a new stadium in Foxborough. Kraft, citing concerns the Hartford group could not construct a new stadium in a timely manner, extricated himself from the agreement.

The backlash was venomous. When the Patriots went to the Super Bowl in 2002, the Hartford Courant's Jim Shea wrote, "The team is owned by Robert Kraft, the ethically challenged, double-dealing greedy little white rat -- no offense to rats -- who played us all in Hartford for fools."

Kraft likely would have experienced similar backlash from Massachusetts fans had he moved his team to Connecticut. The NFL, unwilling to lose its Boston market, also stepped in to ensure that didn't happen.

"If we moved to Hartford, according to our research, 97 percent of our fans still would have gone to the games," Kraft said. "They wouldn't have been happy, but they would have gone."

"People don't understand. I walked away from what would be \$1.2 billion present value. There was no risk for me. No debt. I would have been much wealthier with no financial risk if I had done it."

"It wouldn't have been like the Boston Braves moving to Milwaukee. Our stadium would have been a 1 hour and 15 minute drive from here. Most of the people who come and tailgate drive that far anyhow. But, it didn't feel right, so we didn't do it."

### **Unprecedented stability**

Although many in Connecticut have never forgiven him, Kraft has stockpiled reservoirs of goodwill throughout the rest of the country for his role in settling the NFL labor dispute in 2011. Former Colts center Jeff Saturday publicly thanked Kraft for brokering the agreement while Myra was battling cancer.

"Without [Robert] this deal does not get done," said Saturday, whose bear hug of the owner went viral. "He is a man who helped us save football, and we're so grateful for that."

Kraft is most grateful for the continuity that has become the hallmark of his franchise. During his tenure, he's hired only two coaches (Pete Carroll and Belichick), and had two starting quarterbacks in Bledsoe and Brady (Matt Cassel filled in following Brady's knee injury in 2008).

Kraft's son Jonathan is the heir apparent to this NFL jewel, but the father is not quite ready to abdicate his football throne. He is energized and excited about the Patriots' future.

"I love our locker room," he said. "When I lost Myra, they saved me. I spent a lot of time there. You can walk through on game day and feel the camaraderie."

He does not know if this New England team can win a fourth Super Bowl. He's not sure how much longer Brady will play, but predicts, "It's longer than you think."

By the looks of his cluttered office, Robert Kraft plans on sticking around to find out.



### **Kraftwork**

**Three bold decisions by Robert Kraft transformed the Patriots from league laughingstock into the NFL's model franchise**

By Peter King

February 1, 2012

On the last day of the 1993 NFL regular season, Patriots players and die-hard fans seemed resigned to losing their team. Absentee owner James Orthwein, a Missouri native who had bought the club two years earlier, intended to move it to St. Louis, which had lost the Cardinals in '88. "We were as good as gone," said Patriots linebacker Andre Tippett. But the fans wouldn't go down without a fight. Though they had the league's worst team (13--50 over four seasons heading into that game, against playoff-contending Miami) and worst venue (dumpy, no-frills Foxboro

Stadium), damn it, this was still their bad team and their crappy stadium. Before the game they burned empty cases of Budweiser in the windswept parking lots. (Orthwein was a great-grandson of brewing mogul Adolphus Busch and sat on the board of the St. Louis--based brewing company.) And once the game ended, victoriously, on a Drew Bledsoe overtime touchdown pass to Michael Timpson, the fans wouldn't leave. "Don't take our team!" they chanted. "Don't take our team!"

Robert Kraft, the owner of Foxboro Stadium, was getting in an elevator when he heard the crowd. It had been a frenzied time for Kraft and his family, as they watched Orthwein shop the Patriots to prospective owners who would take the team to St. Louis. Kraft was a potential buyer, but he felt the deck was stacked against him because he would keep the Patriots in New England. As the elevator door closed, he turned to his son Jonathan and said, "There's no way we're not winning this."

There are decisions people make—often emotional, often against the wishes of those they trust most—that radically shape their future. Robert Kraft has made three of them involving the Patriots. And if any of those had gone the other way, chances are very good that the Patriots would not be the winningest team in the NFL since 1994, and would not be playing in their fifth Super Bowl in the last 11 seasons on Sunday in Indianapolis.

The Patriots morphed from laughingstock to the best franchise in football because at three critical junctures Kraft didn't do the logical thing. He did what something inside him said to do. "I've been around Mr. Kraft a lot when he's got all these spreadsheets and data in front of him," says quarterback Tom Brady. "But it's his instincts that he really trusts. He goes with his gut. And look at his track record—he's always right."

### **DECISION 1: Overspending for a bad team**

A native of the tony Boston suburb of Brookline, Kraft took his four sons to countless Patriots games over the years. He had built a fortune in the paper and packaging business, and with that money came the ability to indulge a dream: He wanted to own his hometown football team. Kraft first tried to buy the Patriots in 1986, but the cash-strapped Sullivan family eventually sold to Victor Kiam. In 1989, however, Kraft bought the lease to Foxboro Stadium out of bankruptcy.

As it became more clear that Orthwein, who had little interest in owning and running a football team, would steer the club to St. Louis, Kraft broke the news to his wife, Myra, in the summer of 1993 on a walk on the beach in Cape Cod. "I told her, 'I'm going to put a bid in for the team,'" Kraft recalled in a three-hour interview with SI at his Brookline home in January. "She didn't think it was a very good business idea. To put it mildly."

But Kraft plowed forward with a seven-man team led by Jonathan, a Harvard Business School grad, that would determine how much they'd bid. The committee came to the conclusion that the Patriots—not including the stadium or lease—were worth about \$115 million. "But," Kraft said, "I figured I'd go to 120 or 125 million if I had to." Summoned to St. Louis to make a final offer with other suitors three weeks after the 1993 season finale, Kraft bid \$125 million. When Orthwein and his advisers declared that none of the bids were sufficient, Kraft said, in essence, tell us what you want for the team. Orthwein's advisers came back with a number: \$172 million.

"Was I scared?" Kraft said. "Yes, I was scared. But this was my shot. How many times in life do you get your shot to do something you desperately want to do? Logic said no. Instinct said yes. Also, things kept flashing through my mind. The Boston Braves had left, and no team ever replaced them. My sons were getting to an age where smart sons move to take good business opportunities [elsewhere], and I wanted my family to stay intact here. I figured this could be a good family business."

After gulping hard at the figure he was quoted, Kraft said yes. For the highest price in the history of American sports, he now owned a bad football team that played in an el cheapo stadium. The tough part—telling Myra—was still to come.

Over the past six months Kraft's anguish over the death in July of his wife of 48 years has been continually evident. In his interview with SI he had to stop to compose himself four times when Myra's name came up—including in the discussion about his decision to buy the team.

"When I told her, she thought I was crazy," Kraft recalled, sitting at his kitchen table. "Angry? Yeah. She couldn't believe I'd done that. It was a ridiculous number. It's the only time she questioned my business judgment in all the years we were married. Every marriage has some hard times, and I can tell you that was a tough night."

Pause. Fifteen seconds.

"That night, to tell you the kind of person my sweetheart was, she said to me ..."

Pause. Five seconds.

"...'You have to promise me our charitable donations will not be reduced.' I promised her that, and we moved on. Now, today, it's so tough, still. This thing with Myra—everything else is paper clips. Her perspective on what was important in life was such an inspiration."

There were fits and starts to be sure: In 1999 Kraft, seeking a new stadium, announced he would move the team to Hartford, then reversed course. And in the downturn after 9/11, funding for a privately constructed new stadium in Foxborough nearly collapsed. But Kraft weathered the storms and saw the project to completion. Gillette Stadium opened for football in the fall of 2002, when the Patriots were—thanks largely to another gutsy call Kraft had made nearly three years earlier—the reigning Super Bowl champs.

## **DECISION 2: Hiring Belichick**

It's no secret that Kraft and Bill Parcells, the coach he inherited when he bought the team, had their moments of hostility. Parcells wanted authority to draft players, while Kraft preferred a team approach, with the personnel department having final say. That eventually led to an ugly breakup after the 1996 season. But something else good came out of that season, beyond the team's first Super Bowl appearance: Kraft got to know Belichick.

"Bill Parcells came to me and said there was someone he wanted to add to the staff, Bill Belichick, and he wanted me to meet him," said Kraft. "We were already over our coaching budget, but I met him and liked him right away. I drilled him with questions, and I liked what I heard."

Things turned bitter when Kraft learned that Parcells wanted to leave after the season to coach the Jets. After the Super Bowl loss to the Packers, when the Patriots' staff was dissolving, Kraft had a choice: keep Belichick, perhaps even as head coach, or hire new blood. "I wrestled with it," Kraft said. "But I had lost the trust with Parcells, and he and Bill were tied at the hip. They were together for so long. Could I trust [Belichick]? I decided I couldn't, at the time. Everything in life is timing. Myra and I went out to lunch with him and Debby [Belichick's then wife], and I explained it. When I left there, I thought maybe there'd be a time we might work together in the future."

Belichick followed Parcells to the Meadowlands, and the Jets signed him to a contract with an "heir clause" that would give him the head coaching job whenever Parcells stepped down. As an additional reward—and, some within the Jets' organization thought, a ploy to ensure Belichick stayed on—owner Leon Hess gave Belichick a \$1 million bonus, unprompted, in January '99. But Hess died in May of that year, and the ownership situation with the Jets became muddled. When Parcells announced on Jan. 3, 2000, that he was resigning, Belichick took over—for one day. On Jan. 4 he sent his infamous letter to club management: "I resign as HC of the NYJ."

In New England, Kraft had fired coach Pete Carroll on Jan. 3, but before the Parcells announcement. "I made sure we faxed in a request for permission that day to interview Belichick—when Parcells was still the coach," says Jonathan Kraft. When the Patriots' interest in Belichick surfaced, friends around the league called Robert Kraft unprompted to ask him what in the world he was thinking in pursuing the diffident Belichick, who'd made more than his share of enemies in a five-year 37--45 run with the Browns a decade earlier. One associate sent Kraft a tape of memorable and/or monosyllabic moments from Belichick's press conferences in Cleveland.

Kraft was undeterred. Though he felt the Patriots had the right to freely hire Belichick because they'd requested permission before it was announced that Parcells was quitting, commissioner Paul Tagliabue ruled that the Patriots would have to pay the Jets compensation. Irony of ironies: Parcells, who stayed on to run the Jets' front office, and Kraft were the ones who had to hammer out the deal. "When [Parcells] called to discuss it," Kraft said, "my secretary walked into my office and said, 'Darth Vader's on the phone.' I knew exactly who she meant." Finally they agreed. Belichick cost New England its first-round draft choice in 2000.

That wasn't the only first-round pick Belichick cost New England. Commissioner Roger Goodell docked the Pats a 2008 first-rounder as partial sanction for the Spygate scandal. But those two first-rounders were small price to pay for a coach who has averaged 12.9 wins a year, including playoffs, and led the Patriots to five Super Bowls in his 12 seasons. Belichick, a latter-day Monty Hall when it comes to dealing current draft picks for better ones down the road, has ensured that the flow of quality talent won't be stemmed anytime soon. And friends say he has no plans to quit coaching. (Belichick declined to be interviewed for this story.)

"The key to life," said Kraft, "is you try to see things other people can't see. This league is set up for everyone to go 8-8. How do you differentiate? You have to be bold in any business and do things you take a lot of criticism for but you believe are right."

Which brings us to Tom Brady.

### **DECISION 3: Jettisoning the highest-paid player in football, in his prime**

This call is less tough—though it isn't exactly an easy move to trade a prolific quarterback within the division in favor of a sixth-rounder who still had question marks. But a year after Belichick took Brady with the 199th pick in 2000, Kraft could tell that the coach was smitten with Brady and not thrilled with Bledsoe, who improvised too much for the liking of Belichick and offensive coordinator Charlie Weis during a 5--11 season in 2000. Meanwhile, Belichick found Brady to be a sponge, and it was becoming apparent that his arm was stronger than scouts had seen during the predraft process. Brady lived for the game, twice winning a parking space awarded to the player with the best off-season workout effort. And the kid was confident. He was walking out of the old stadium to his car one day shortly after the draft, pizza box (that evening's dinner) under one arm, when he encountered the owner for the first time.

"He looked me right in the eye," Robert Kraft recalled, "and said to me, 'Mr. Kraft, hi, I'm Tom Brady. I just wanted to tell you I'm the best decision your franchise has ever made.'"

In 2001 Brady replaced the injured Bledsoe with the Patriots 0--2 and quarterbacked an underdog team to a stunning Super Bowl victory over St. Louis. The next spring Belichick wanted Brady to play over Bledsoe. "You'd better be right," Kraft told him in a staff meeting. When the Bills offered a first-round pick for Bledsoe, Kraft had to okay it—and he did. "I love the guy," Kraft said of Bledsoe. "That was a tough one. But you've got to back your key managers when they make a decision."

Bledsoe lasted three unspectacular seasons in Buffalo, winning 23 games, none in the playoffs, with a plus-12 touchdown-to-interception differential. Brady in those three years: 43 wins, two Super Bowl victories and 47 more touchdown passes than interceptions.

This past year Kraft was one of 10 owners who helped negotiate the decade-long labor agreement that was hammered out in July. As chair of the league's broadcast committee he took the lead in extending the NFL's network deals through 2022. Those jobs helped him fill his time as he coped with Myra's death. "The way he does business," said Patriots union rep Matt Light, "is it's never a pissing contest. In the labor deal he said the commonsense thing: 'Let's get the lawyers out of the room.' And they did, and it got done."

While difficult, those CBA and TV deals were, in many ways, logical business developments emanating from the sport that laps all others in popularity today. Buying the Patriots? Hiring Belichick? Those were tougher calls, the kind it's become Kraft's business to make. "In this game," he said on Sunday night, after the Patriots had arrived in Indianapolis for their sixth Super Bowl under Kraft, "you better take some risks—or you'll have a nice team, and once every 10 or 20 years you'll be good. That's not what I want to be about."

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## Head Coach Bill Belichick



### **All football, Bill Belichick leaves his narrative to his friends and enemies**

By Adam Kilgore  
September 9, 2015

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Last week, Bill Belichick trudged behind a podium wearing shorts and a sleeveless New England Patriots windbreaker, gray stubble dotting his face.

The assembled reporters had another round of questions about the status of Tom Brady, the quarterback embroiled in the most recent controversy that swarmed Belichick's team. He deflected questions about Brady's status and the functionality of his team's offense without a determined quarterback. He discussed in detail the intricacies of choosing players for his practice squad. He refused introspection.

Belichick had risen from playing center at tiny Wesleyan University to the top of the NFL, along the way becoming celebrated for his brilliance and achievement but suspected of malfeasance and rule-skirting. He was asked what was the most important thing he had done over those four decades to evolve as a coach.

Belichick looked up from the questioner, gazed at the back of the room, and replied, "I don't know." He snorted. He stared. The room waited for him to say something else. He didn't.

Belichick has left it to others to fill in the blanks behind his gloomy facade, and the effects of his success — admiration, animosity, loyalty, jealousy — have created wildly divergent portraits. On Thursday night inside Gillette Stadium, the Patriots will open the season against the Pittsburgh Steelers, and Belichick will begin the defense of his fourth Super Bowl victory. He is 63 years old, the third-oldest coach in the NFL behind Tom Coughlin and Pete Carroll. Entering his fifth decade in the league, Belichick remains at the fore of NFL innovation. Defining him — and the roots of his success — remains elusive.

[The Patriots aren't dumb enough to have cheated against the Steelers]

People close to him describe a reliable friend, a voracious learner, an ardent student of the game, a man whose grim public demeanor hides sharp intelligence and understated humor. He engenders loyalty with both surprising kindness and utmost competence. "As a player, what more do you want?" former Patriots safety Lawyer Milloy said. "You don't want that fluffy [stuff]. He just wanted us to be focused on ball."

Belichick's detractors — and many within the league — suggest rule-breaking has propped up a brilliant football strategist. The SpyGate scandal remains a stain, a wound picked fresh this week by an extensive ESPN The Magazine story detailing the practice of filming and decoding opponents' signals. In 2007, the NFL fined Belichick \$500,000, but the scope and effectiveness of the scheme remain murky because of the league's rapid investigation and destruction of video tapes.

Supporters, associates and former players say Belichick has adapted with a wickedly dexterous mind and a curious bent. "Probably the story of his career, from my vantage point, would be his attitude toward learning," said Iowa Coach Kirk Ferentz, a Belichick confidante. Belichick once told his college economics professor that what he studied in class helped him stay under the salary cap. ("That's an application of marginalism," said Dick Miller, the professor.) His current defensive coordinator, Matt Patricia, was a rocket scientist before he became a football coach. Belichick seeks. He listens.

"It's really amazing when you think about it: He's been coaching longer than any player on this team has been alive," Patriots special teams captain Matthew Slater said. "That says something about his leadership, the way he learns. The way he views the game is very unique. He's been able to stay ahead of the curve because of the mind the good Lord has given him for football."

**'Always moving forward'**

For nearly three decades as a coach in the NFL, Belichick had divined creative solutions to complex problems, the skill that fueled his rise from playing center at Wesleyan to coaching at the top of the sport. On the day the Patriots arrived in New Orleans for his first Super Bowl as a head coach in late January 2002, he confronted a problem without precedent in his career: Milloy, his star safety, wanted a new hotel room.

At a walk-through practice, Milloy explained to Belichick that he had heard first-year defensive tackle Richard Seymour beaming about how spacious his room was. Milloy could barely squeeze luggage into his. What was up with a rookie scoring a bigger room than a veteran? “Really, Lawyer?” Belichick responded. Belichick was already trying to prepare a two-touchdown underdog to face the St. Louis Rams; he didn’t need another headache.

When Milloy returned to the team hotel after practice, a concierge greeted him with a key to a new room: “Big as hell,” Milloy recalled, and with a panoramic view of Bourbon Street, a Jacuzzi and, oddly, a treadmill in the corner.

At the Patriots’ team dinner that night, Belichick approached Milloy. “How do you like that room, Lawyer?” Belichick asked.

“It’s cool,” Milloy replied. “But I don’t know why they put that treadmill in there.”

“That’s because it was my room,” Belichick said.

Belichick grew up in Annapolis, drawn to football by the same innate pull that obsessed his father. Steve Belichick coached all over the country before he settled down as a Navy scout. He wrote a book, “Football Scouting Methods,” that became a bible among football intelligentsia. Bill followed his father on the road, where he watched Steve’s deathly serious attention to detail, and into coach’s meetings. Rick Forzano, a Navy assistant, would instruct 10-year-old Bill to break down film. Belichick would return with detailed notes, describing which receivers liked to run which routes on which downs.

“I hate to think what his IQ is,” Forzano said. “He looks beyond what’s happening.”

Forzano would later become the coach of the Detroit Lions, and he hired Belichick as a 23-year-old with one year of experience, a \$25-per-week assistant job with the Baltimore Colts. Forzano still called him Billy. Belichick came to the Lions as a special teams coach, but soon his duties expanded to wide receivers and linebackers. His voice quickly became valued in meetings. One coach would suggest adjusting the position of the strong safety, and only Belichick would identify why it might affect the defensive end.

“Bill’s always moving forward,” said Al Groh, an assistant alongside Belichick with the New York Giants. “He’s not just thinking about this season. What is distinguishingly unique for somebody who is very bright and on top is he’s a terrific listener. He’s interested in anybody and everybody’s opinion because out of that might come a good idea. That was the case even when he knew he wanted to do.”

In Cleveland, his first stop as a head coach, Belichick would surprise assistants by raising ideas they had mentioned a month prior. He contacts college coaches and visits campuses. Friends have noticed him drifting away from one conversation to eavesdrop on another.

In the spring of 2007, Belichick — a better lacrosse player than football player at Wesleyan — called Johns Hopkins lacrosse Coach Dave Pietramala to congratulate him on winning the national championship. They talked on the phone for an hour. Later, after an awards banquet both men attended, they met at a restaurant afterward and chatted for three hours. Pietramala realized Belichick had as many questions for him as he did for Belichick. They still talk or text weekly.

“The amazing thing to me with Coach, he’s always in search of a way to do things better,” Pietramala said. “I’m really taken back at how inquisitive he is about lots of different things. It doesn’t have to be in coaching. If we have a guest speaker, he wants to know, what did he talk about? What was good about it? For a guy who’s extraordinarily bright, extraordinarily successful, he’s always searching for a better way, a different way.”

The depiction stands in stark contrast to the label many have affixed to Belichick: cheater. The Indianapolis Colts expressed suspicion that the Patriots bugged the visiting locker room at Gillette Stadium. At the Super Bowl earlier this year, Don Shula called him “Belicheat.” Even before SpyGate, one NFL coach was asked how he killed time at league meetings. He replied, only half-jokingly, “Sit around and talk about how much the Patriots cheat.”

**‘He knew everything’**

Former players insist Belichick did not have to cheat, that his knack for detail and recall gave him all the edge required. Heath Evans, a former Patriots fullback, ran off the field following a kick return, during which he had executed a block. Evans had kept his man out of the play, but Belichick informed him he had taken an imprecise angle, the kind of infraction most head coaches may not spot days later on film, let alone in the cacophony of a real-time NFL game.

“He knew everything,” Evans said. “Literally. He knew every detail. There was instant accountability, every second of the day. Bill just knew everything. It was scary sometimes.”

One season during his tenure in Cleveland, Browns coaches met with Chicago Bears coaches to swap notes about teams in their respective divisions. “I swear, he knew more about Tampa than the Bears, who played them twice,” said Ferentz, then Belichick’s offensive line coach. “Their guys were looking at us like, ‘Holy smokes.’”

Belichick prepares for everything. During staff meetings, he asks questions about a tactic an opposing coach used a decade prior. During Super Bowl XLVI, in 2012, the Patriots’ headsets malfunctioned in the second half, leading to harmful miscommunication. And so, in the week leading into last season’s Super Bowl, Belichick stopped practice and shouted for the coaches to drop their headsets.

In today’s NFL, most coaches rise and become head coaching candidates by mastering a specific area. Once they become a head coach, they hand off one side of the ball to a coordinator. Belichick touches everything in the organization, from scouting draft picks to an offensive lineman’s hand placement. During practice, he can spot a fullback missing a block out of the corner of his eye, halt the drill and correct the mistake himself.

“It’s still mind-boggling how I sat there and watch that take place,” said former Patriots linebacker Willie McGinest, now an NFL Network analyst. “He would break down both sides of the ball and be instrumental in planning every phase of the game. Other coaches can’t do that. That’s just amazing to me, having been in the league 15 years.”

Playing for Belichick can be stressful. Evans would pass him in a hallway or the locker room, and Belichick would present a situation and play and ask him, “What is their linebacker going to be thinking?”

The strict standard also brought comfort. Players understand their role with uncommon clarity, and they trust Belichick’s detailed instructions will reap success. “Playing for Belichick was the most pressure-packed and most peaceful experience of my career,” Evans said.

“He’ll put it up on the board,” McGinest said. “He’ll say, ‘This is what’s going to happen. This is how they’re going to attack you. If you do X, Y and Z, you’ll be okay.’ And it seems like every single week, it happens. So it’s not hard to play in that system.”

### **The Belichick guys**

Mike Whalen was still groggy when he woke up the day after taking a new job in 2010. After four grueling days, he had resigned as the coach at Williams to take the same job at Wesleyan, a fierce New England rival but also his alma mater. While at Williams, Whalen had tried to introduce himself to Belichick as a fellow Wesleyan alum, but Belichick brushed him aside after a perfunctory greeting. But hours after accepting the Wesleyan post, he checked his packed voice mail, and one of the first messages came from a familiar voice: “Hey, Mike, this is Bill Belichick, head coach of the New England Patriots.”

Whalen called him back, and Belichick gave him a simple introduction: “Glad to have you back. Anything I can do to help, let me know.”

Belichick has kept his word. He has spoken at fundraisers at Whalen’s request, counsels Wesleyan players interested in coaching and responds each time Whalen e-mails him. Whalen once asked him how he would handle playing at Trinity, a rival with a lengthy home winning streak. In the middle of his own season, Belichick replied and told him to ask the players how many of them had anything to do with the streak.

“A few of the seniors had played there once,” Whalen said. “It was virtually irrelevant to three-quarters of our team. It gives you a little bit of insight into how his mind works.”

Belichick shows the public only his grim side, saying little and revealing less. Those who know him quickly point out his understated sense of humor, his thoughtfulness and kindness toward people who supported him. He sent Forzano a signed picture after the first three Super Bowls he won. “He’ll be sending me a fourth,” he said.

Ray Perkins, the head coach who hired him to coach linebackers for the Giants in 1979, asked Belichick in 2013 to attend a fundraiser at Jones County Junior College, where Perkins had become head coach. Belichick agreed instantly, traveling to Ellisville, Miss., and telling football stories on stage at a banquet. "He talked for 45 minutes," Perkins said. "We had to drag him off the stage to get him to his plane."

Pietramala has seen Belichick play video games with his 11-year-old twin boys, then drop to the floor and wrestle with them. Last season, after one of Pietramala's players died suddenly, the coach asked Belichick for advice on how to handle his team. Belichick spent an hour on the phone with him.

"Not too many know him outside of the Gillette walls," Milloy said. "Because that's where he's always at. The thing about the perception is, I'll put it like this: Once you buy into the system, once you're a Belichick guy, you're a Belichick guy for life."

But his team always takes priority. The list of Belichick guys Belichick has cut ties with for the sake of the salary cap is long. McGinest, Seymour, Logan Mankins, Deion Branch, Mike Vrabel, on and on. It even includes the safety to whom he once gave his hotel room.

Days before Week 1 of the 2003 season, Belichick told Milloy the Patriots would release him if he didn't take a pay cut. Milloy refused. The Patriots waived him, and Milloy still chokes up discussing it.

Even as Milloy faced Belichick twice a season playing for the division-rival Buffalo Bills, they did not speak for three years. Milloy moved on to the Atlanta Falcons, who played the Patriots in the preseason's first game in 2006. After the game, Milloy mingled with former teammates on the field. He felt a hand on his shoulder pads. When he turned around, he was shocked.

"Hey, Lawyer," Belichick said. "Sorry for how everything went down."

Like that, his animosity dissipated. The gesture was small and unconventional, perhaps open to interpretation. But to Milloy, it had meant everything.

"It was perfect," Milloy said. "It was the Belichick way."

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## **Persistent Bill Belichick grows into champion**

By Jeff Howe

Thursday, September 4, 2014

Ted Marchibroda can't think of another NFL coach who has worked for a paltry \$25 weekly salary.

Then again, "Billy" Belichick always has managed to distinguish himself among his peers, both as a 23-year-old apprentice and a Hall of Fame lock who is entering his 40th coaching season. That milestone has been met with pride and applause by the football minds who worked closely with Belichick throughout his career, particularly as they watched him feverishly hone his craft during eight stops, including this 15-year tenure with the three-time Super Bowl champion Patriots.

"I don't think there's ever been a coach that got \$25 a week," Marchibroda said recently. "I'm very happy for him and very proud of the guy. To me, a guy like Billy deserves it. He has worked for it and has earned every bit of it. He took the chance, whether it was a chance or not, but he didn't get paid too much and decided to take it."

### **Breaking in**

Belichick helped his father, longtime Navy coach and scout Steve Belichick, break down film for years and desperately worked his connections to break into the NFL upon graduating from Wesleyan. Marchibroda, who was hired by the Baltimore Colts in 1975, needed an assistant to do the film work after general manager Joe Thomas' cousin declined the job. Special teams coach George Boutselis recommended Belichick to Marchibroda, who was impressed enough to offer him the job after one interview.

"I decided to hire him because of the fact that I felt like, 'Well, if he runs into any trouble, we have his father as a backup,'" Marchibroda cracked.

Belichick logged every roll of film that crossed his desk, tallying Colts opponents' formations and plays based on the down and distance, time on the clock, score and hashmark, and he'd make a note of any plays the defense needed to practice. As the season progressed, Marchibroda noticed defensive players asking Belichick questions if their positional coach was unavailable.

Belichick also helped on special teams during practice and had the unenviable job as the turk, whose role is to tell players to bring their playbook to the head coach's office to be released.

And he was the driver. Marchibroda got a few free rooms at the local Howard Johnson hotel in exchange for Colts parking passes, so Belichick would shuttle hotel mates Marchibroda, Boutselis and offensive line coach Whitey Dovel to and from practice. They bought Billy most of his meals and slipped him extra cash on occasion. Steve Belichick once told Marchibroda he still had to claim his son as a dependent on his tax returns because of his uniquely low paycheck. But Bill Belichick recognized a priceless experience with three respected coaches, and he simply listened and processed every word he heard.

Marchibroda's staff turned a two-win team into a 10-4 outfit that ended a three-year playoff drought, and Belichick asked for a \$4,000 salary for 1976. Thomas declined, and Belichick joined Rick Forzano's Lions, who were willing to give him \$10,000.

### **Setting a foundation**

Forzano knew Belichick from a four-year stint as the Navy head coach and hired the 24-year-old to assist on special teams and coach the receivers. But Forzano resigned after a 1-3 start and was replaced by Tommy Hudspeth, who transitioned Belichick to the tight ends in 1977. The entire staff was fired after the 1977 season, and Belichick hooked on with the Broncos after his only two years coaching offense, which he always has acknowledged to be significantly valuable to his development.

Belichick again assisted on special teams and defense in Denver, where he focused on the secondary under Joe Collier, the coordinator and architect of the famed Orange Crush 3-4 defense. Though Collier's 3-4 is different from Belichick's modern-day unit, it gave Belichick a first-hand look at another philosophy.

"Just about everything we were doing at that time, he soaked up pretty good," Collier said. "He was the early guy in the office and late to leave. . . . He fit right in with all the rest of the coaches."

Belichick again assisted with the film breakdowns, but he didn't overstep his bounds by piping up with new defensive schemes, even though Collier recognized those ideas were flowing. To this day, Belichick tells his players to "do your job" and not worry about others' responsibilities. Collier admired Belichick's grinding mentality.

"I could see his work ethic, how he is absorbing everything, how he is the son of a coach," Collier said. "And his ambition, you could see his ambition. He didn't want to stick doing what he was doing then. He wanted to advance. There was no question about it. Yeah, I could see he was going to be a success."

### **Launching a legacy**

Giants coach Ray Perkins hired both Belichick and Bill Parcells in 1979, but the two new assistants met a few years earlier. Parcells, an Army assistant in the 1960s, used to exchange film with Steve Belichick because of the programs' agreement. Parcells then said he met Bill Belichick in the 1970s when his Vanderbilt squad was playing Army, whom Steve Belichick was scouting with his son.

Belichick joined the Giants to run the special teams and assist Parcells' defense. His responsibilities increased through the years as Parcells asked Perkins to give Belichick more time on defense. Belichick harnessed even more defensive authority when Parcells became the head coach in 1983, and he officially was promoted to defensive coordinator in 1985.

Still, Belichick remained infatuated with league-wide activity, which wasn't difficult to notice because the Giants coaches were confined to one small room. Romeo Crennel noticed Belichick's note-taking during offseason and draft prep.

But make no mistake: Belichick advanced because of his work with the defense. Parcells instituted the basic philosophy, which he picked up during his 1980 stint with Patriots coach Ron Erhardt and coordinator Fritz Shurmur, but Belichick led the group.

“(Belichick) put his own ideas in it and refined it, and we kind of modernized some of the coverages a little bit as we went,” Parcells said. “We always were able to, and this is much to his credit, just go forward with what we thought was necessary at the time, and he did a great job with it.”

Belichick earned more exposure after the Giants were 14-2 with the league’s second-ranked scoring defense in 1986, a season that culminated in a victory against the Broncos in Super Bowl XXI, and he soon started to turn down head coaching offers because he wanted to be set up with an ideal opportunity.

It came after the orchestration of one of the great stretches of defensive game plans in NFL history.

Belichick asked Parcells to switch his positional concentration from the linebackers to the secondary in 1989, which led to the hiring of Al Groh to coach the linebackers. Belichick’s thought process: To be a great defensive coordinator, he must have a great grasp of the defensive backfield.

The Giants generally were a 3-4 team with zone coverages, but they proved their matchup philosophy in the 1990 playoffs against the Bears, 49ers and Bills.

“Within the basic structure of your philosophy, you had to have the flexibility to play the game we need to play. Every opponent presents you with different issues,” Groh said. “At the heart of it all was Bill Belichick.”

The Bears, who visited the Giants in the divisional round, led the league in rushing attempts, and quarterback Mike Tomczak replaced Jim Harbaugh because of a shoulder injury. So Belichick’s plan was to play the whole game with an eight-man box that included some six-man fronts that still utilized 3-4 techniques, and the Giants rolled, 31-3.

They visited the 49ers in the NFC Championship Game and were tasked with stopping Joe Montana, Jerry Rice and a West Coast offense that ranked second in passing. Belichick designed a nickel game plan with man coverages that took away easy completions. The Giants survived, 15-13.

The Super Bowl was Belichick’s greatest trick as he prepared for the Bills’ K-Gun offense without the luxury of a bye week.

“If Buffalo had been trying to prepare themselves for the game by studying the previous two games, there was nothing that was going to relate,” Groh said.

The Giants used a 3-2-6 scheme with myriad zone coverages. Linebacker Lawrence Taylor became a down lineman while Carl Banks and Pepper Johnson played inside with a pair of safeties as outside linebackers, which increased their speed in coverage and enticed the Bills to run more with Thurman Thomas. The Giants offense complemented it all by controlling the ball for 40:33 in a shocking, 20-19 upset.

“I think we had a good defensive plan that was a little different, but it was tested because that was a close game and they didn’t have nearly as many opportunities as we had,” Parcells said. “We were big underdogs in that game. Just managed to pull it out.”

### **First opportunity**

The Browns hired Belichick as head coach in 1991, and he immediately cleaned up a locker room that got out of hand under Bud Carson. Belichick implemented structure, a firm practice schedule and set rigorous expectations.

Ozzie Newsome, a Hall of Fame tight end who retired before the 1991 season to join the Browns front office, immediately recognized Belichick’s credibility. Newsome still had friends on the roster who relayed their appreciation for Belichick’s football IQ and teaching abilities by using past examples.

“He was very demanding on, ‘This is the way it is going to be. I’m coming off a Super Bowl. This is what it takes to win Super Bowls.’ Nobody had won a Super Bowl in Cleveland,” Newsome said.

Belichick finally got the Browns to the playoffs after an 11-5 season in 1994, but owner Art Modell made an unprecedented decision midway through the 1995 season to announce the team would relocate to Baltimore in 1996, which sabotaged the campaign and, ultimately, Belichick’s tenure.

"I know — K-N-O-W — that he got the appreciation of the job that he had to do when the move was announced, to be able to get that team to finish that season," Newsome said. "I don't think you can put a measure on how tough that was."

Belichick was fired after the 1995 season and joined Parcells' Patriots staff as the secondary coach in 1996. Parcells, Crennel and Groh all recognized an assistant coach with a greater perspective of the entire operation, and Belichick continued to make strides as the Jets defensive coordinator under Parcells from 1997-99. He also was mindful that he'd get one more shot to lead a team.

"Whatever the results were in Cleveland, they were certainly results that were below what he had hoped for in the beginning," Groh said. "So he had assessed then, 'OK, the next time I get my next chance, what are the things I'm going to change, how can I improve the structure of things, how can I improve myself in this particular role?' He made pretty good use of that time because he had a hell of a plan."

### **Second chance**

Patriots owner Robert Kraft strongly considered hiring Belichick after Parcells bolted for the Jets in 1997, but Kraft decided to ultimately wash his hands from the Parcells era and went with Pete Carroll.

When given a chance to do it over in 2000, Kraft was all in on Belichick, who resigned as Jets head coach after a day because of the pending sale of the organization. After the Browns relocation, Belichick didn't want uncertainty.

Kraft recalled rave reviews from the Pats defensive backs in 1996, and the owner coveted Belichick's appreciation for the salary cap. During Belichick's interview, Kraft asked him about a key player, and the coach broke down a formula that illustrated why that player would be overpaid based on future production.

League and network executives pressured Kraft not to hire Belichick because of his dry media appearances, and Kraft also withstood the Jets' three-week standoff to release Belichick from his contract, but the owner identified what he wanted and remained persistent.

"I was patient and waited for him," Kraft said.

After a 5-11 season in 2000 and Drew Bledsoe's injury in Week 2 of 2001, Belichick rode Tom Brady the rest of the way. Belichick then sold the "one game at a time" mantra after a 30-10 Week 4 loss to the Dolphins by burying a football at practice.

"When you screw up and have concern about your job and all those things," Crennel said, "I think that eased some of the tension and allowed guys to focus on the next game."

Crennel, the Pats defensive coordinator from 2001-04, really noticed the players buying into Belichick's message after a tight, 24-17 loss to the Rams that dropped them to 5-5, their last defeat of the season.

Crennel was part of Belichick's two most historic game plans — Super Bowl XXV and Super Bowl XXXVI — and likened the prep work to his racquetball sessions with Belichick during the 1987 strike. Pinpoint the vulnerability (the Bills' impatience, the Rams' stubbornness, Crennel's backhand) and attack.

The result, a 20-17 victory against the Rams, spawned a dynasty that includes more Super Bowl wins (three) and appearances (five), division titles (11) and victories (163) than any team in the league since Belichick took the helm.

He is a disciple of many and gathered valuable knowledge at every stop along the way, but anyone who has worked with Belichick during the past four decades has recognized a level of success that is his own doing. After all, if anyone else did actually coach for \$25 per week, they probably didn't last 40 years.

"It's remarkable what he's done there," Parcells said. "The people in New England are lucky to have him."

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## Offensive Coordinator Josh McDaniels



### **LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON: COACHING IS IN THE FAMILY FOR JOSH MCDANIELS**

By Ryan Hannable

Friday nights were a big deal for Canton McKinley High School, a big school in Canton, Ohio, which some called the high school capital of America.

The school was winning state and national championships left and right led by legendary head coach Thom McDaniels.

Standing behind Thom on the sidelines every game was a young boy.

"What's the call?" a trainer would ask.

"Toss to the right," the boy replied.

With no headsets back then, it was all hand signals, and Josh McDaniels knew the play before it happened. After all, it was his dad leading the way for Canton McKinley, and Josh was always at his father's side at practices, so he knew everything.

He watched film, he watched drills, he watched scrimmages, he watched it all — anything football related, Josh was there.

"I got to start to see that at a very early age when I started to go to two-a-day practices when I was 5 and really got to see that up close and personal. I was kind of a sponge at that point and I fell in love with the game of football through [my dad]," Josh said. "I knew real early in my life that this was probably something I wanted to do. I didn't know what level, but at some point I wanted to be a coach."

From a player at Canton McKinley himself, to playing in college at John Carroll University, to being a graduate assistant at Michigan State, to now being one of the best offensive coaches in the NFL — everything Josh did and still does now, he traces back to his dad.

#### STARTING HIM YOUNG

Thom is regarded as one of the best coaches in Ohio high school football history. In 1997, he was named national high school football Coach of the Year by USA Today while leading his Canton McKinley team to state and national titles.

He won 134 games at Canton McKinley from 1982-97 — the 1997 team went 14-0 and won both state and national championship titles. He then went on to coach two other high schools in the state before retiring.

Many of his players got major Division 1 scholarship offers, so big-name coaches were always getting in contact with him. Football was life in the McDaniels household and Thom's two sons, Josh and Ben (Rutgers' offensive coordinator), were always by his side.

"They both loved to watch film with me back then," Thom said. "It was 16-millimeter film and it was a big deal when I brought the projector home and let them run the buttons."

Thom's connections to college coaches are ultimately what led to Josh's career path.

Josh played quarterback for his dad at Canton McKinley and then went on to play at John Carroll University, a Division 3 school in Ohio “where he belonged,” according to his dad.

He didn’t play quarterback in college because a sophomore already had that position locked down. Ironically, it was current Patriots director of player personnel, Nick Caserio, so McDaniels made the switch to wide receiver and it worked out as he got regular playing time.

“He’s an incredible human being,” McDaniels said of Caserio. “I am very fortunate he befriended me when I went to John Carroll as a freshman. We played three years together, had a lot of fun, enjoyed a lot of success and handled some adversities as well playing together and became very good friends through the whole process.”

(McDaniels was the one who recommended Caserio to work for Bill Belichick and the Patriots. “I knew when I recommended him to Bill that he was the kind of person that would never, ever let you down, and he has definitely held his end of the bargain up,” McDaniels said.)

In the winter of 1998, Josh’s playing days were over, but the majority of his football journey was just beginning.

#### ‘DAD’S INFLUENCE ENDS HERE’

With Thom coaching for so long and having a lot of contact with college coaches, he knew Josh would need to get a graduate assistant job if he wanted to go anywhere in coaching.

After sending out his resume, Josh only got one offer, but a good one at that — a graduate assistant job at Michigan State under Nick Saban.

“I knew that going and being a GA for Nick would be a great experience for him because Nick is extremely demanding and extremely tough and very detail oriented,” Thom said. “I thought it was a really good place for him to go and begin his college coaching experience and all that proved to be true. If you work for Nick you can work for anybody.”

“I remember taking him [to Michigan State] and telling him, ‘OK, you’re going to coach at Michigan State and you’re going to coach for Nick Saban. This is where your old man’s influence ends. There is nothing I can say and nothing I can do to help you after this point. Dad’s influence ends here,’ ” he added. “I think he knew that and I think he understood that. He worked real hard to do things whatever it was.”

After a few years at Michigan State, Josh got a job in the NFL with the Patriots in 2001 as a personnel assistant.

Josh served a number of roles in New England — personnel assistant, defensive assistant, quarterbacks coach and offensive coordinator before becoming a head coach in Denver for two seasons and then an offensive coordinator in St. Louis.

Then in 2012, McDaniels found his way back to New England, where it all began as the offensive coordinator under Belichick.

#### COACHING LIKE HIS DAD

Even though Thom coached teenagers and Josh is coaching grown men, Josh still uses a lot of the same communication methods. Josh is a big believer in connecting with players regardless of age and stature.

“I would say most of it — the way I communicate with the players, the way I kind of interact with them, I really want them to understand what I am saying,” Josh said. “If I need to say it a different way, I will. That is an important part of coaching and he was so good at it. He obviously had a little different types of kids, different varying levels of background, communication, intelligence, age — those types of things so you have to be creative at times. You have to find a way to connect with all your players.

“He was very, very good at that. It’s one of the things I try and do the best I can because we have obviously a lot of older men, but nonetheless you still need a connection and if you can connect with these guys at this level and they know you have their best interest at heart, then they are going to give you everything they have. That is an important thing to learn early as a coach and I was fortunate to learn it from my father.”

Josh doesn’t often reach out to his father for advice, but on occasion does, usually to get his opinion on dealing with a player or other off-field situation, rarely ever X’s and O’s.

"It's about managing people or it's about dealing with a situation or an issue with a player just because when you coach high school football, I did all of that on a daily basis because you're dealing with kids as they are growing up," Thom said. "They are maturing and becoming men. Most of the time he's already got the answer in his mind and he is just looking for affirmation from me."

Thom still tries to remain as involved in the game as he can from the afar like when he watches a Patriots game in person, Josh gives him an idea of what the game plan is and what to watch for from the opposing defense as a way for Thom to be able to watch the game from the stands with a coaches perspective.

"I'm able to watch the game plan unfold and I am sort of able to anticipate based on what they've done before and what the opponent presents I get to anticipate things that they'll do," Thom said. "That is great for me because it allows me to be engaged in the game and not just a spectator."

One of the most memorable moments for the two occurred during February's Super Bowl. The Seahawks scored with 4:54 left in the third quarter to go ahead by 10 points — 24-14, which took a lot of wind out of the Patriots'™ sails, but not for the McDaniels clan.

Thom and the rest of the McDaniels family were seated at the 35-yard line, just behind the Patriots bench, and it was then and there Thom and his son had a moment they will never forget.

"For whatever reason I looked down to the bench and he looked up at me and I gave him a thumbs up and he smiled as big as can he could smile and he gave me a thumbs up," Thom said. "It was never planned and not prepared for. It was like he was letting me know that he had the thing under control."

The Patriots went on to score two fourth-quarter touchdowns and held on thanks to a last-minute interception to beat the Seahawks, 28-24, and win Super Bowl XLIX.

"I'll never forget that, and he won't forget that either," Thom said. "He talked to me about it after the game. It was just one of those little two seconds on your life that was very meaningful to him and very meaningful to me. We both didn't know the outcome, but we knew what was going to happen."

#### COACHING RUNS IN FAMILIES

Like Josh learned from Thom, Belichick learned from his dad, Steve, which Thom said is a reason why he is always welcome at the Gillette Stadium facility.

During his first few years in New England Josh didn't ask Belichick if his dad could come out to watch a practice, but after he became comfortable, he did, and Belichick agreed with no questions asked. Thom recalled the first practice and his first meeting with Belichick when the coach told him he was welcome whenever he wanted.

"Josh told [Bill] later that he may have created a monster. When he said he's welcome anytime he's going to want to do that, and Bill said, 'No, I meant it. Anytime, anywhere he's welcome,' " Thom said. "I think [Bill] sees between Josh and I what he had with his dad and he's going to respect and honor that. I appreciate that so much."

The bond between a coach and his son is special, and Josh knows just how lucky he is to be able to have that with his father.

"I think it's probably I would say the most important ingredient in my upbringing," Josh said. "I got an opportunity to watch him do it. I fell in love with the game of football through him and watch him grind and coach, win and lose, and go through tough times, celebrate great victories and that type of things.

"This aside from faith and your family, this game has really become a huge part of our life. It doesn't consume us, it certainly isn't bigger than the two previous things I've mentioned, but it is an enormous part of our life. It defines a lot of our weekends. It determines a lot of our happiness and joy sometimes.

"As a son of a coach, all you want is for your dad to have success and for your dad to be happy. When you become one yourself, then you have a different understanding of the type of commitment he made his entire life to be a good teacher, good role model, to be a good coach, and there is no way I could have asked for a better father."

From the Friday nights at Canton McKinley to Super Bowl Sunday at University of Phoenix Stadium, the father-son bond has always been there and will never go away.

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## How Josh McDaniels and Brad Stevens became suburban dad buddies

By Ben Rohrbach  
AUGUST 21, 2018

Tracy Stevens, the wife of Celtics head coach Brad Stevens, was driving home after a game when the sports commentators on the radio began dissecting Jumbotron appearances by two prominent fans in attendance at the TD Garden that night: New England Patriots head coach Bill Belichick and his offensive coordinator, Josh McDaniels. The hosts joked that while Belichick sat courtside, McDaniels was stuck in the “cheap seats” with the rest of the commoners.

“Hey, those aren’t the cheap seats,” Tracy recalls protesting to the radio on that winter night in 2017. “He was sitting with me.”

The commentators — and sports fandom in general — could be forgiven for not knowing that two of New England’s star young coaches hang out quite a bit when the cameras aren’t trained on them. Stevens, 41, and McDaniels, 42, have six children between them (two and four, respectively) and live 15 minutes apart in Boston’s suburbs. Both families tend to congregate at the Garden, where their wives can chat and the kids can escape to the depths of the arena. McDaniels typically attends about eight Celtics games a year to support his friend.

“I love the team, I love the coach, and I love the game,” he says, “so as many times as my wife will let me go, I’ll go.” He catches the rest of the games on TV.

“It reminds me a lot of when he watches his brother’s games,” says McDaniels’s wife, Laura, referring to Ben McDaniels, an offensive analyst for the University of Michigan. “He’s talking to the TV, and then at times he’ll say, ‘What are you doing?’ My husband analyzes everything to death. There are very few things he is not working through his head all the time. He has a busy brain.”

The obsession is mutual. Though Stevens hails from the Indianapolis area, he’s a full-fledged New England fan.

“I guess my Indy friends don’t always love to hear this,” he says, “but yeah — I root for the Pats.”

So how do two of New England’s most famous coaches like to spend their free time in the offseason together? “Dad stuff” is how Stevens characterizes it. They’ve barbecued with their families, and this summer they managed to squeeze in a round of golf. Josh has visited Brad during summer league play in Las Vegas. Their adolescent sons — 14-year-old Jack McDaniels and 12-year-old Brady Stevens — have crossed paths in spring and summer basketball. Despite the fact that they’re originally from the Cleveland area, the McDaniels family now cheers for the Celtics. This past spring, they attended a couple of playoff games, including Game 7 against the Cleveland Cavaliers. After that defeat, McDaniels sent his friend a sympathetic message, just as Stevens had done for him following Super Bowl LII.

“You understand how much is invested in those things,” says Stevens. “Josh understood I probably wasn’t getting as many texts after Game 7 as I was after some of our wins, so it was good to hear from him early on. You appreciate that about somebody who’s been through it.”

Talk to Stevens and McDaniels for any length of time, and it’s easy to see that they share a similar coaching philosophy and a genuine interest in learning from each other. They maintain a steady stream of conversation through regular phone calls, and their chain of text messages is filled with ideas about how to face hard decisions. They are chasing the legacies of Red Auerbach and Bill Belichick — one memorialized with a bronze statue near Faneuil Hall, the other still carving out his body of work — both among the most legendary coaches in their sports. Now they’re helping each other navigate the sports landscape of New England, where they’re learning to carry the expectations of two dynasties on their shoulders.

Neither Stevens nor McDaniels remembers exactly how they first met, but their friendship was sparked by a sense of mutual admiration. Stevens joined the Celtics in 2013, when the Celtics made him the NBA’s youngest coach with a six-year contract that has since been extended. Like so many football fans, he was impressed with the Patriots’ winning culture. Meanwhile, McDaniels had watched closely as Stevens led NCAA underdog Butler University to

consecutive men's basketball title games. He reached out to the new coach in town, and a conversation that started over lunch is still going five years later.

"We can have a one-question phone call turn into 45 minutes," Stevens says. "That's pretty normal. Because then we get into the deeper conversation of trying to maximize this [coaching] experience, and as many differences as there are, there are a lot of similarities."

McDaniels assured Stevens early on that New England was a great place to coach and "a tremendous place to raise your family." That came as a relief to Brad and Tracy, who were concerned about how their children might adjust to growing up in the limelight.

If they weren't mainstays on local sports programming, McDaniels and Stevens might blend into suburbia. Though still boyish looking, both men give off a pleasant Midwestern-dad vibe. Stevens disguises a fiery competitiveness behind his mild manner on the sidelines and drops dry jokes in conversation, whereas McDaniels strikes a more serious tone, like his father, Thom, a legendary high school football coach. The elder McDaniels believes his son has learned the art of stoicism from Stevens and Belichick — and become a better coach for it.

Though Belichick kept his e-mail responses to inquiries about McDaniels characteristically short, he describes his protege as a dedicated and quick study "who got along with everybody and brought a great personality to the staff." Those who know Stevens describe him much the same way.

"I don't look at myself as giving a Knute Rockne speech every other day," says Stevens. "I want to make sure I know these guys as well as I can. I want to make sure they know that we have a real interest in them, on and off the court. I think maybe to me that's the part I enjoy the most."

McDaniels and Stevens have also bonded over their roots in Canton, Ohio, the town where Josh spent most of his childhood in the shadow of the Pro Football Hall of Fame, which is also where Brad's mother worked summers in the gift shop during college. Their wives both grew up in and around Cleveland. Stevens enjoyed a childhood in Zionsville, Indiana, seemingly plucked right out of Hoosiers, though he grew up in a subdivision instead of a farmhouse. After half-days of kindergarten, he rewatched VHS tapes of college basketball games — his first film sessions, as it were. When he got a little older, Stevens and his father would join friends at the local Steak 'n Shake to discuss games. Meanwhile, in Ohio, McDaniels started tagging along to practice with his father when he was about 5 years old.

"The reward for cleaning your plate at supper that night was that you got to go to two-a-day [practices] the next day," says Thom McDaniels, who was named the nation's top high school football coach by USA Today in 1997 in the midst of a decades-long career. "I don't know if it was football practice or stopping at the Kustard Korner on the way home that cinched the deal for him, but there reached a point when he was 7 or 8 that he had to have a practice plan in his hand. He wanted to have a script so that he knew what play we were running. He was adorned with wristbands, a ballcap, and a practice plan."

Those days turned to high school stardom and Division III careers in football and basketball for Josh and Brad at John Carroll and DePauw universities, respectively. Stevens majored in economics, McDaniels in mathematics. Both accepted entry-level positions at stable companies after college — Stevens as a pharmaceutical marketing associate in Indianapolis and McDaniels as a plastics sales representative in Cleveland. Neither lasted much more than a year before trading their business attire for shorts and a whistle.

"Obviously, he's a basketball coach, and that's what he was born to do," McDaniels says of Stevens.

Stevens arrives at Patriots practice with pen and paper at least once almost every season, including twice last year. He studies how Belichick runs drills, sits in on the team meeting, and follows McDaniels from film session to film session. Stevens leaves with a full notebook every time, juiced, like a man who might get an endorphin rush from running a mathematical Olympics.

"He came home with lots of notes and lots of thoughts and was fascinated by how they run their logistics," says Tracy Stevens. "He was really energized by it. That's the thing about them; they love learning."

If McDaniels and Stevens are young Jedis, Belichick, with his seven Super Bowl rings (five as Patriots head coach, two from his stint with the New York Giants), is their Yoda. Their quest to replicate his success leads every conversation between the two men back to coaching, as they exchange precious morsels of information that might help them take that next step toward the summit.

“You walk into Patriot Place,” Stevens is fond of saying, “and you walk out feeling inadequate.” Adds McDaniels: “Bill’s taught me most everything I know about how to do things at this level, and I learn from him every single day.”

In turn, McDaniels also shadowed his friend at Celtics practice before a game against the Indiana Pacers in March and was blown away by how efficient it was.

“One thing he’s helped me with is: Don’t overcomplicate it,” says McDaniels of his friend. “As much as you want to tell them 50 things they’ve got to do to win, it’s much better to boil it down to three or four.”

In basketball, “you’re coaching the basics of spacing, of action, of playing off penetration, but there’s a lot of randomness to a lot of those plays,” says Stevens. “In football . . . a lot of it is very, very, very scripted, and it’s incredible to watch that thought process up close.”

Because of the differences between the two sports, their exchanges tend to focus less on X’s and O’s and more on coaching as a craft—leadership, communication, structure, team building, culture setting. They treat every life experience as a learning opportunity they can apply on the field or on the court.

“Ultimately why you win in sports many times is the same reason,” says McDaniels, launching into the cliches that are both the staples of their public personalities and tentpoles of their teams’ successes. “Don’t beat yourself, work hard, be a good fundamentally sound team, and go out there and play the game to its completion and put your best foot forward every night and see what happens.”

Dressed in a cutoff hoodie and a Patriots hat after a February 4 Celtics win, Stevens held a press conference that lasted just three minutes. “Football game to watch,” he told reporters before rushing home to catch the Super Bowl.

While McDaniels has helped Stevens see the game through a different lens, mostly the Celtics coach just enjoys following football as a fan. “And I think he’ll tell you, sometimes it’s harder to be a fan than to be a coach,” his wife says, “because it’s totally out of your control.”

One of the topics they obsess over most is how to relate to and keep up with their players—many of whom are part of a younger generation that feels light-years different from their own.

McDaniels helped steward Tom Brady’s evolution from Super Bowl-winning system quarterback to record-setting MVP and, arguably, the greatest player in history. The bond between Brady and McDaniels played a role in the Patriots’ push to retain their offensive coordinator this past February, though McDaniels maintains it was ultimately a “family decision.” It was a move to stabilize a dynasty that appeared to be in turmoil.

“Life is about the quality of your relationships,” Brady, who has worked directly with McDaniels for 12 of his 19 seasons, says in an e-mail, “and Josh and I will be friends for the rest of our lives.”

Stevens was the first to tell star player Gordon Hayward he had NBA potential when he lured him to play at Butler. Together, they reached the 2010 NCAA title game. The narrative that bound their careers, even as they parted ways, may have been overplayed, but Stevens “was always a phone call away,” says Hayward. And when Hayward visited the Celtics in 2017 free agency, it felt like picking up where he left off with an old friend.

“He’s always been so prepared, and I think that’s what makes him so successful and so calm on the sidelines, too,” says Hayward, who has similar appreciation for McDaniels after spending a day with him at Gillette Stadium last season, courtesy of Stevens. “He kind of knows the answers to the test before he takes it.”

Both McDaniels and Stevens finished in the top 10 of their high school graduating classes, and that drive has carried over into their coaching careers. McDaniels was the architect of one of the most prolific offenses in NFL history at age 31, and Stevens was 33 when he shepherded Butler to within inches of an unthinkable NCAA upset. They have been labeled geniuses in some form or another by everyone from fans to their own players to historically great coaches like Tony Dungy and Gregg Popovich.

If fans understand anything about McDaniels and Stevens, they know the coaches deflect praise and are quick to credit their players for their teams’ successes, which include 10 conference finals appearances between them as offensive coordinator and head coach, respectively.

Stevens says he’s happy McDaniels will remain with the Patriots. “I’m glad he stayed, because it’s easier to find a golf course to go play when you only live 15 minutes apart.”

"When you go and watch Bill up close, Josh up close, some of the other great coaches who I've gotten to see, there are no stones unturned, and there are no steps skipped," Stevens says. "The work that they put in to be prepared for that day is enormous. There are certainly geniuses I'm sure out there, and I think that those guys are as smart as they come, but they're also as hard-working as they come. And that's what I try to emulate from those people—how much it takes to be good."

"None of us have cured cancer," says McDaniels. "We coach a game. Brad is really special in terms of his ability to get guys to do certain things well. Coaching takes on a lot of forms, man. It's not just strategy. It's motivation. It's leadership. It's inspiration. It's handling adversity. It's teaching. It's communicating. It's a lot of things. Don't ever put me in that category. Bill's special; Brad's special. Those guys are tremendous at what they do, and I think ultimately would say the same thing: We win because we've got good players and our players play well."

Their close proximity nearly came to an end in February. Less than 24 hours before McDaniels was about to be introduced as the Colts' next head coach, he made a dramatic about-face and decided to stay in New England. Stevens says he didn't talk to his friend very much during that time.

"You make yourself available, and if they want to call, they can. Otherwise, I know how crazy it gets, so I try to stay out of that unless people need to talk to me," Stevens says. "I was just like everybody else. I was curious to see what he ultimately decided to do, and I'm selfish—I'm glad he stayed, because it's easier to find a golf course to go play when you only live 15 minutes apart."

For Stevens, the NBA draft and summer league preceded a brief break that will allow him to explore New England and maybe another Patriots practice. For McDaniels, offseason workouts sandwiched an early June mini-camp, and then he traveled in search of more coaching lessons before training camp started in late July.

"If you ever stop learning at the levels that we're at, somebody's going to catch you and pass you by," McDaniels says. "I have so much more ahead of me, and I think he would feel the same way in terms of: What are we going to be 10 or 15 years from now? Hopefully we continue to grow and get better. I know I have through my relationship with him."

Stevens sometimes wishes he had stopped to smell the roses more often.

"To go from age 23 until now, I just feel like these 18 years have flown by, and there have been a lot of fun times and the relationships have been great, but it's a whirlwind right now," he says. "I think I'll probably reflect better on it when I'm done and rooting for whatever football team Josh is coaching at that time."

Maybe still in New England. "Hopefully," Stevens says. "Hopefully."

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## Linebackers Coach Brian Flores



### **The Patriots' next coaching star? His odds were incredibly long**

Ian O'Connor  
Mar 7, 2018

Editor's note: This story was originally posted on Jan. 31. It has been updated to reflect Brian Flores' new role as the defensive playcaller for the Patriots in 2018.

MINNEAPOLIS -- Brian Flores will be the next coaching star of the New England Patriots, and to understand why is to understand where he is from. He grew up in the housing projects of Brownsville, Brooklyn, maybe the toughest neighborhood in New York, so there was nothing about Bill Belichick or the Patriot Way that could ever shake him.

Life had roughed Flores up early, prepared him for full-contact drills inside the NFL's most demanding environment.

"I never backed down from anybody," Flores said. "If people see you're scared, or as somebody who backs down, you're going to deal with it every day. That was my thing. I didn't back down from anybody or any situation. Football, school, anything."

Long before the 36-year-old Flores became a Patriots scouting assistant in 2004, or the coach who will call the defensive plays for Belichick in 2018, he was the son of Honduran immigrants who lived with his four brothers 20 stories above a community that could be perilous to navigate. His younger twin brothers, Luis and Danny, each had knives pulled on them in separate mugging incidents on their way to the local video game store. Luis, now a fourth-grade teacher in the South Bronx, said he saw chalk outlines of bodies outside their building more than once, and that almost every night the Flores family heard the not-too-distant sound of gunfire.

Brian, the second-oldest, prefers not to offer the same details on similar confrontations. "I was tested many times," Flores said, "and I want to leave it at that." Flores knows what people often think about Brownsville and what journalists from far different places often write about Brownsville. He didn't need to read in a 2012 Time story that his neighborhood had the nation's highest concentration of public housing. He didn't need to read in a 2014 New York Times Magazine piece that there were 72 shootings and 15 murders the previous year "in an area spanning about two square miles that many people never leave."

Flores lived it every day. He lived amid the high poverty, crime and unemployment rates. And he loved his community all the same. "It shaped me in a lot of ways," he said. "It made me tough. I learned how to deal with adversity, and it motivated me to get out of there. ... It's a tough environment, and there's violence and drugs. But it wasn't the wild, wild West. There are a lot of good people there too. I was fortunate to be around a lot of them."

It takes a village, after all. "And it takes a big village when you come out of Brownsville," Flores said. His father, Raul, was a merchant marine who was out to sea as many as 10 months out of the year. His mother, Maria, stayed home to stand guard over the five boys, including the youngest, Christopher, who has autism. Maria ruled with two iron fists. Unless her sons were traveling to and from school or practice, or running an errand, they were expected to be off the streets and inside their three-bedroom apartment in the Glenmore Plaza projects.

"A bunch of our friends from middle school were in gangs," said Danny, now an equipment manager and graduate student at Columbia University, "and our parents didn't want us involved in that culture and lifestyle. I was leaving school once and saw a kid running for his life from a gang member. I went straight home. That's a hard thing to see when you're 13 years old."

On a beautiful fall day when Flores was 12 years old, his uncle Darrel Patterson stopped by the apartment to find the Flores boys watching TV. Maria didn't want them out of the building, but Patterson, a Jets fan and Brooklyn firefighter, had an idea. A cancer survivor, Patterson had been on medical leave on September 11, 2001, when he lost six colleagues from Ladder 118 at the World Trade Center. But football was Patterson's joy, and he told Maria he was going to load the boys into his car to drive them to a Queens park used by the Lynvet youth football league. A coach

there timed Flores in the 40-yard dash and couldn't believe the kid's speed. He pointed Flores toward a parked van and told him to go inside and pick out the equipment he wanted to use. The young Flores put his first pair of shoulder pads on backwards, and the rest is football history in a basketball town.

Flores became a Lynvet prodigy as a defensive end and running back, and as an eighth grader, he was spotted by former NFL nose guard Dino Mangiero, who was coaching at Brooklyn's Poly Prep Country Day, a private high school attended by the children of New York elites. Flores was a grade-A student, and the school allowed Mangiero to admit a number of athletes from low-income backgrounds as part of its Jordan Scholars program. Before its campus was rocked by reports that a previous coach had sexually abused students between 1966 and 1991, Poly Prep was seen as an idyllic sanctuary in the affluent Dyker Heights section of Brooklyn. Flores and the younger brothers who followed him from P.S. 332 to Poly Prep, Danny and Luis, thought it was really something after a 90-minute commute by train and bus to see a pond full of ducks and a parking lot full of luxury cars. They were a long way from Brownsville in every literal and figurative way.

By his sophomore year, Flores was starting at tailback and safety for the varsity. Unbeaten Poly Prep was down big at halftime to a strong team from the Peddie School in Hightstown, New Jersey when Mangiero challenged his team to show its heart. On a fourth-and-1 near midfield in the second half, Mangiero had decided to punt before Flores, then a sophomore, started to plead his case during a timeout. Over his headset, Poly Prep assistant Craig Jacoby heard Flores tell the head coach: "Give me the ball. I'll get a first down." Flores ran through a tackle and scored a 51-yard touchdown in what would be a 38-38 tie. Jacoby said it was the only varsity game over Flores' three years that Poly Prep didn't win.

Flores scored a reported 1,140 on his SAT, and picked Boston College over a wide circle of major college programs offering him a full ride because of its academic standing and proximity to home. The BC coaches saw in Flores what the Poly Prep coaches saw: grit, intensity and, more than anything, humility. Flores redshirted his first year with the Eagles and eventually moved from safety to linebacker. Bill McGovern, now the New York Giants' linebackers coach, was Flores' position coach at BC, and he couldn't get over Flores' aptitude for the game and how quickly he applied a lesson from the meeting room to the field. McGovern would speak at clinics and use tape to support his teaching points, and over time he noticed something about his film clips: Flores kept showing up in them. His feet and eyes were always in the right places, and his technique and execution were all but ripped out of a textbook.

The 5-foot-11, 212-pound Flores was BC's second-leading tackler in 2003, and would have landed in an NFL camp if not for a torn quadriceps muscle that required surgery and knocked him out of the Eagles' bowl game. Flores had all the makings of a perfect Patriots player -- selfless, undersized, overlooked -- and suddenly he had to make himself a perfect Patriots staffer. Scott Pioli, vice president of player personnel, hired Flores as a gofer before later teaching him how to judge talent. Belichick taught Flores how to develop that talent once he transitioned from scouting to coaching in 2008.

Belichick's defensive coordinator, Matt Patricia, just took over the head-coaching job in Detroit, leaving a major hole at the top of the New England staff. After interviewing for the head-coaching vacancy in Arizona and impressing Cardinals officials, Flores was given Patricia's play-calling responsibilities, if not his title. Bill Parcells groomed Belichick this way when they were together with the Giants of the 1980s -- if only to ease the burden on his rising assistant -- and Belichick in turn groomed Patricia and offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels in the same manner. If Flores is successful in keeping the bad guys out of the end zone over the next season or two, he'll ultimately earn the title.

Flores doesn't fit the profile of past Belichick protégés -- small-college, small-town grinders who were long shots, yes, but who never confronted the type of odds facing a kid from Brownsville. If the camera finds Flores next season as often as it found the bearded Patricia, it will do a great service to young men around the country who are forced to deal with hopelessness and despair below the poverty line.

"I hope it's a powerful image," Flores said. "I hope they look at me and hear my story, and there's a hope and an understanding that they can do it too. That would be exactly what I would want them to feel. To see that regardless of what your circumstances are, or where your parents are from, of where you live ... you can write your own story. I've written my own story."

Raul and Maria were Flores' co-authors. They arrived from Honduras in the 1970s unable to speak a word of English, and by making education the household's No. 1 priority beyond physical safety, their sons Raul Jr. (Virginia Tech), Brian (BC), Danny (Albany) and Luis (Bucknell) all graduated from four-year universities. Flores earned his undergraduate degree as an English major and then earned his master's in administrative studies, all while playing big-time football and, when home on breaks, tending to Christopher's special needs.

People in the community took notice. "Brownsville is the trenches," said Lance Bennett, the athletic director at New Jersey's Mater Dei Prep and a childhood friend who became a prominent young musician and a kick returner at the University of Indiana. "And Brian was like a rose growing out of the concrete. At 14 years old, he had this grown-man demeanor about him. I've never seen him show emotion or any sign of weakness."

Another childhood friend, Chris Legree, who played quarterback at Poly Prep and then at the University of Maine, said Flores could put their neighborhood on the map for a reason other than boxers who fought their way out -- Mike Tyson, Riddick Bowe and Shannon Briggs among them. Legree recalled Flores as a unifying force at home and again at Poly Prep. "He was really the first black person I'd seen mingling with white people," Legree said. "And it was a cool thing."

Legree also said he'd never met anyone who was prouder of being from Brownsville than Brian Flores. As a schoolboy football star, Flores was protected, to some degree, by friends and strangers alike. Even most drug dealers knew to stay clear of him. He was a designated golden child, a kid with a chance to make it out, and if something unlawful or dangerous was about to go down in a park or on a street corner, someone usually rushed Flores out of there, according to Flores and his brothers.

"But at the same time, I still had to watch my back," Flores said. He described his early-morning walk to the train station as ominous enough to "look like a movie scene where you're about to get robbed."

His life experiences made him a hell of a football coach. He learned how to survive in Brownsville. He learned how to interact with people with different socioeconomic backstories at Poly Prep. He learned how to overcome adversity -- in the form of his leg injury -- at BC.

Belichick has been tough on Flores, just as he's tough on all the young assistants who he's raised through the system. But Belichick has nothing on Maria Flores, who once grabbed her young son by the ear and forced him to immediately start reading the phonics book he'd just pushed to the side.

"Myself and my brothers are what our parents dreamed of having when they came to this country," Flores said. "We are the American dream."

Two years ago Flores moved Raul, Maria and Christopher out of the projects and bought them a condo in North Attleborough, Massachusetts, two miles from his home. Flores' own American dream, as a kid, was to make it as an NFL player and buy his parents a home so they never again had to walk up 20 flights of stairs when the elevator broke down, which happened every couple of weeks. Flores made that dream happen as an NFL coach, instead.

Raul and Maria are close to their three grandchildren, Flores' two boys and girl, and Christopher, 25, is enjoying a local special-needs program that keeps him active in flag football, basketball and softball. It isn't crazy to think that Flores could remain in Foxborough for many years and join McDaniels as a candidate to replace a retiring Belichick, given that Patriots owner Robert Kraft is said to adore Flores.

No matter what happens with the rest of his coaching career, Flores said he will honor what he called his neighborhood's mantra: "Never ran, never will."

Bring on a much bigger role in Belichick's cabinet, and the burden of taking back the Super Bowl title the Patriots just lost to the Eagles. This proud product of Brownsville will never run, and he will never back down

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## Offensive Line Coach Dante Scarnecchia

# The Boston Globe

### **Patriots' offensive line revitalized thanks to Dante Scarnecchia**

By Ben Volin  
JANUARY 8, 2017

FOXBOROUGH — Bill Belichick always arrives for work before the crack of dawn. But he never has to turn the lights on at Gillette Stadium.

That is already taken care of by Dante Scarnecchia, the Patriots' offensive line coach.

"Six [a.m.] would be late for him. More like 4:30," Belichick said. "Oh, Dante's early. He beats everybody here. You have to pretty much stay here to beat him here."

At this time the last two years, Scarnecchia was doing what retired grandparents should be doing — putting his grandkids on the school bus, building woodworking projects, inviting friends over to the house.

But when the Patriots' offensive line fell apart at the end of the 2015 season, and the team and former coach Dave DeGuglielmo mutually agreed to part ways, Belichick knew there was only one person who could whip the offensive line into shape — the 68-year-old former US Marine Reserve who decided after the 2013 season that he had had enough of the grind.

Two years later, the grind pulled Scarnecchia back in.

"Dante, as I've said many times, is as good a coach as anybody I've ever been around," Belichick said. "I'd put him up there with Scott O'Brien, Nick Saban, guys like that. He does a great job, and it's great to have him back."

Scarnecchia declined to speak for this story, and has spoken very little about his return after two years of retirement, choosing instead to deflect attention onto his players. He last spoke during the Patriots' bye week in early November, and was asked if he felt refreshed during the off week.

"No, I don't," he said bluntly. "It's a grind."

"It's a lot of hours, but not my first rodeo. I knew what it was going to be like."

When asked about all of the praise he has received this year for turning around the Patriots' offensive line, Scarnecchia called it "terribly overrated."

"Every line coach in the league aspires for the same thing — continuity and players playing as hard as they can play," he said. "There's no magic to any of it."

But "Scar" seems to have brought his magic touch to the Patriots this season. A unit that was ravaged by injuries and inconsistency last year has been remarkably healthy and productive this go-around, and is a major reason the Patriots are 14-2 with a first-round playoff bye.

Doing things his way

The Patriots had 13 starting offensive line combinations last year in 18 games, and it wasn't just because of injuries. In two years under DeGuglielmo, the Patriots were constantly rotating guys in and out of games and into different positions, to cross-train them for versatility.

This year, though, the Patriots have had just three different combinations in 16 games, including the same offensive line over the past 11 games. That consistency has helped turn Marcus Cannon into an All-Pro at right tackle a year after Patriots fans wanted to ship him out of town. It helped turn youngsters David Andrews, Shaq Mason, and Joe Thuney into a formidable interior unit. It helped the Patriots rush for 1,872 yards and 19 touchdowns. And it kept the Patriots' quarterbacks clean, as they were sacked just 24 times all season, fifth fewest in the NFL. Last year the Patriots allowed 38 sacks, 14th most.

"I think there are some people in the organization that like the idea of bringing guys in and out of the offensive line. When Dante wasn't there they tried to push for that, and that [stuff] doesn't work in the offense," said three-time Pro Bowler Matt Light, the Patriots' left tackle from 2001-11. "Those are the kind of things that Dante knew, and he wouldn't allow it. He wouldn't care if God came down and said, 'Hey, you've got to rotate some guys in and out so they can play multiple positions and some experience.' He's got tried and true methods of coaching that just never change."

The Patriots speak reverentially of Scarnecchia, who will turn 69 just nine days after Super Bowl LI in February. He came to New England with former coach Ron Meyer in 1982 as a special teams and tight ends coach, and after joining Meyer in Indianapolis for the 1989-90 seasons, returned to the Patriots in 1991. For the next 24 seasons, Scarnecchia coached special teams, tight ends, and the offensive line, and was a defensive assistant for two seasons. He worked for Dick MacPherson, Bill Parcells, Pete Carroll, and Belichick, and even for himself for eight games in 1992 when Scarnecchia was named the interim head coach.

Tom Brady recently called Scarnecchia "the best offensive line coach in the NFL." Team broadcaster Scott Zolak said Scarnecchia deserves votes for Patriots MVP this season. Rookie guard Ted Karras called it a "privilege" to be coached by Scarnecchia and loves hearing Scarnecchia's old John Hannah stories. Offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels called Scarnecchia "a tremendous asset."

"He's been a tremendous mentor of mine, and he's certainly made a huge difference and impact on our group up front, and on our offense, and on our team," McDaniels said. "I don't think his value can be understated."

Scarnecchia's impact could be felt from the start. In organized team activities last spring, Scarnecchia worked his players hard (as much as rules allow) and would not allow poor technique to slide. In training camp, the linemen carefully lined up their helmets on the field after practice — all in order, facing the same way. The details matter, Scarnecchia hounded them.

"Even back in OTAs he was showing us that each and every day was going to count," backup tackle LaAdrian Waddle said. "We always talk about, 'Don't dip your toe in the water, dive in that mud.' So that's what we're doing, and it's paying dividends now."

Belichick praised Scarnecchia's organization, communication skills, preparation, and ability to teach fundamentals. Scarnecchia arrives at Gillette well before any other coach to get a headstart on his "lesson plans" for the day — the film he plans to show to his offensive linemen, the techniques he wants to teach — and Belichick praised Scar's ability to solve problems and think on the fly on the sideline during games.

"He's like the sixth man — there's the five linemen and the coach," Belichick said. "He has a lot to do with their continuity and their performance. They're all shareholders. I don't know if there's one majority stockholder."

No playing favorites

It couldn't have been easy for Scarnecchia to give up free time with his wife and grandkids to return to the grind of working for the Patriots. But Belichick said Scarnecchia has "a lot of energy," while Nate Solder said his coach seems like the same guy from before retirement.

"There's a lot of very similar things from what I remember. We do all the same drills, we go about our business the same way," Solder said. "It's a part of his blood, his DNA, the way he goes about coaching."

If Scarnecchia misses retirement, he doesn't show it. He has coached football since 1970, and won three Super Bowl rings with the Patriots the last decade, but he called this year's four-game experiment with Jimmy Garoppolo and Jacoby Brissett "as great an experience as I've ever had in coaching."

"I think Jimmy really showed what he can do," Scarnecchia said. "And Jacoby, he just earned nothing but huge respect around here given what he did in two games. So for me, personally, as a coach that's something you want to see every week. I was really lucky to be here for that."

And the offensive line isn't just thriving because of consistency. Dan Koppen, the Patriots' center from 2003-11 and a Pro Bowler in 2007, said the offensive linemen are forming a better pocket around Brady than they did last year. The best pockets are both deep and wide, yet last year the pocket was narrower.

"Last year with [DeGuglielmo], you saw a lot more vertical sets, and that pocket was sort of caving in on the outside because those tackles weren't building width into their sets like they are now," Koppen said. "You saw the tackles

basically going straight back all the time. Now he's got those tackles understanding when they can go wide in their sets and when they can't. You can see it in their hands, their body position, where their weight is. You can put on the tape from this year and last year, and the difference is remarkable."

And Cannon has been Scarnecchia's pet project. A talented but inconsistent swing tackle for the first five years of his career, Cannon started a career-high 15 games in 2016 and per Pro Football Focus allowed just two sacks and 27 total pressures on 555 pass blocks, earning the second-highest passing grade among all right tackles this season. Belichick said Cannon is in great shape this year and has worked hard on his technique, and he earned second team All-Pro honors.

"Marcus is a great example of how [Scarnecchia] develops talent and players," Koppen said. "Regardless if you're a No. 1 draft pick or undrafted, there's no sacred cows in that meeting room. No one's on a different level, and he treats and coaches everybody the same."

And the Patriots are certainly happy to have their wise offensive line coach back in the fold.

"He's in extremely early every morning and does everything he can to help us prepare for the day, for the opponent, to get his guys to improve and make progress, and I think that it rubs off on everybody," McDaniels said. "He makes us all better."

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## Safeties Coach Steve Belichick



### **Bill Belichick's son, new Patriots safeties coach, wants to be just like his dad**

Mike Reiss

May 2, 2016

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. -- The oldest son of New England Patriots coach Bill Belichick settled into his chair Monday for his first official interview as the team's new safeties coach, and soon enough, there would be humor.

Steve Belichick, who paid his dues from 2012 to 2015 as an entry-level coach with the team, was asked about the challenges of sharing the same last name with one of the greatest coaches of all time. He laughed under his breath before looking up at the crowd of 15 to 20 reporters around him.

"This is one of them," he said of the intense media interest.

Elsewhere around the Patriots' media workroom, other assistants were engaged in interviews, but few, if any, had drawn the overflowing crowd that Belichick did.

He took it all in stride, perhaps a bit nervous for his first official media responsibility as a Patriots coach, yet striking the right mix between humility and humor that had some reporters buzzing afterward about the next generation of Belichicks in the coaching ranks.

What has it been like working for Bill Belichick?

"Obviously, I love my dad, he's my role model, my idol," the 29-year-old Belichick said. "I want to be just like him and I have since I knew what an idol was. It's rewarding for me to be able to see him more and learn from him more, because I've been away from him for high school and college."

Donning a gray Rutgers lacrosse sweatshirt to support his alma mater leading into next weekend's Big Ten tournament, Belichick playfully paid homage to the hoodie that his father has made famous.

"It's a good piece of clothing. I think everyone should have a hooded sweatshirt in their closet," he cracked.

That led to laughter among reporters, as did Belichick's response when asked if he has long-term goals to become a head coach one day: "I just hope to be here at the end of the day."

But if there was one thing that stood out more than anything from Belichick's 15 minutes answering questions from reporters, it was how seriously he takes his craft.

For example, when asked about what type of work he did the past four years as a low-level coach, he said simply, "My responsibilities were to help us win. If that was breaking down film, that was breaking down film; if that was throwing interceptions to defensive players to make them feel good, that's what I do. I'm here to win."

Sound familiar?

Belichick said he first remembers falling in love with football when he was 4. He had played at The Rivers School in Weston, Massachusetts, where he was a three-year starter at linebacker and fullback/tight end and also the team's long-snapper (a skill he learned from his late grandfather). Belichick ultimately went on to Rutgers, where he played lacrosse for four seasons before walking on to the football team as a long-snapper in preparation for a career in coaching.

He explained that he has always liked being part of a team, which means "having to put your personal success on the back burner for the betterment of the team, all to get to one goal."

Working 18 hours a day as an entry-level coaching assistant over the past four years certainly qualifies, and now that he's been elevated to a position coach, Belichick said, "It means everything to me."

That he's working under his father makes it even more special.

"I followed every single thing that he's done, and I've watched everything he's done, and he's the best that has ever done it -- he's my idol, he's my role model and he is my standard. So I just watch my dad," he said.

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## The Providence Journal

### The education of Stephen Belichick

By Mark Daniels

Oct 3, 2015 at 11:36 PM

FOXBORO — Bill Belichick sat there and watched the game film, his eyes glued to the screen.

After each play, he'd mark the down and distance and note what stood out to him on both sides of the ball. He'd turn to the player next to him, pointing out responsibilities on each snap and what he thought should be done in certain situations.

It was just like preparing for any other game. But the future Hall of Fame coach wasn't breaking down film of the Patriots' next opponent. Instead, he was watching film of high-school students, particularly games involving The Rivers School in Weston, Mass., with his oldest son, Steve Belichick.

Related content Who can beat the Patriots? And who almost definitely won't? Donaldson: Fantasy football decision by NFL might not be a keeper No Patriots game this week: Test your knowledge in our bye week quiz "We'd talk about some keys that the other team would have. Like formation or various other tendencies — stances and splits and things like that," Bill Belichick said.

Every week during the season, the then-Rivers School coach Darren Sullivan would send Steve home with game film and eagerly await the results.

"He and his dad would go and watch the previous game's film together," Sullivan said. "We would give him copies and they would sit down together and break it down. Stevie would go over it with his dad, come back and have some ideas about the next week's opponent and that kind of thing. He would also watch film on his own."

Bill Belichick was 10 years old when his father, also named Steve, would have him break down film of Navy opponents. The elder Belichick revolutionized football scouting similar to the way his son would revolutionize coaching and game planning.

As they say, like father like son.

Learning how to break down film has long been a rite of passage in the family. Bill Belichick taught his son about formations and plays when Steve was in elementary school. His childhood also included trading cards and playing Madden NFL, but when his father was involved, it was all used as a tool for teaching the game.

"I mean, we've kind of been talking football back to football cards. Occasionally a video game and stuff like that, since he was in the single digits for sure," Bill Belichick said. "But he's kind of done that his whole life."

Now 28 years old and in his fourth season as a coaching assistant with the Patriots, Steve Belichick continues to follow in his father's legendary footsteps.

THE GRIDIRON was his playground.

Steve Belichick was four years old when his father took his first head coaching job in Cleveland. He was 13 when Bill Belichick was hired as head coach of the Patriots in 2000. As he grew up, he watched, listened and learned — like his father did when he was a boy — and spent summers at training camp.

"He's grown up around the facility, around the players, around the team," Bill Belichick said. "He's seen it from a coaching end as well as player end when he played in high school and college."

Like his father, Steve Belichick played lacrosse and football in college. And like his father, he was known more for his IQ than his athletic ability. When people noticed his last name on a jersey or a roster, lofty expectations followed. He had to live up to the challenge in high school and later at Rutgers. He impressed various coaches and peers along the way.

You won't find many backup long snappers breaking down film in college football. You probably won't find many future NFL draft picks going to these long snappers for advice, either.

But that's what happened during Rutgers' 2011 season.

After playing lacrosse for the Scarlet Knights for four seasons, Steve Belichick walked on to the Rutgers football team. On a team that featured eight future NFL draft picks, he helped defensive players break down film, just like his father had shown him.

Among those who he helped were future Patriots Logan Ryan and Duron Harmon.

"He did his job as the backup long snapper, but he was also like an assistant coach—esque," Ryan said. "That's where he showed off a little bit of his coaching skills. He showed us how to break down some film and showed us how to use that stuff years ago. He was a huge help."

"He was helping me in college getting ready for games," Harmon added. "He would tell me what he saw from their offenses, what I can be on queue for, what I should try to remember. You could tell that he was going to be a coach in college. You could already tell."

Scarlet Knights head coach Greg Schiano would give Belichick "projects" — like running the scout team, watching tape or putting together film clips. Bill Belichick called it "a great experience" that also turned out to be advantageous for the Patriots.

"I'm sure that he learned a lot through Coach Schiano as I have through all my conversations with Coach Schiano," Bill Belichick said. "And just the way he ran the team and things he did to prepare the team and so forth. Stephen and I have talked about those things as well. I've got some good ideas from some of the things that they did at Rutgers."

PART OF BEING a Belichick is the ability to stay composed. It's about taking a deep breath, staring across the sideline and having the confidence that you can outmaneuver the opposing coach. It's one of the things that's made Bill Belichick great.

Sometimes it's also about taking a deep breath and blocking out the noise. Steve Belichick learned that early. There were many times during Rutgers lacrosse away games that he heard it. Opposing fans tossed insults his way about the Patriots and his father.

"Every time we went on the road or Bill was at a game, everyone knew who Stephen was. He'd hear it from the stands," former Rutgers lacrosse coach Jim Stagnitta said. "There'd be hoots and hollers all the time. That just never really bothered him. When you spend time with him as you do with his dad, you learn he doesn't get rattled very easily. They're very steady when it comes to that."

Steve Belichick also dealt with trash-talking spectators in high school. But it wasn't fellow teenagers he had to worry about. It was the parents in the stands who behaved the worst, taunting the teenager.

"Surprisingly not with the kids. More so with the parents," Sullivan said. "But he was pretty stoic and handled it very, very well. I don't recall any times where he lashed out. He just handled it."

Sullivan, who also taught Steve Belichick in his modern world history and U.S. history classes, saw a young man who embraced his name and legacy. At The Rivers School, he'd often be seen wearing his grandfather's dog tags. On the field, he embodied a selfless, emotional leader as a senior captain, one who offered to sit out his final high-school game to give playing time to other seniors.

"I'm not surprised he's a coach, let's put it that way," Sullivan said.

The respect he garnered from teammates in high school and college carried over to Gillette Stadium. And this isn't a story about being nice to your head coach's son. Bill Belichick casts a large shadow, but Steve Belichick's worked hard to create his own identity.

"I think Steve's not necessarily trying to allow himself to be put under that umbrella," said Brendan Daly, the Patriots defensive line coach. "He's trying to do his own thing. He's working hard at the craft, get better every day and develop himself as a coach. It's fun to see."

ASK BILL BELICHICK about working with his son and he'll smile and tell you it's "awesome."

Seeing Steve grow as a coach has been special. It also brings him back to when he was in his 20s, trying to make a name for himself. He first cut his teeth as a special assistant with the Baltimore Colts in 1975, a year out of college. His father's connection with Colts' special-teams coach George Boutselis earned him the opportunity, but it was up to the young coach to make the most of it.

With each season, Bill Belichick was given more responsibility. He remembers what it was like to gradually gain trust from coaches and players around him.

"It's great to see him on a daily basis and to see him grow and develop as a coach," Bill Belichick said. "I certainly think back to my time at that age and what that meant to me, each day, each week, each game, because you don't have very many of them at that point. Each year, how much growth and knowledge you absorb. And then being able to put it into application, you know, the second, third time around after you've gotten it."

Steve Belichick started to rise through the ranks long before he joined the Patriots in 2012. When his father was hired, he started out in training camp as a ball boy. During the summers throughout high school and college, he progressively did more, working in the scouting department and taking on more "projects."

In practice he's glued to linebackers coach Patrick Graham, but it's behind the scenes where he's making a name for himself. This offseason, the Patriots had him work out players before the draft. One of those was third-round pick Geneo Grissom, the defensive lineman from Oklahoma.

"At first glance, I was like, 'Dang, he's young. He's really young,'" Grissom said.

But the two hit it off. Young players often turn to Steve Belichick to learn the ropes inside Gillette Stadium. He teaches them how to study, watch tape and about the terminology.

"He has a great understanding of the game. He's really relatable," Grissom said. "He's really great with players like myself or in my position, rookies. Being able to just kind of help us and guide us through on this process."

He's also "progressively" taken over the defensive scout team. Inside the building, he handles paperwork for defensive coordinator Matt Patricia, writing up scouting reports. Like he did in high school and college, he studies film. He'll break down plays from opposing teams and put together highlight packages for the coaches and players. "Instead of somebody telling him, 'Put these plays together on a tape,' now he can go to the tape, find the plays that we need and use them and create them himself and say, 'Hey, I did this. What do you think of it?'" Bill Belichick said. "That's where he's really thinking ahead for you. It's great to see that and great to be able to experience it first-hand with him."

The Patriots head coach wouldn't say whether he thinks his son will become a head coach.

"I don't know. At this point, when I was at that point in my career, that wasn't ever something I really thought about," said Bill Belichick, who was just beginning to climb the coaching ladder with the New York Giants when he was the age his son is now. "I just thought about trying to do a good job for the team that I was with, whether that was the Lions or the Giants or whoever it was. I think he's kind of in that same mindset."

"He's unselfish. He works hard. He does whatever he can do to help our team. I think that's the most important thing to him rather than worrying about where he's going to be 15 years from now. I don't think that's really too high on the radar."

One day at a time. Steve Belichick's a chip off the old block.

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## TE Dwayne Allen

**Sports Illustrated**

### **Tight end Dwayne Allen rises above the ashes of his tumultuous childhood**

By Jason Buckland

Tuesday December 1st, 2015

Long before he reached the NFL, before he was a high school star and the finest college football tight end in the nation, Dwayne Allen was a 13-month-old toddler in Fayetteville, N.C. And he was dead.

It was the winter of 1992, and Dwayne had crawled off to his mother's bedroom while she cooked dinner. He returned some time later to the family room, but he was not alright. "Mama," Dwayne's sister, Carlotta, observed. "Look at Dwayne. Something's wrong."

See Video of Patients Discussing Psoriatic Arthritis

Suddenly, Dwayne's head dipped, and fell — right into a bowl of potato chips placed on the apartment floor.

His mother, Olivia, raced over in a panic. Her husband at the time grabbed Dwayne, shook him, but just then a nightmare seemed to become real. Dwayne's eyes rolled into the back of his head.

Olivia rushed to her room to grab shoes and a jacket, and there she saw it. On the ground was a bottle of Advil, pills scattered everywhere. Dwayne had somehow reached them atop her dresser and opened the cap. How many he ingested Olivia couldn't know.

They sped to the hospital, the evening sun falling fast from the Carolina sky. Already, Olivia began to dread the worst. In the car, when she held her boy's little body, Dwayne didn't feel like he used to. "He was gone," she says. "He was limp in my arms."

Nurses grabbed Dwayne in the emergency room, and began cutting away his onesie, when a male doctor approached in a hurry. Olivia heard him shout, over and again: "Code blue!"

Olivia was told her baby was gone.

It was a freak accident, the fear of any parent, but for Dwayne, who's now 25 years old, it was the first hardship in a life full of them. He grew up poor, he grew up angry. For the first many years after he was born, Dwayne's father never bothered to care for his young son. His only contact with the man came through Olivia, who signed his father's name on Christmas gifts and birthday cards to make it appear as though dad had really sent them himself.

His mother became a true idol to Dwayne, but even that seemed remarkable. She had led no easy life; Olivia became pregnant with her first baby at just 11-years-old, and by the time she gave birth to Dwayne, her seventh and final child, she was still only 21.

That in itself was hard enough, finding the money, the time, the resources to raise seven children and raise them well. Yet for years Olivia describes how she was also the victim of horrific domestic violence, the recipient of busted lips and black eyes at the hands of three men. One of them once came home wasted on crack, slipped into bed next to Olivia, and whispered in her ear that he could slit her throat without the kids hearing. The beatings often spilled over in front of her children.

In that environment, it was unbelievable that Dwayne made it anywhere, let alone where he has gone since: Clemson University, a graduate; the Indianapolis Colts, a starter; the NFL Players Association, a union leader.

But first he had to survive. In that emergency room some 23 years ago, there was no guarantee any of it would be possible. Doctors and nurses worked like hell to pump the medicine out of him. Olivia could only watch from the doorway. She began to pray.

"I said, 'God, you told me the number seven means completion,'" she says. "This is my seventh child. Come on here. You gotta do something."

It seemed like hours passed, but moments later something caught her ear. "Mama," her baby mumbled. It was all Olivia needed to hear to know Dwayne was alright.

In a movie, Dwayne might have left the hospital as a young boy and began anew, his second chance affording him happiness and an ease in life he'd never had before.

The reality is there was much more struggle to come. As he grew, Dwayne became a very irritable child, prone to outbursts and eager to disturb most every classroom he was placed in.

He felt loved at home, but without a father there could never be a full sense of it. Olivia did all she could, though often she worked nights to provide for the family. Dwayne felt he had no outlet for his rising emotions.

"I was really angry all the time," he says. "I was the entertainer in the classroom, but if my act was interrupted by the teacher I would get angry. Cuss them out. Throw this. Get into fights."

Money was often a challenge for the family, which lived in a very rough patch of Fayetteville. "There were hungry nights, days where mom just didn't have it," Dwayne says. "There were times where we were on the edge of getting evicted, got evicted."

One summer, when he was in grade school, Olivia shipped Dwayne to Houston to live with his biological father until school resumed. Right away, the man tried to assert dominance over his son, though with nothing else in their relationship to fall back on, the gesture fell flat. "He saw it as, 'I'm dad. I'm your father,'" Dwayne says. "It was a rough month."

If his mother's decision to send him to Texas was meant to bring Dwayne closer to his father, it instead confirmed to the boy that he felt he had no real dad at all. "It was not," Dwayne says, "what I imagined it'd feel like to have a father."

He continued to act out, growing to become a disruptive force so great in class he was expelled for Grades, 6, 7 and 8 to an alternative school for at-risk children. There, his peers weren't only class clowns and unfocused youths — they were much more dangerous and much more violent than he ever was.

Not until high school was Dwayne considered ready to rejoin a normal school system, however his life would change on one of his first days back.

By his freshman year, Dwayne was a large, strapping teen, an excellent basketball player who had yet to pick up the game that would make his life.

He wore his usual get-up, a white t-shirt, sport shorts, crew socks and flip-flops, when he passed a window walking toward the gymnasium at Terry Sanford High. Then, as if out of nowhere, Dwayne heard it for the first time: the thick, southern voice of Wayne Inman.

Wayne Inman is a tower of a man, a big, strong gym teacher who also happened to double then as the head football coach at Terry Sanford. He was on the phone with his brother when Dwayne happened to stroll by his office. "I might have to call you back," the coach said.

Inman charged into the hallway. "Hey, you," he said, and Dwayne turned his head. "How come you don't play football?" Dwayne walked back toward the coach, told him that no, sir, basketball was his sport.

"Well," Inman began, "there are two things I can look at and know when I see it. One's a good-looking girl, and the other's a football player. And you're not a good-looking girl."

The coach returned to his office for his wallet and produced a ten dollar bill.

"Here's 10 bucks," he told Dwayne. "You can go buy a Wendy's burger, Twinkies, or you can go buy a bag of dope. Or you can use it to go get a physical. If you go get a physical, I'll see you out there at practice Monday."

The meeting struck Dwayne. He'd had coaches before, though never before had a man in his life put such trust in him. That Inman was white made things even more peculiar.

"Where I grew up, I didn't have much white male interaction," Dwayne says. "Other than them reading Miranda rights to the people they were arresting."

What began for Dwayne as a curious interaction grew into much more. He joined the coach's team, and soon enough Inman was the driving male force in his life, the only man who would hold Dwayne accountable for his daily behavior.

At school, Inman studied Dwayne's schedule and made sure the boy was in class. When he was in class, Inman confirmed he was awake. When he was awake, the coach volunteered Dwayne to answer any question his teacher might care to ask.

Dwayne resisted Inman's new role at first; he had, after all, been burned by other men before. But Inman never relented, never eased back in what he demanded of Dwayne. "I didn't always tell him what he wanted to hear," the coach says. "But I told him what he needed to hear."

He saw to it Dwayne's grades improved, that he had rides from practice, shuttling his new tight end home to parts of town where an old white man isn't often spotted in a car with a young black teen. They were together so much, and their relationship had grown to such a point, those around Fayetteville gave them a nickname: "Wayne and Dwayne."

Inman knew the stakes for Dwayne, what staying in school and growing as a man meant for him. "I felt like if Dwayne had've gone (back) to an alternative school one more time, we'd have lost him," Inman says. Dwayne found the temper inside him was fading, that Inman's presence and counsel meant he was no longer controlled by a rage about life around him.

And not a moment too soon. "They knew that I needed someone," Dwayne says. "Or else I was going to end up dead or in jail."

Dwayne blossomed as a football star, his talents attracting nearly 30 major programs desperate for the tight end to sign their letters of intent. He chose nearby Clemson, where as a senior in 2011 he grabbed 50 balls and scored eight touchdowns. After his final season, he earned the John Mackey Award, given the most outstanding tight end in the country. When the Colts picked Dwayne in the third round of the 2012 NFL Draft, he was just the second player off the board at his position.

He had come so far, and yet all along the way, by his side, was Inman. Some years earlier, when he had become a high school phenom, Dwayne's biological father returned to visit his boy, searching to rekindle a lost bond. But Dwayne had a need for him no longer. Where once there was a void in his life, the place a father was supposed to be, Inman had arrived.

"He loved me," Dwayne says. "He absolutely loved me."

Dwayne is a fine tight end today, a talented receiver, an impressive blocker, and a true leader of the Colts (at just 25, only Eric Reid of the 49ers is younger than Dwayne among team union reps with the NFLPA.)

But as he has developed as a pro, he found his most important role has been outside football.

"Dwayne believes the position he is in (in the NFL)," Inman says, "God put him there to serve others." Which is why, with the blessing of his mother, Dwayne would like to share some of the most painful secrets his family has.

Dwayne Allen sits in the booth of a sandwich shop on W. 11th St. in Indianapolis. He has told parts of this story before, at women's shelters and with community groups, however it has not necessarily come easier each time.

He is a gifted public speaker, the result, he says, of pleading his case to teachers and school principals all those years. But one topic forces Dwayne to start and stop, to pause, to stare off between sentences toward some place in the distance only he knows.

Domestic violence.

Dwayne's mother, Olivia, is about the kindest woman there could ever be. She is known as "Mama O" around Fayetteville, a soaring, warm spirit that was always the neighborhood mother, feeding and clothing those children who had even less than hers did.

Her voice is so soft, her demeanor so sweet, it does not seem possible she has been through what she has.

For years, Dwayne was forced to watch Olivia become the victim of terrible abuse in her home, vicious attacks at the hands of multiple men Olivia could only pray her children had not seen.

Dwayne was so young when it began, 4-years-old, maybe 5, but it was no less devastating to the boy, to hear the shouting, the pleas from his mother, the bloody result.

One of Olivia's cruellest abusers was a man named Stanley (for this story, the man's real name has been changed.) When Olivia met him, he was a wonderful partner. He cooked and cleaned. When Olivia came home from work, Stanley had already run her bath water, laid out her bed clothes so she could get comfortable. "He had all good characteristics," Olivia says. "But he had one bad that made him a monster."

Stanley, Olivia says, was addicted to crack. Olivia says she always knew when he was high; even Dwayne says he could see it, too. His eyes would be glassed over, sprung open wide. His lower lip would quiver and shake, as if he were trying to chew it.

It was in these moments Olivia knew she would be hit. Stanley became violent when he used, striking Olivia in the face, bloodying and bruising her. Her children never saw the worst of it, the threats on her life, the time in bed when Stanley told Olivia he could slice her throat, the stolen money, the controlling jealousy, the orders to never be caught spending time around another man.

But Olivia couldn't keep the abuse from them. "You can't hide nothing like that," she says. "Kids know. They knew."

Somehow, Olivia kept her composure, though there was no way it couldn't change her, all the smacks and punches. One day, she says, she was thrown clear through a wall in her home.

Dwayne was heartbroken. Olivia was her rock, but also the life of every party. After each attack, it required no small amount of time for her to recover and return to herself. He saw it take months sometimes before she emerged as "Mama O" again.

"Seeing a woman who I idolize, who I think is the strongest person I know, broken, hurt because a man that she loved was going to physically assault her," Dwayne says. "It was so tough."

Eventually, the children intervened, confronting Stanley and running him off, but the next men, nor the ones that preceded him, seemed to be any better. Olivia figures that, from the time she was a pre-teen mother until very recently, three husbands and more than a dozen men in total, she was in a relationship that was abusive in some way, whether it was physical, sexual, verbal or otherwise.

She could not break the pattern. As bad as the abuse got, the men in some way provided her comfort and support. "Loneliness," she says, "is a terrible thing."

Olivia found salvation and self-worth through her children. She has five daughters — Margreata, Carlotta, Lonnett, Tina and Keyera — and Olivia realized she wanted that fate for no woman, her own children or anybody else's. She began speaking to the community, to abused women, telling the story God asked her to share.

"I didn't want my daughters to go through what I went through," she says. "I didn't want my sons to become the men that I was with."

During his third season as a pro, Dwayne rang his mother. By then he had become a respected NFL player, even had a bit of national fame, but he always desired to make a difference in another way. He wanted to do something more with his prominence in football.

He hoped to speak about domestic violence, and Olivia agreed right away that he should share her story. "My mother told me, before she passed away, the things that you go through are not just for you," Olivia says. "They're meant for others along the way that go through things and don't know what to do."

Dwayne partnered with Verizon Wireless to help collect used cell phones to support Coburn Place, an Indianapolis shelter for battered women and children. He took over a leading role in a program called DREAM Alive, which mentors at-risk youths in Indianapolis, 99 per cent of which live below the poverty line.

He has also become a role model to local children of domestic violence, for there is never only one true victim of abuse. "They remind me so much of myself when I was younger," Dwayne says.

The son cannot hide his affection for mom today. "Aw, man," Dwayne beams when asked about Olivia. "She's my hero." Talking about the pain she has been through helps him realize all that the family has overcome.

All that pain. There was a time when Olivia wondered how her own abuse might shape her children, what may come of them from living under the same roof as so much violence.

But with Dwayne, no matter how it looked, she had a sense of things to come.

As she watched doctors bring her baby back from an early grave in that emergency room in Fayetteville, Olivia moved closer to Dwayne and stood above his hospital gurney. Sometimes Olivia asked God why he had given her seven children, yet there she found out.

“Because my seventh had a calling on his life,” Olivia says. “He was destined for greatness.”

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## C David Andrews

# The Boston Globe

### **Patriots' David Andrews has unique mentor in Dan Reeves**

By Jim McBride GLOBE STAFF SEPTEMBER 25, 2015

FOXBOROUGH — They can be found on refrigerators, albums, and desks across the country.

Replica trading cards featuring young athletes wearing their favorite uniforms and playing their favorite sports. Keepsakes for proud moms, dads, grandmas, grandpas, and assorted other extended family members.

Dan Reeves has one. And the retired NFL coach is pretty proud of it. It's of a young football player near and dear to Reeves's heart — and it's even autographed: "Hold on Uncle Dan, I'm coming."

The signer? Patriots rookie David Andrews, who watched Reeves's Atlanta Falcons teams as a kid growing up in Johns Creek, Ga.

"That's a memory that really sticks out," said Reeves, whose brother-in-law was Andrews's grandfather. "When I was coaching the Falcons [from 1997-2003] he gave me that bubble gum card. It had his picture on it and he was in his pads, no helmet, but he had his pads on, holding the ball, snapping it."

It's a memory Andrews recalls fondly, too.

"Yeah, I do remember that. You know, he never got to watch me play growing up because [the Falcons] were always either on the road or they had practices when we had games," said Andrews. "So my Little League team had trading cards made up and I signed one. I know he still has that. Pretty funny story. He always says, 'You said you were coming but I didn't hold on.' He always jokes about it. But he did enough in his career."

Andrews has come a long way from those Little League days. These days he's in the big leagues, playing center for the Patriots. He may have seemed like a long shot to have an impact on the reigning Super Bowl champions when he arrived in New England as an undrafted free agent in May. But Reeves saw it coming.

"Well, I'm not surprised because it's something he's dreamed about all of his life," said Reeves, who arrived in Dallas as an undrafted free agent in 1965 and amassed more than 3,600 total yards over an eight-year career at running back. "When he got that opportunity, he immediately moved [to New England] and wanted to be there every day and wanted to do everything he could to prepare. He's worked extremely hard. That's the way he's gotten to where he was at Georgia and that's the way he's gotten to where he is in New England. He's a very dedicated young man."

It was at Georgia where Andrews was able to refine his skills as a center and where Reeves was able to make up for all those missed Little League games. Andrews started every game over his final three seasons with the Bulldogs, and it was during that stretch when Reeves started to realize the 6-foot-3-inch, 294-pounder had a chance to play on Sundays.

"I watched the quarterback at Georgia from the sideline and the end zone and I'd watch David. And in the three years I watched him there he never made a bad snap," said Reeves. "That's incredible — when you figure you go from under the center to shotgun. And they do the same thing in New England. He's very comfortable in that system. He's been doing it a long time."

David Andrews (60) started in the Patriots' season opener vs. the Steelers.

Andrews smiled at Reeves's recollection of his performances, saying, "I think I might have had a few [bad snaps]." But added, "I've played center since the seventh grade, so I had a lot of practice and I try to be consistent with it."

Consistency has been the key for Andrews, who has stepped in and played every snap through the first two weeks of the season for the Patriots. With starter Bryan Stork and top backup Ryan Wendell on the shelf, it looks like Andrews will be entrenched in the middle of the offense for the foreseeable future.

Reeves said another component to Andrews's success is his intelligence — an important trait for a center.

"[Centers are] like the quarterback for the five offensive linemen," said Reeves. "They make all the calls. He and the quarterback have to be on the same page. I know they do a lot of communication at the line of scrimmage in New England."

Andrews ended up in New England after working out for Bill Belichick before the draft. It was a workout that obviously left an impression.

"It was an awesome experience," said Andrews. "I just went there and tried to show that I deserved a chance and it all worked out."

Reeves said no guarantees were given to Andrews.

"Coach Belichick was very honest with David," said Reeves. "He told him he wouldn't draft him but if he was a free agent they would be interested in signing him. So I wrote Bill and told him how much I appreciated his honesty and for giving David a chance. I told him he wouldn't be disappointed because he's such a great young man."

You'd be hard-pressed to find anyone in the organization disappointed in Andrews's play.

"I think that David has done everything we've asked him to do since he came here," said offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels. "He's been accountable to his job, dependable each day . . . And he's played very tough, and he's a smart player."

Andrews lacks prototypical size for an offensive lineman but is deceptively quick and athletic — he can get to the second level. He is very appreciative of the tips he picked up from his favorite former NFL coach.

"He gave me a lot of advice," said Andrews. "Especially as I started getting older and started to understand how the game was supposed to be played. Definitely a very unique contact to have. He's a great mentor. A great mentor for football but also a great man. So it's kind of a two-dimensional thing."

As exciting as the journey has been for Andrews and Reeves, there were some anxious moments along the way — specifically roster cut days.

"The fact that he was getting to play an awful lot, I felt good about that. You know the way it is, it's hard to find offensive linemen," said Reeves. "It's unusual for a rookie, a kid, to come in and play that much in the preseason . . . To think about where he is now. Coach Belichick does a tremendous job. He knows exactly what kind of players he wants, offense, defense. To see that David was someone he was interested in as a free agent, to give him that opportunity is pretty special."

Andrews said the bond between the two is still strong and he still seeks Reeves's advice.

"Not many people in my family know what it's like to play in the NFL," he said. "So he's kind of the only one I can bounce things off or someone who might understand what it's like, so it's definitely cool."

Reeves hopes Andrews will be bouncing things off him for years to come. For now, he's just enjoying the ride. "This has been a dream of his since he was little, so it's been great to see," said Reeves. "You hear stories like these but to be involved with one personally . . . It's just great."

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## QB Tom Brady



### **Brady, Belichick are a perfect match**

*An odd couple on surface, Patriots' quarterback, coach were made for each other*

By Greg Garber

Originally Published: January 7, 2015

Bill Belichick and Tom Brady have become almost unimaginably successful and rich and famous - and, in terms of their shared history, inseparable.

But the secret of their unprecedented partnership is the two or three hours they spend together each week, far from the public view, scheming in a drab meeting room under Gillette Stadium. Most NFL head coaches operate like CEOs, delegating the messy, monotonous details of game planning to underlings. And yet in their 15th season with the New England Patriots, Belichick and Brady, along with the other quarterbacks, meet every Tuesday - technically the players' day off. They sit in the flickering semi-darkness and break down coaching videos with something that approaches a forensic fervor. They scout the weekly opponent, doing their diligence, searching for weakness, strategizing on how to best exploit it.

"Bill's done his homework by then, and he tells them what the secondary will be trying to do to them, the linebackers, the defensive front," explained owner Robert Kraft, who has sat in on some of these meetings. "The two of them go back and forth about where the best opportunities are.

"Oh, yes, it can be lively."

Today's videos are awash in color, but their world is starkly black and white, a simple, logical function of down and distance.

Back in late September, after losing to the Kansas City Chiefs 41-14 in a Monday night game, the Patriots found themselves 2-2. The media jackals, sensing weakness, wondered aloud if their ridiculous run was coming to an end. There were even whispers that friction had developed between Belichick and Brady.

Bill O'Brien, head coach of the Houston Texans, remembers laughing out loud at the time. He spent five years in those offensive meeting rooms in Foxborough, Massachusetts, neatly spanning the team's last two Super Bowl appearances, and he understands the crackling dynamic as well as anyone. That accrued knowledge was an important factor in the Texans' 9-7 record this year, an improvement of seven victories from the previous season - three more than any other team.

"I was kind of immersed in things here, but I heard some of that," O'Brien said recently, laughing again. "Don't believe all that stuff you read. These are two competitive guys who work really well together. There is no ego there.

"Bill actually coaches Tom two, three times a week. He appreciates Tom's intelligence and toughness. And vice versa."

In 28 seasons of football - from high school to college, arena football to NFL Europe and the NFL - quarterback Kurt Warner said he never once watched film with a defensive coach. Warner was the MVP of Super Bowl XXXIV for St. Louis, but he was on the opposite sideline when Brady snatched away the game and that award two years later against the Rams in New Orleans.

"They complement each other incredibly well," said Warner, an NFL Network analyst. "If Brady struggles, Belichick keeps him in the game with great defense. In those games when the defense is exposed, Brady picks up Belichick with his great play.

"I think they make each other better - and they're both pretty good to begin with."

More, if it is possible, than the sum of their considerable parts.

On the surface, they are an odd couple: Belichick in his sideline gray hoodie, bangs plastered to his forehead, Brady sporting a GQ-worthy wardrobe (and world-class coiffure) after games. But parse their public words, and they seem to finish each other's sentences. Those close to them say that winning is virtually the only thing they care about.

The bottom-line, quantity/quality numbers: Together, Belichick and Brady have won 160 games - 44 more than the Dolphins' Don Shula and Dan Marino, who are next in line since the AFL-NFL merger in 1970, and 53 more than Pittsburgh's Chuck Noll and Terry Bradshaw. Their record is a staggering 160-47, a winning percentage, .772, which is ahead of the Raiders' John Madden and Ken Stabler (.756), Chicago's Mike Ditka and Jim McMahon (.754) and the Colts' Tony Dungy and Peyton Manning (.753).

"I feel like I have a good player-coach relationship with Tom," Belichick said in a 2011 interview with ESPN. "We talk regularly during the week about what's going to happen, how we're doing it, and then we review what did happen and move on to the next stage."

Earlier that same year, with the Patriots headed to their fifth Super Bowl in 11 seasons, the quarterback also sat down with ESPN.

"Coach comes in and says, 'These are the things we need to do to win,' and he's right damn near 100 percent of the time," Brady said. "It's, 'This is what we need to do, and this is how you're going to do it, and if we don't do it, we're going to lose.'"

Brian Billick, former Ravens head coach and now an NFL Network analyst, marvels at the Patriots' continuity and consistency of structure.

"Tom Brady is an extension of Bill Belichick, and Belichick an extension of Brady," Billick explained. "The offense and defense is totally integrated - not only structurally, but philosophically, too. I don't know if we've had a relationship like this ever in the league."

"The wealth of knowledge, their database is unparalleled. Imagine their frame of reference - 'Remember six years ago when the Dolphins tried a four-wide blitz on second-and-long?' Six years ago? Are you f--ing kidding me? I can't remember yesterday. The synergy between head coach and quarterback, it's stunning."

Their shared experiences have evolved into a collective memory, a vast encyclopedia of X's and O's, an iCloud embedded in their brains. At a critical juncture in New England's Week 15 victory over Miami, Brady surprised the Dolphins with an uncharacteristically unbridled 17-yard run.

"He did a good job of seeing that in the pass rush," Belichick said afterward. "It's something we've talked about this week. He made a big play on that last year against them."

'Absolute, maximum position'

Their fathers both adored the game of football and, in a very short time, so did they.

William Stephen Belichick was always underfoot, a fixture in the film room, at the U.S. Naval Academy's football facility in Annapolis, Maryland, where his father, Steve, was a scout and assistant coach for 33 years. The boy was 8 when Navy halfback Joe Bellino won the Heisman Trophy and 11 when quarterback Roger Staubach also captured college football's top individual prize.

Over the years at Giants training camp, where his son was an assistant for a dozen years, Steve would tell stories over a scotch or two about Young Bill, a Mozart-ian prodigy, asking technical questions about linebackers' run-support responsibilities or a running back's blitz keys.

Thomas Edward Patrick Brady Jr. was born into a Bay Area family of rabid 49ers fans. The boy was 4 years old, wearing a tiny No. 16 Joe Montana jersey, when he witnessed Dwight's Clark's "The Catch" in person. Later, he'd join Montana as a multiple Super Bowl champion and MVP.

Belichick probably saw something of himself in Brady as he rose from the No. 199 pick in the 2000 draft to No. 1 on the Patriots' depth chart in the narrow span of 17 months - intelligent, driven and committed to the process.

For 27 consecutive years, Bill Polian ran the Buffalo Bills, Carolina Panthers and Indianapolis Colts. But after working six Patriots games over the past two years as an analyst for Sirius XM Radio, he has an even greater appreciation for the duo.

"Week in and week out, in every facet of the game, they're the best-coached team in football," said Polian, an ESPN analyst. "With respect to situational football and matchups, they do that better than anybody."

"And as much as it is Tom operating the offense, it's also Belichick and the coaching staff putting those guys in the absolute, maximum position. Especially in Foxborough, you almost have to play a perfect game to beat them. Give them even an inkling of daylight - and they'll grab it."

Running back Jonas Gray was cut three times in one year, but when Stevan Ridley tore two knee ligaments earlier this season, Gray was activated from the practice squad. He carried 37 times for 201 yards against the Colts, becoming the first NFL rusher in 93 years score his first four career touchdowns in a single game. The next week, after oversleeping and missing a Friday practice, Gray didn't get a single snap as the Patriots hung 34 points on the Detroit Lions' No. 1-ranked defense.

"A lot of teams just do what they do," said Ty Law, a Patriots cornerback from 1995-2004 and a five-time Pro Bowler. "They say, 'We'll stick with our bread and butter.' Outside of Brady, they don't have a bread and butter. They always adjust to what the other team does on both sides of the ball."

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Law said, Brady isn't in the business of stroking the egos of diva receivers.

"When you have the star wide receiver with big numbers, most quarterbacks feel obligated," Law said. "They want to make the big guy happy. They force the issue - and they lose games."

"Tom, he'll throw it all over the field. Always to the open guy. For Tom, it's about winning. It's way more important than stats."

As Rodney Harrison, a Patriots strong safety from 2003-08, is quick to point out, making friends isn't Belichick's first priority, either.

"I think a lot of coaches do things for public perception because they're afraid of getting criticized," said Harrison, an analyst for NBC's "Football Night in America." "And that's why he's had so much success. Bill doesn't give a crap what people outside the locker room think. Whatever he thinks is in the best interest of the team, that's what he does."

Suspending their disbelief

Kraft is widely viewed as one of the best owners in professional sports. He knows that reputation rests largely on the successful marriage of Belichick and Brady.

"The coach and the quarterback share a lot of stuff," Kraft said on the last day of 2014, from a yacht cruising the Caribbean. "The main thing is they are obsessed with every minute detail. Obsessed."

Amidst all the accolades this season is one that might have gotten lost in the sauce: The Week 16 victory over the Jets earned Kraft his 250th win (in his 368th game), tying him for the fastest owner to 250 with the legendary George Halas.

It was Kraft who was impressed when Belichick served as the Patriots' defensive backs coach under Bill Parcells in 1996. It was Kraft who parted with a first-round draft choice as compensation for Belichick's services when he abruptly stepped down as the New York Jets' head coach - after one day with the title - following the 1999 season. And while Kraft does not take credit for drafting Brady, he has managed to keep him happy and in uniform.

"Look, there have been situations over the past 15, 16 years where the coach and the quarterback could have gone another way," Kraft said. "I worked hard to keep them together. I've learned in my other business that continuity is critical to success. That's the underlying factor in what we've achieved."

Their rare skill sets and willingness to experiment gives each of them the confidence to suspend his disbelief of the other.

"When you respect and trust someone, you're willing to go outside the box and change things," Harrison said. "They care for each other so much, on a professional level and on a personal level. They've become stubborn in their belief in each other."

And 15 years into their relationship, the two are still clearly motivated by former failures.

As Parcells' wizard of defense for the Giants in the 1980s, Belichick controlled the movements of Hall of Fame linebackers Lawrence Taylor and Harry Carson and helped the team win two Super Bowls. But as the Cleveland Browns' head coach from 1991-95, Belichick was 37-45, including 1-1 in the playoffs, and was left behind when the franchise moved to Baltimore.

Brady was never a stand-alone star at Michigan. He arrived as the seventh quarterback on the Wolverines' quarterback depth chart and struggled to find playing time. He even shared the job during his senior year with Drew Henson - who would later play professional baseball and football, neither with much success. To this day, Brady can spit out the names of the six quarterbacks taken ahead of him in the 2000 draft, including, incredibly in retrospect, Giovanni Carmazzi and Spergon Wynn. As a rookie, he was the Patriots' fourth-string quarterback, behind Drew Bledsoe, Michael Bishop and John Friesz. But in 2001, when Bledsoe was injured against the Jets in Week 2, Brady became the starter.

Today, Belichick and Brady are full-fledged peers, intent on wrecking opponents, sometimes even to the point of embarrassment.

Their biggest challenge? Keeping the other honest and engaged.

"He's a hard guy to coach, because he's so well prepared," Belichick said in 2011. "He's seen all the tape. He's studied the film. You really have to know what you're talking about when you talk to him, because if you tell him something that's not quite right, he'll say, 'Hey, what about this game 10 weeks ago, when this happened and that happened? We can't do that.'"

"It really forces you as a coach to be well prepared to make sure that you can really give him information that is helpful - not things that he's already seen. You can't B.S. your way through a meeting with Tom Brady. I'll tell you that."

'No one works harder'

Troy Brown, who caught a critical pass in the game-winning drive of the Patriots' first Super Bowl win, says that Brady is as competitive as any player he has ever seen.

"He'd lose a game of trash-can basketball - and he'd get upset," said Brown. "Belichick hates to lose, too. It's always the team first and everything else second."

Kraft remembers a golf tournament outside Boston when he was paired with Brady.

"We needed a putt on the 16th to take our first lead," Kraft said, "and he just dialed into that laser focus that he has. Eighteen feet. Yeah, he sunk the putt."

Harrison respects Brady's work ethic as much as his competitive drive.

"The best player has to be the hardest-working player, and that's what you have with Tom Brady," Harrison said. "They call him a pretty boy, with the mansions and the model wife, but he deserves those things. At the same time, no one works harder, or longer, than Belichick."

Brown, a Patriots receiver from 1993-2007, said as a result players feel accountable to both men.

"You feel you need to do a little bit extra for them," said Brown, an analyst for Comcast SportsNet New England. "No matter how much praise they get, you say, 'We need to do the same thing all over again.' Everybody feels that."

If any former player has a reason to hold a grudge, it is Lawyer Milloy, a strong safety who made four Pro Bowls in seven years as a Patriot. Belichick banished him to Buffalo when he wouldn't agree to restructure his salary before the 2003 season. But he remains in awe what his former team has accomplished.

"The one constant in the last 15 years of Patriots success, all this talk of dynasty, is Brady/Belichick," Milloy said from his Seattle home. "It happens once in a lifetime, and you really can't explain it."

"They just get each other."

Said Kraft, "To have these two guys working together, winning games for the people of New England ... it's pretty cool."

They are separated by 25 years and a sense for fashion, but that's about it. Down and distance - so, what are you seeing here?

"He can recognize things, he can anticipate things, manage the clock, manage personnel, down and distance, formations, a lot of moving parts going on at the same time," Belichick said of Brady in 2011. "He's able to sort them all out, put them together and do the right thing for the team."

"It gives you a lot of ability as a coach to put responsibility on him to take advantage of certain situations because he's able to process it and manage it, not just himself but to get the team to do it."

He might have also been talking about himself.



## Given the way he prepares, Tom Brady won't be slowing down anytime soon

Why Tom Brady should be getting more MVP consideration

BY GREG BISHOP

Thu Dec. 11, 2014

The sports therapy center sits adjacent to Gillette Stadium, 500 feet to the northwest, inside a shopping plaza, next to a hair salon. It's a nondescript location but no ordinary rehab facility. There's a VIP entrance, a personal chef and a brain fitness room. The company logo is splashed everywhere: tb12.

It's a November Monday morning in Foxborough, Mass., and the center's owner, Patriots quarterback Tom Brady, has already received treatment and spoken to his neuropsychologist via Skype. The day before, he obliterated the Lions, topping 300 passing yards for the 63rd time, tying Dan Marino for No. 3 on that list. Perhaps he celebrated with ice cream, though his would have been made from raw ingredients, mostly vegetables -- he favors an avocado base with cacao mixed in to mimic chocolate. "Tastes great," Brady says later, not all that convincingly.

The flat screen in the lobby is tuned to SportsCenter; next to it are jars of whey protein and knee braces for sale. Brady is away at the stadium, deep into his routines by now. Forget, for the moment, the supermodel wife, the movie cameos, the designer clothes. That's celebrity camouflage. That's Brady and that's not Brady -- not as it relates to football. His career is built on, defined by and prolonged with routine, even if his life is anything but that. This scrolls across ESPN's ticker: 7 STRAIGHT FOR BRADY, PATRIOTS.

The center is run by a 49-year-old California native with a master's degree in traditional Chinese medicine. Teammates describe Alex Guerrero as Brady's Mr. Miyagi. They say he knows the quarterback's body better than Gisele Bündchen, Brady's wife. "I do have my hands on him a little more than she does," Guerrero says, laughing.

He is Brady's body coach and business partner, and he's one of the main reasons Brady has been able to transform what looked like a lost season into another star turn in a Hall of Fame career. In late September, after a 27-point drubbing by the Chiefs, the more foolish NFL observers suggested that Brady could be near the end. That he should retire. Instead, he's on track for the fourth-best passer rating (100.2) and the third-best interception percentage (1.4%) of his career, with what one might fairly describe as one of the least intimidating sets of wide receivers he's ever had. And how he did that -- with a diet that made him lighter, workouts that made him (relatively) faster and marked improvement in throwing on the run -- speaks directly to his work with Guerrero, and to the center they opened together more than a year ago. It has the Patriots 10-3 and Brady positioned to make another run at the Lombardi Trophy, which has eluded him since 2005.

The two men met through Willie McGinest, the linebacker who played 15 seasons with Guerrero's help. Initially, Guerrero fixed Brady's aching right shoulder. Then it was a sore calf and a damaged groin. Other than one freak injury, a torn left ACL in '08, Brady has not missed any time since he started with Guerrero, about 10 years ago. He is 37 and in his 15th season, and he wants to play into his 40s. Like 45. Like 48. When teammates ask how long, he simply says, "Forever."

"You'll hear people say, Football doesn't define me," says Guerrero. But that's not Brady. "Football isn't what Tom does -- football is Tom. This is who he is."

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Let's start here: Brady is a quarterback whose daily schedule, both in and out of season, is mapped clearly into his 40s. Every day of it, micromanaged. Treatment. Workouts. Food. Recovery. Practice. Rest. And those schedules aren't just for this week, this month, this season. They're for three years. That allows Brady and Guerrero to work in both the short and long terms to, say, increase muscle mass one year and focus on pliability the next. "The whole idea is to program his body to do what we want it to do," says Guerrero. "We don't let the body dictate to us. We dictate."

"God, what if LeBron James trained how I trained?" Brady asks. "He really could play forever."

Sports accelerate the aging process, especially football, which often leaves gladiators, once powerful and sculpted, with shredded ligaments, broken bones and scrambled brains. Yet quarterbacks seem to age more slowly than other players. Based on touchdown passes, nine of the top 10 signal-callers this year are 30 or older; six are at least 33. For Brady to play this well for so long isn't simply a matter of built-in aggression (although he has that) or extra film study (although he does that) or of avoiding big hits and running only when necessary. The secret to his longevity is more encompassing. "Everything," says Guerrero, "is calculated."

Guerrero describes a typical vacation day, in the offseason: Brady wakes up, works out, has breakfast with Gisele and their two kids, hangs at the beach, naps on schedule, surfs, works out again. He goes to sleep early, eats well and for the most part avoids alcohol. The in-season portion of his regimen is designed to run through Super Bowl Sunday; if New England's campaign ends in a playoff loss (excluding that 2008 season, he has missed the postseason just once), Brady completes every drill, every throw, anyway.

That's their system. From the outset the principles made sense to Brady, who had spent the early part of his career like most athletes. He'd worried about injuries after they happened. He'd focused on rehabilitation as opposed to preventative maintenance. He was, he says, guiding a plane 30,000 feet into the air without having prepared for mechanical trouble. He would stick his elbow into an ice bucket after training sessions because that's what people did. "It's systematic," Brady says. "I was part of that system. You're in it for so long, you're fearful of change. You always got in the cold tub, so you continue to."

Guerrero challenged all of those notions. He showed Brady how the muscles in his forearm had, through lifting weights, become short and stiff and how that led to soreness when he threw. Together they worked to make those muscles longer and more flexible -- "more like rubber bands," says Brady, "so I can throw thousands of footballs and not worry."

In essence, after the ACL recovery, Brady placed Guerrero in charge of the second half of his career. "God, what if LeBron James got what I got? What if he trained how I trained?" Brady asks. "He really could play forever."

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A Brady story: Charity football game for disabled children, circa 2009. Brady's charity. He's the quarterback. Fourth quarter comes, and he implores his teammates -- guys like retired tight end Christian Fauria -- to pick up the pace. Gotta catch that! Finish the route! So Fauria runs harder, pulls a hamstring and looks at Brady. "Calm the f--- down," he says. "You're the quarterback for both teams."

Brady can eat all the vegetable ice cream he wants, but what drives him, what pushes him to play forever, existed long before. Brady is new age in approach but old school in composition.

"I played with a bunch of quarterbacks: Kurt Warner. Marc Bulger," a former teammate says. "They didn't match Tom's intensity. Not even close."

He's competitive, but to state it that plainly diminishes the level of obsession he has to win. Like in 2005, when a vicious hit to his left shin in Week 14 against the Bills left Brady unable to walk. He played the next week, against the Buccaneers, and suffered a sports hernia that left his testicles at least three times their normal size. He played four more games, including the playoffs, with a bad shin and awful swelling down below. His backup at the time, Matt Cassel, tells this story, setting up the easiest of punch lines. "So, yeah," he says, "Tom Brady has big balls."

Brady has refused to cede any reps in practice, even handoffs. He told Cassel and Brian Hoyer (a Patriot from 2009 to '11), "That's how I got my job." When Rodney Harrison played with Brady, the safety showed up at 6:40 a.m. to lift weights. "Good afternoon," Brady said to him. So the next day Harrison showed up at 6:30. "Good afternoon." Then 6:20. Then 6:10. Then 6. "Good afternoon" each time, until Harrison finally said, "Screw you, Tom. I'm not coming in any earlier."

"I only played one year with him," says tight end Cam Cleeland, a Patriot in 2002. "I still remember his paddle from camp." He means Brady's table-tennis paddle, the one chipped and frayed around the edges, broken from abuse. "I played with a bunch of quarterbacks: Kurt Warner. Marc Bulger. They didn't match Tom's intensity. Not even close."

Brady's throwing coach, Tom House, once tutored Nolan Ryan, the Hall of Fame righthander. Ryan was 42 when he started working with House, back when the ace said he wanted to pitch another year or two. He didn't retire until he was 46.

House operates within what he calls four "windows of trainability." The first two windows focus on developing athleticism as young players (from age six through the late teens) learn sports and gain strength. The third window, which lasts through the late 20s, is for skill acquisition. Everything thereafter -- the fourth window -- is skill retention, skill maintenance. That's when athletes can slow the aging process. Or try to.

House and Brady work to refine less than 2 percent of the QB's overall skillset. That's it. The upper end of the upper end. Early on they ran Brady's throws through a three-dimensional motion analysis, studying his movement patterns (length of stride), timing (shoulder and hip separation) and the mechanical variables (eye level, release point). That provided a baseline.

After Brady's subpar 2013 season -- subpar by his standards, anyway -- they looked at ground-force production: how to shift his feet more quickly to create more torque and to boost his spin on shorter throws and his distance on longer ones. One exercise they added, the Fogel drill, forces Brady to shuffle his feet for 30 seconds while simulating throws to dozens of targets. This makes Brady plant and pass faster. It has helped his balance and led to gains, even at 37, in his ability to deliver on the move.

"Tom is pushing back the aging process," says House. "There's no reason he can't do at 45 what he did at 25."

Brady started with House two years ago, shortly after the death of Tom Martinez, the quarterback guru who developed his mechanics in the first place. For years Brady carried a page of notes from Martinez in his wallet. He eventually transferred those reminders -- hips closed, elbow high -- to his BlackBerry. When Martinez died in 2012, after years of kidney and other ailments, Guerrero says it had a "spiritual impact" on Brady.

Hold up. Spiritual? Has anyone ever described Brady that way? "Our method relates to being physically fit, emotionally stable and spiritually nourished," says Guerrero. "Emotional stability allows you to have spiritual awareness. I always tell him and Gisele they're the most spiritual nonreligious people I know."

There's something else that Guerrero and Brady remind each other of all the time, a philosophy of sorts. It could also be interpreted as spiritual.

"Balance in all things."

Namaste.

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Like Brady, Tim Hasselbeck entered the NFL as a quarterback in 2000. At the combine that year he watched video of Brady, saw him with his shirt off, the 40-yard dash that started in slow motion. "Nothing special," he thought. "Pretty standard."

Hasselbeck went undrafted out of Boston College, played overseas and bounced around the NFL before becoming an ESPN analyst. Brady? He won his first 10 playoff games. He hoisted three Super Bowl trophies in his first four seasons as a starter and was named MVP in two of those games. He was league MVP twice, in 2007 and '10. Obviously not "pretty standard."

"This guy is year-round," Brady's trainer says. "No plays off. No days off. Everything is purposeful."

And yet the career arc hasn't been perfect. Since that hot start Brady is 8-8 in the postseason, including two losses in the Super Bowl to the underdog Giants and two to his greatest rival, Peyton Manning, in AFC title games. The back

end of his career has been defined, in many ways, by his ability to win without continuity among his offensive personnel (when Pro Bowl guard Logan Mankins was traded in August, it was accepted as the Patriots Way) and, largely, without star receivers (outside of Wes Welker, his wideouts have had a combined two Pro Bowl nods). His wife alluded to the latter in 2012 when, after the second Super Bowl loss to New York, she responded to a heckler with, "My husband cannot f----- throw the ball and catch the ball at the same time."

"What he's been able to accomplish there is nuts," says retired fullback Heath Evans, a former teammate turned NFL Network analyst. "There are always new linemen, new receivers, new position coaches. Change is constant."

Except change is only one constant for the Patriots. Brady is another. Coach Bill Belichick is a third. The fourth constant is success: In an era where, Brady notes, "everyone is meant to be equal," New England has had 14 straight winning seasons, the third-longest streak of the modern era. Those who associate Brady only with the rotating cast that he throws to or that blocks for him miss an important point. His support system -- his parents, his three sisters, his various personal coaches -- has remained consistent. "They're almost like his glam squad for football," says Fauria.

Same team. Same coach. "Invaluable," says Brady. "For us, too," says the Pats' owner, Robert Kraft. "He's like my fifth son."

The week after the Patriots fell to the Ravens in the 2013 AFC Championship Game, Brady showed up for workouts with his trainer, Gunnar Peterson, a Band-Aid still on his arm from some game scrape. "This guy is year-round," says Peterson, who has worked with the likes of Sylvester Stallone and Bruce Willis, and who took on Brady after the ACL tear. "No wasted movement. No plays off. No days off. Everything is purposeful. And that includes the people around him."

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Balance in all things, as Brady says.

He has countered that fire with lighter moments that have made him more relatable to teammates who made less money (or didn't marry supermodels, which is basically everyone). He didn't just gift his offensive linemen Uggs boots, he gifted everyone on the team.

He didn't just watch pranks and laugh. He engaged in them. He won them. He used to sit by the door to the quarterbacks' meeting room and knock Cassel's food out of his hands when he entered. The backup responded by filling Brady's Nikes with a chocolate protein shake. Brady then had the tires taken off Cassel's car, putting three of them in his locker and hiding the fourth -- at which point Belichick put a stop to what he called World War III. But Cassel had learned two valuable lessons. The first: Brady can be one of the boys. The second: Don't mess with guys who make more money than you.

Evans describes Brady as the "most humble superstar I've ever been around," and if that sounds convenient, he isn't saying that about Drew Brees or Shaun Alexander, superstar former teammates who happen to be two of his better friends. Brady's preparation, how he works, bolsters the way his teammates view him. He was maniacal. Still is.

He meets with Belichick three times a week to talk over the gameplan -- every coverage, every hot read, every play. He summons his backups an hour before the Saturday team meetings and goes over the entire call sheet, typically between 100 and 110 plays. Twice. He asks the QBs to arrive an hour early on gameday, too, then goes over everything again. Twice. "He has a great memory from all that," says Bill O'Brien, once Brady's offensive coordinator, now the coach of the Texans. "He can remember from eight years ago: left hash, toward the lighthouse, third play of the game. ... We'll look it up. He's always right."

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If every player is competitive, and most quarterbacks are meticulous, here's what makes Brady different: that approach, where traditional Chinese philosophy and advanced sports medicine meet a quarterback willing to try anything in order to play forever. The avocado ice cream approach to football, basically.

Take that diet. It's seasonal, which means he eats certain things in the winter that are considered "hot property" foods, like red meat. In the summer, when it's time for "cold property" foods, his diet is mostly raw. He subscribes to the 80-20 theory -- but it's not 80 percent healthy food, 20 percent unhealthy. It's 80 percent alkaline, 20 percent acidic. The idea, he says, is "to maintain balance and harmony through my metabolic system." That's why teammates always see him with hummus, raw snack bars packed with nutrients and what one teammate calls "that birdseed s---

." This is the same guy who once ate Christmas breakfast with the Evans family and quietly picked all the sausage out from his omelet.

Brady is faster and stronger. "But given where I started," he says, "I wouldn't say that's some great accomplishment."

Take his sleep patterns. Brady struggles to unwind after games and practices. He's still processing, thinking about what's next. So they added cognitive exercises at night to destimulate his brain, allowing him to get to sleep by 9 p.m. and wake up without an alarm.

Take his workouts. Brady does them on land, in sand, in water. He hardly ever lifts weights but works mainly with resistance bands.

Then there's the brain resiliency program. Brady underwent a battery of tests and a neuroscan a few years back, then had a program created to work out his brain the way he worked out his body. The various exercises help Brady to more quickly process information between plays, read defenses and make adjustments. They assist with his memory. They increase his peripheral vision and how far he can see downfield. "The body is a whole system," says Brady, "and that includes the brain. I'm lucky I haven't had many concussions -- maybe one I can remember. I'm training for if that happens. I'm building resiliency and staying sharp. I feel like that's really where my edge is."

"If we can keep his processing speed this high," says Guerrero, "then I don't care if he's 48."

The by-product of all this: Brady is faster and stronger than on the day he was drafted. He doesn't care if you believe that. "I am," he says. "I'm more durable, too. But given where I started, I wouldn't say that like it's some great accomplishment."

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Brady is on the phone. It's Tuesday morning, two days after the Patriots lost 26-21 in Green Bay. The streak is over. The playoffs loom, the top seed in the AFC is within reach. Brady and Guerrero have already gotten in a workout. Back to the routines.

For years, as Brady made football his singular obsession, everyone asked what he planned to do afterward. He never really knew. He wanted only to play football, to win championships. He never considered flying airplanes or running car dealerships or whatever it is athletes do when they no longer pursue what once defined them. He thought only about football and family. The closer he gets to 40, the more Brady tries to simplify, the more he relies on his routines. He doesn't have many hobbies. He likes to surf, but he's terrible at it. He likes to golf, but he forced himself in recent years to take it less seriously, which made it less fun. Hoyer watched Brady against the Packers, and he points to all the f-bombs captured on camera, the way he head-butted Rob Gronkowski, how much every play still meant.

"Since I met him, he married a supermodel, made millions of dollars and became internationally famous," says Troy Brown, another former teammate. "But I don't think he's changed that much."

Well, maybe a little. Brady is active on Facebook now, a new development. He recently posted his old résumé; under additional, he'd written, "Guided football team as starting quarterback to 1998 Big Ten Championship." He posted pictures of former backup Ryan Mallett carrying his pads.

He still wants to play forever, but he's come to realize that what has enabled him to play at such a high level for so long is what he wants to do after football too. That's why he opened his sports rehab center just over a year ago, why he recruited so many teammates to come by. (About half of them have, which perhaps has contributed to New England's improved roster health this season.) He still remembers the doctor who told him his knee would never be the same after the ACL tear, that he wouldn't be able to run around with his kids. "Which was all bulls---," he says. "That knee feels as good as my other knee."

He won't need a résumé for his next endeavor, only his body of work and his actual body, how it has held up over time. "I used to joke with Alex," says Brady, "one day, we have to go on the road. We have to teach people. This is what people really need to know."

He is presented with a scenario: Brady and his body coach/business partner on stage at some convention hall, dressed in white robes, packed crowd, merchandise tent, clothing and videos for sale, books jammed with testimonials for the quarterback turned life coach. "I don't know about the robes," Brady says, laughing, "but we do talk about it."

## DL Malcom Brown

# The Boston Globe

## **Patriots top draft pick Malcom Brown is intentionally grounded**

By Ben Volin GLOBE STAFF MAY 11, 2015

BRENHAM, Texas — Malcom Brown was a 6-foot-2-inch, 306-pound behemoth as a sophomore at Brenham High School back in 2010. And he was about to face the wrath of Margaret Agnew, a sweet little lady with a Texas twang who stood about a foot shorter and weighed nearly 200 pounds less.

Brown had moved in with the Agnew family that year. Growing up 20 miles outside of town, he wanted to live closer to school to make it easier to attend football practices. He also craved a loving family structure. His father was killed in a car crash when he was 4, and his mother, Barbara, struggled to provide for Malcom and his three brothers.

But Malcom was nowhere to be found that June day in 2010. He had attended Brenham's graduation to watch his older friends walk, and got separated from his group. Day turned to night and the Agnews hadn't heard from Malcom. They were worried sick.

When Malcom finally returned home that night, Margaret Agnew got very stern with him. He had to check in with his family and be more responsible.

"Malcom, it doesn't matter what anyone else does. You are responsible for you," Margaret told him. "You can't blame it on anybody else. I'm responsible for me."

Margaret added, "He really took that in. We didn't ground him or anything, because he never went anywhere. I think just the talking to was enough."

Brown's life begins anew when the Patriots introduce him to the media as the team's latest first-round draft pick. A humble, easygoing kid from southeast Texas who never had visited New England before arriving Thursday, Brown has lived up to his football hype every step of the way.

He earned five-star prospect status as a hulking nose tackle in high school, dominated Big 12 competition for three years at the University of Texas, and left school early to become a first-round draft pick.

Now the Patriots envision him wreaking havoc in the middle of the defensive line as Vince Wilfork's replacement. Former Colts president Bill Polian called Brown "the steal of the draft."

"We could tell as a freshman he would be a first-round draft choice, and no one thought he'd stay past his third year," said former Texas coach Mack Brown (no relation). "The day he walked on the field, he was a man."

But Brown's meteoric football journey may never have come to be if not for the embrace of the Agnew family. Margaret and Craig Agnew — Brown's defensive coordinator at Brenham — taught him about love, maturity, and responsibility.

### **Feeling at home**

As a senior in high school, Brown defied his coaches and refused to give up his cellphone during a meeting. When he had returned to the Agnews' home, Margaret had placed all of his clothes and belongings on the front porch, a sign that he had to follow the rules or get out.

Lesson learned.

“They took care of me,” Brown told the Austin American-Statesman last fall. “They taught me how a family is supposed to be.”

Now only 21 years old, Brown is a self-described “old soul” — married to his college sweetheart, Faith, and raising two daughters (4-year-old stepdaughter, Rayna, and babyayah, 9 months old). Brown doesn’t drink, and his Texas coaches never had to worry about him running around Austin’s 6th Street getting into trouble. When he’s not playing football, Brown likes to fish, play video games, watch vampire movies, and play the role of daddy.

“He wants four total, which I think that’s a testament to how much he loves kids,” Faith Brown said. “He does a really good job — when it’s football time, it’s football time. When it’s school time, it’s school time. When it’s family time, it’s family time. He’s just really good at getting into those roles when he’s supposed to.”

The Patriots didn’t draft Brown because he’s a mature family man, of course. They drafted him because, simply put, he’s a beast.

He was virtually unblockable as a four-year varsity nose tackle at Brenham, menacing many quarterbacks in his path, including Johnny Manziel. He’s now 6-2 and 320 pounds, but more of a pass rusher than a typical anchor-down nose tackle. Type Brown’s name into YouTube, and watch him chase down a wide receiver from behind, 31 yards down the field.

“I used to like to let the college coaches come watch us do conditioning because he would win every sprint,” said Glen West, Brenham’s head football coach. “And I’m not talking about linemen. He would win the sprints against everybody, because he ran so hard.”

Mack Brown recruited Malcom Brown hard as a sophomore, and by his junior year Malcom had committed to be a Longhorn.

“It became obvious as a sophomore, if he stayed away from the injuries and stayed motivated and stayed out of trouble, that he had definite potential to be an NFL player,” Craig Agnew said.

The motivation part was tough at first. Brown didn’t have a strong male role model in his life as a child, and he lacked direction. He actually quit the varsity football team as a freshman, but West and Agnew convinced him and his mother to give it another shot as a sophomore.

“I went to Coach Agnew and said, ‘This kid’s got something special. He’s a smart kid, he’s just had a bad environment,’ ” West said.

Brown grew up in Washington, a rural town about 20 miles outside of Brenham. Agnew and his son, Tyler, would drive Brown home from games every Friday night, then pick him up early on Saturday morning for practices. Eventually they thought, “Why doesn’t Malcom just stay over on Friday nights?”

After a few weeks, Brown wanted to stay over on Saturday nights, too, so he could attend church with the Agnews on Sunday. Then he wanted to stay over on Thursday night, too, so he could get to the football team breakfasts on Friday mornings.

Before his junior season, Brown told his mother and his uncle, Gerald, that he wanted to live with the Agnews full time.

“It wasn’t like we made him do anything. He asked if he could stay with us, he asked if he could go to church with us,” Margaret Agnew said. “His mother has some difficulties, and we were just really happy to help him out. If she’s there, she’s momma. We just try to fill in the gaps.”

## **Quick to impress**

The changes in Brown were immediate and noticeable. He turned into an A-student and made the honor roll as a senior. He spent his weekend nights hanging with Tyler Agnew around the house instead of running around town. He went on vacations with the Agnews to their ranch in New Mexico, or to visit Margaret's family in Dallas.

"Definitely saw Malcom mature," said Tim Cole, a linebacker at Texas and lifelong friend of Brown's. "When you don't have a father, you know right from wrong but sometimes you make mistakes. Malcom and Coach Agnew had a special connection. I think that really helped him mature his mind-set in life and school and things like that."

He also dedicated himself to football. While recruiting Brown, the Texas coaches told the Brenham coaches they were worried that Brown, already 306 pounds as a sophomore, would eat himself out of his potential.

"He instantly went to work on it, and he weighed 288 his junior and senior year," West said. "It was nothing to see him running in the heat of the day in July in Texas. He ran a six-minute mile for our conditioning test at 288 [pounds]. He'll do whatever he has to do, and that's what sets him apart and why he's a first-round draft pick."

Brown made an immediate impression on his teammates and coaches at Texas when he enrolled there the summer before his freshman year.

"By the time we got to August practice, he had already earned the respect of everybody in the locker room through his work ethic and toughness, which at a line position is pretty difficult to do," said Manny Diaz, formerly the defensive coordinator at Texas and now in the same position at Mississippi State. "You wouldn't think a freshman would challenge some older guys to finish their lifts or runs, but he brought that instantly."

Brown earned a spot in the defensive line rotation as a true freshman, and started all 13 games as a sophomore. He didn't quite dazzle during his first two seasons, compiling just two sacks and 12 tackles for loss as a sophomore, but the Texas coaches loved having him around and knew he still had tremendous potential.

"Malcom was never in the office for anything negative," Mack Brown said. "He's a very upbeat, positive young guy that took school very important. Never late for a meeting, never in any trouble in any kind, he was never around drugs. Just the perfect student-athlete for us."

He met Faith in a freshman class, and she provided the love and support he was missing from the Agnew family. He quickly assumed the role of father for Rayna, and spent his days changing diapers at 5 a.m., going to class, then practicing football. They scraped by on his football stipends and her odd jobs. They got married last May, and had Mayah last August during two-a-days.

"He was so excited about it, just like, 'Ah man, it's a great feeling to be a father, I can be there for my daughter,'" said Cole, his best friend. "He's one of those guys, it kind of clicked for him earlier than most people. He found the special girl for him that makes him happy, and he was like, 'This is who I want to spend the rest of my life with.' And it's worked out."

When new Texas coach Charlie Strong arrived for the 2014 season, he had discipline issues with the players from the Mack Brown regime, as is common in college. His message to the players who didn't want to fall in line: "Why can't you be more like Malcom?"

"I said that because he played hard," Strong said. "And if you watch him, his game tape, he was one of those guys, even if he took a play off, he felt guilty about doing it. He never wanted to let the team down."

## **'A unique skill set'**

Brown is serious about his football. He loved it so much that during his junior season, he would sit in on the coaches' game-plan meetings on Monday mornings to get a headstart on preparation, even though Monday was his one off day of the week.

"The first time he brought Faith home, he said, 'Will you tell her it's OK that I dream about football?' " Margaret Agnew said. "I said, 'Faith, ballerinas dream about dancing, singers dream about singing. Malcom's a football player, he dreams about football.' "

Brown made a jump his junior season, compiling 6½ sacks and 15 tackles for loss and becoming a finalist for the 2014 Outland Trophy and 2014 Nagurski Award. Coaches rave about his quickness, knee bend, footwork, and power, as Brown is more of an interior pass rusher than a Wilfork-like run stuffer. He can play inside or outside, 1-gap or 2-gap. West said everyone in Brenham was "extremely disappointed" when Brown ran a 5.05 in the 40 at the Combine in February because they'd seen him run in the 4.7s many times.

"He's a speed-and-quickness guy," Strong said. "If he needs to play the double team he can play it, but he's not just an anchor guy that's going to hold down the middle. Some guys that big, you have to create plays for them. But he can go 1-on-1 and create his own plays."

"It's a unique skill set. To have a big guy like that that can still be productive rushing the passer, not just a run plugger, is a huge commodity," Diaz added.

Before the draft, Patriots defensive coordinator Matt Patricia went down to Texas to work out Brown and linebacker Jordan Hicks, and came away impressed with Brown's physical skills as well as his football IQ. Naturally, Brown watched the draft with 70 friends and loved ones in Austin instead of soaking up the red-carpet experience in Chicago.

"He's one of those guys that understands ball," Strong said. "You can put him on the board and he can give it back to you. Smart, tough, and dependable, that's what Malcom is."

Now he's a Patriot, too, with the goal of manning the middle of the defensive line for the next five or six years, at least. He doesn't have to scrape by anymore, as he will sign a contract worth \$7.3 million over four years.

But his loved ones say money and fame won't change him. Brown already has everything he needs in his wife, two daughters, and a career playing football.

"He's not a material guy. He wasn't at all wanting anything from us except attention, instruction, discipline, and love," Margaret Agnew said. "He's not into the hype. He's a family man — changes diapers and takes care of his girls. He's just Malcom. That's what I want everyone to know."

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## T Trent Brown



### **Pats' plan to protect Brady's blind side: Meet NFL's largest player**

Mike Reiss

Aug 14, 2018

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. – The player with the inside track to handle one of football's greatest responsibilities -- protecting quarterback Tom Brady's blind side at left tackle -- is easily judged by his physical appearance.

That's because Trent Brown, listed on the roster at 6-foot-8 and 380 pounds, is the biggest player in the NFL.

But ask Brown to sit down and talk about something that means the most to him, it soon becomes clear that focusing only on his size (he said he is actually 6-9 and weighs 370 pounds) and the stereotypes that might accompany it, blocks those from seeing a different side of him.

The big guy has a big heart.

"He does, and it's almost to his detriment. I have to remind him often times that he can't save people who don't want to be saved," Tiffany Brown said from Albany, Georgia, where she and husband Reginald raised the NFL player who wears a size 18 cleat. "I tell him, 'You have to be careful of people taking advantage of you.' He's a sweetheart."

Based on the way he physically mauls defenders on the field, those words might be the last thing one would expect to hear about the 25-year-old Brown.

But mention the role that Reginald and Tiffany have played in his life, and he flashes a disarming smile of compassion.

"I was, for sure, over-blessed before I even opened my eyes on this earth. God, for sure, blessed me with two angels as parents," he said. "I really, really, really don't feel like there's anything I can do to repay them, but I'm for sure going to try to give back those blessings that they've done for me."

Reginald and Tiffany say they don't expect a thing, and that their blessing is watching their son live his dream while remaining humble. A professional football player? It wasn't part of their wildest imagination when they had their youngest of two boys first try gymnastics, at the local YMCA, when he was 3 years old.

Then, not long after Trenton Jacoby Brown enrolled in elementary school, there was an aggressive growth spurt. In the fourth grade, he wore a size 10 shoe. By the time he went to middle school, Reginald and Tiffany were shopping in the men's department for his clothes.

On the football field, that meant the youngster who first played quarterback and running back would be moved to the offensive line. And blending in with friends his age was a challenge at times, which is why he often played with those older than him.

"As he was growing up, he was always the big kid, bigger than all his classmates and more often than not, bigger than his teammates," said Tiffany, who at 5-foot-7 played volleyball in high school and later worked in education. "Sometimes we reminded the adults around him, he's still a child, no matter how tall, how big."

That wasn't a problem at home, where Trent and his brother Reggie Jr. knew that there were two non-negotiable rules to follow: Be home for a family dinner each night, and set the table. Trent might have picked up a culinary tip along the way, as Tiffany says, "He's a pretty darn good cook. There's not much he can't cook."

Family bonds can be strengthened at the dinner table, and it was there, among other places, that Reginald -- who is in his 25th year on the police force in Albany and used to work security at Hugh Mills Stadium when former Patriots receiver Deion Branch played football there -- would often pass along words of wisdom.

At 6-foot-7, Reginald is an imposing figure himself, having played professional basketball in China. Having that background in sports might explain why Trent seemingly had some type of ball in his hands since his earliest days; he was born a few weeks early and still measured 22 inches while weighing 6 pounds, 9 ounces.

"I always believed in him, had confidence in him even when he didn't think he could succeed at something, backed him 100 percent," Reginald said. "But I also held him accountable. When it wasn't so good, I told him the truth."

The message was often straightforward: Always do your best. People are always watching. Always try to be a great person and help others.

On the football field, Brown wasn't a highly touted prospect entering the NFL, slipping to the seventh round of the 2015 draft after two years as a part-time starter at the University of Florida. Before that, he spent two years at Georgia Military College.

A year of development mostly behind the scenes with the San Francisco 49ers as a rookie in 2015 laid the foundation for him to break through the following season as a full-time starter – 15 games at right tackle, one at left tackle. He kept the job into 2017 before a shoulder injury ended his season after 10 games.

Then came a confluence of events in March of 2018 that landed him in New England. First, the Patriots lost starting left tackle Nate Solder in free agency to the New York Giants, then the 49ers – who have Joe Staley locked in at left tackle -- drafted Notre Dame offensive tackle Mike McGlinchey with their first-round pick. With Brown entering the final year of his contract, the 49ers were willing to trade him and a fifth-round pick (No. 143) in exchange for a third-rounder (No. 95).

Even with the Patriots selecting Georgia left tackle Isaiah Wynn with their highest first-round pick (No. 23), Brown has been the top left tackle since his arrival, building a quick rapport with Brady.

"Tom is the coolest guy. It's really great to see somebody with all the accolades being the way he is, so down to earth," he said, adding that it makes him that much more motivated to ensure Brady's blind side is well protected.

While Brown's primary experience in the NFL is at right tackle, he relays that past experience at left tackle -- going back to junior college and then in two games with the 49ers -- has given him confidence and made it a "pretty easy transition." Also, having played in three different offensive systems in the NFL, including Chip Kelly's up-tempo attack in 2016, sparks his relief that his playing style fits them all.

As for the topic that seems to follow him everywhere -- his uncommon size -- he fully embraces it.

"God blessed me with size and ability. If I didn't have it, I wouldn't be here," he says. "I look at everything as a blessing. God doesn't make any mistakes."

He's the big man with a big heart for his family, ready to carry out one of the biggest responsibilities in the NFL, in large part due to lessons learned from his parents.

"I wouldn't be here without them," he says. "I can for sure say that. Without a doubt."

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## DL Adam Butler



### **Plan A working out for Pats' Adam Butler**

By RICH GARVEN

Sep 12, 2017 at 7:17 PM

FOXBORO — Adam Butler was a big, fast and strong youngster growing up in Northeast Texas, so, of course, he played football. And, of course, he dreamed of one day playing in the NFL.

Butler's dad, Clarence, who has since retired from the Air Force after putting in 25 years of service, and his mom, Kim, a group nursing and facility administrator, urged the largest of their three children to chase those dreams.

"They told me I could do it," Butler said Monday.

They also told him to have a Plan B. So Butler made sure he excelled in the classroom as well as on the field, making the honor roll and earning all-district academic recognition while attending Duncanville High outside of Dallas.

The decorated student-athlete earned a scholarship to Vanderbilt, where he graduated with a degree in environmental communication. It's a major he created by combining environmental science and communications studies.

Initially interested in working in the environmental field in some capacity, Butler has since drafted Plan C.

"Now I want to be a public speaker, especially to the African-American youth to let them know that their dreams can come true just like mine," he said.

You remember those dreams? Plan A?

They were realized when Butler made the Patriots' 53-man roster earlier this month as an undrafted rookie. The 6-foot-5, 300-pound defensive tackle made his NFL debut Thursday as the Patriots opened the season with a 42-27 loss to the Kansas City Chiefs.

"I always think about my childhood and I always think about telling my parents that I wanted to do this for a living," Butler said. "And to actually live it — I can't, I don't even know how to put it into words. It's kind of like hitting the lottery. You hope, you hope and then, boom, there it is."

Butler said he got chills from running out of the inflatable tunnel at Gillette Stadium for the first time in a game that meant something in the standings. His eyes lit up at the fireworks and his ears buzzed from the sound of nearly 66,000 fans roaring their approval.

The Chiefs threw a big bucket of cold water on the festivities by evening's end, but not before Butler accorded himself well. He made a solo tackle, twice forced quarterback Alex Smith into rushed throws and drew a holding penalty while playing 21 defensive snaps (30 percent), mainly in third-down, pass-rushing situations.

That capped a week that saw Butler join offensive lineman Cole Croston, tight end Jacob Hollister and linebacker Harvey Langi as undrafted rookies that survived the cut.

"It's been such a humbling experience," Butler said. "I love being around guys like Tom Brady and stuff like that. I'm just glad to be here."

The Patriots have a knack for unearthing unpolished and undrafted gems and they may have found another one in Butler, especially considering his lack of experience on defense.

Butler played left tackle for his final two years of high school and was shifted to guard-center as a freshman at Vanderbilt. After redshirting, he switched sides and moved to defensive tackle during spring workouts.

“At that point I was just willing to take any job that was available to me because in the past I didn’t get those opportunities as a young guy,” Butler said. “So at that point I was just like, ‘Whatever you got for me, bring it on.’ I just wanted to get on the field so I could at least have a shot at what I’m doing now and it just all worked out.”

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## The Boston Globe

### **Patriots rookie Adam Butler has more to tackle than football**

By Brad Almquist  
OCTOBER 3, 2017

FOXBOROUGH — Chat with Patriots rookie Adam Butler long enough, and you’ll receive an education beyond football.

Ask him about his college major, and he will lecture you on plate tectonics and global climate change. Ask him about his hobbies, and he will explain that his love for fishing stems from the thrill of catching something unknown. Ask him about his aspirations beyond football, and he will guide you through his plan to motivate America’s youth.

After going undrafted out of Vanderbilt, Butler earned a spot on the Patriots’ 53-man roster last month, then started at defensive tackle in his second game. He grew up with a dream to reach this point, but he always had a Plan B.

When Butler was 9 years old, his parents, Kim and Clarence, had him create a “vision board.” On the cardboard template, Butler wrote down his goals and areas where he wanted to improve, from earning better grades to cleaning his room more frequently.

Pasted across the top was his ultimate goal: play in the NFL.

“You get a feel for where they are in life,” Clarence said. “Wherever they need help or something needs tweaking, the vision board helped shape and molded the ideals in our children.”

Despite Butler’s young age, Clarence, a 21-year Air Force veteran, made sure his son worked toward the goal he outlined, regardless of the inevitable obstacles.

One of the first came during a football game in middle school. Butler grew so frustrated with sitting on the bench that he removed his pads and walked off the sidelines during the game. His parents were equally frustrated, but they wouldn’t allow their son to quit. He was moved to the B team, an unfortunate consolation, but it meant his ultimate goal was still intact.

Once high school came around, he grew into his body and blossomed into a star, earning team MVP honors as a senior at Duncanville High School, a large suburban school in Dallas. He received roughly six college offers, Vanderbilt being the most prominent. After meeting with Vanderbilt coach James Franklin, and knowing what type of top-notch education he would receive, Butler committed.

Vanderbilt served as a springboard to the NFL, but it also introduced Butler to many of the ideas that now shape him.

During his freshman year, he took a seminar on volcanoes in human history that piqued his interest. The class meshed his compassion for others with an interest in the environment.

A self-proclaimed conspiracy theorist, he wanted to learn more about foreign subjects that may have been missed in his earlier curriculum. He created an interdisciplinary major called “environmental communication.”

“As you get older, you start to learn more about the truth, and I guess that’s why it is interesting,” Butler said. “The most exciting thing about a volcano to me is that they explode in different styles. The ones that don’t explode that big are called an infusive volcano, like Hawaiian-type volcanoes, where the lava just oozes out at a steady pace.

“But then you have, like, Mount Saint Helens, where it blows the top off the volcano. There is a big cloud of ash that comes down, and it will literally incinerate people.”

Between playing football in the SEC and studying at one of America's top universities, most of his time was spent on the field or in the classroom. His rigorous class schedule occasionally forced Butler to miss parts of practice, and vice versa.

"He would take classes that are challenging but he would take them anyway," said Dan Morgan, an associate dean in Vanderbilt's College of Arts and Sciences. "Perhaps his story of making the Patriots is a good example of that. He wasn't drafted but he was willing to put in the work it takes."

Butler spent a summer in Nashville working as an environmental remediation, education, and outreach intern. He prepared for life without football while maintaining his goal of playing in the NFL.

A switch from center to defensive tackle after his redshirt season augmented the possibility. Butler molded himself into a force at his new position, recording four sacks and 28 hurries in his senior year.

He went undrafted but found a lifeline when Bill Belichick called. The Patriots coach relayed a simple message: It doesn't matter how you got here; it's what you do when you're here.

Butler impressed throughout training camp, clogging running lanes and creating push that developed into sacks. He was Pro Football Focus's highest-graded Patriot in two of the four preseason games. He didn't play in the fourth, signifying he would make the roster.

He did, then started in his second career game over veteran Alan Branch. Butler has played in 45.7 percent of snaps through four games, the most of any Patriots rookie.

He feels he has much more to prove.

"I don't want to get the big head," Butler said. "Me feeling backed up into a corner, me feeling underrated helps me push harder."

Despite attaining the original goal he outlined as a 9-year-old on a cardboard canvas, Butler has ambitions that extend beyond the field.

His environmental communication degree has inspired him to own a farm and grow crops someday. He also plans to earn a master's degree with the hope of becoming an athletic director.

Butler is socially conscious — he was one of 18 Patriots to kneel during the national anthem last week — and wants to use his platform to motivate African-American youth.

"If you look at me, I have flat feet, I am not just ripped," Butler said. "I have somewhat of an athletic body, but someone like me, they would probably say, 'You are flat-footed. You are clumsy.' I kind of received that coming up as a child. I want to share with other children that 'Yes, you can.'"

Back in Northeast Texas, Clarence is reminded of his son's journey every time he walks into his room.

Butler's parents had him update his vision board every four or five years. The ultimate goal never changed. His most recent board, made in high school, still stands on his desk across from the same Muhammad Ali and Michael Jordan posters that have always adorned his bedroom walls.

Clarence recently placed Patriots memorabilia next to the vision board, a reminder of what Butler has achieved and who he is still becoming.

"It brings everything full circle from the time he started playing football to now," Clarence said. "Expect a great humanitarian to develop out of his football character."

"We have a lot to look forward to in the future with Adam, being able to give back and add positive motivation to society post-football. You will see a great, big-hearted person give back to the world."

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## S Patrick Chung



### **The wristband that links Patrick Chung, 10-year-old battling cancer**

Mike Reiss

Aug 15, 2018

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. -- The 10-year-old boy with the charming smile, colorful hat and heavy black brace on his right leg waited at the rope that surrounds the New England Patriots' practice fields, leaning into crutches to keep him upright.

Jack Berry of Missoula, Montana, wasn't supposed to be here. He didn't want to be here. But everything changed so suddenly about five weeks ago with a life-altering medical diagnosis: osteosarcoma, a solid tumor of the bone.

Yet, as veteran safety Patrick Chung approached him, the 30-year-old was uplifted by the youngster's presence.

"He wasn't down. He was smiling. He was happy. He didn't seem sad about it," Chung recalled. "For a kid, that's hard. As adults, sometimes things happen and we complain, it's a natural thing. But for a kid to not complain, and keep smiling, that goes a long way with me."

Chung offered his football gloves. In turn, he received a blue-and-green "Jack Strong" band.

Chung accepted, but with one request: Please sign it.

As parents Cooper and Kate Berry watched the exchange unfold, they savored it as a moment of light in what has been a time of chaos and fear for their family of five.

"Instead of him just doling out autographs, he took the time to say, 'Wait, I want this kid's autograph.' That was my favorite part -- that Patrick Chung wanted Jack's autograph," Kate Berry said.

Chung promised he would wear the band until it snapped. Two days later in the Patriots' preseason opener against the Washington Redskins, as Jack watched from club suite 11, it was still on Chung's left wrist.

"People think we just play football, but how I was brought up is that we all bleed red, no one is better than anyone. When people are going through things, you want to help them," Chung explained.

Jack has been going through a lot, and this week has been especially tough, with another round of chemotherapy treatments at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston. This wasn't the way he expected to be spending his summer. He had planned to be doing all his favorite things -- playing hockey, mountain biking, hiking, whitewater rafting -- before returning home to the triple bunk bed he shares with brothers David (age 8) and Patrick (5).

On July 11, not long after he was dropped off at summer camp in Missoula, where he was excited to embark on a two-day backpacking trip, Jack felt a piercing pain in his right leg, almost as if he was hit by a baseball bat.

Kate had just returned to the family's home about 15 minutes away when she received the call from a camp counselor. She quickly returned and took Jack for X-rays at an urgent care facility. When the doctor entered the room to relay the results, Kate, who is a nurse, could tell immediately by the look on his face that something was terribly wrong.

The diagnosis was osteosarcoma.

"One of the things we've asked doctors is, 'How does this happen?' We've lived the healthiest life. They just said, 'Bad luck, that's it.' The likelihood of it is like one in a million," Kate said.

The Berrys then had to decide where Jack would receive medical care, with Seattle, Salt Lake City and Denver among the options. They chose Massachusetts, in part because of the world-renowned Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and Boston Children's Hospital, but also because that's where they would have the most family support.

Cooper grew up in Simsbury, Connecticut, which is located about 12 miles outside of Hartford, and his brother, two aunts, one uncle and a godmother all reside in Massachusetts, as does a friend who volunteered use of a van. The family has been staying at the home of one of Cooper's aunts since arriving in town about one month ago.

A family connection also is what led them to Patriots practice last week, as Cooper's brother, Will, had coached Patriots assistant Steve Belichick in high school. On a 100-degree day with thick humidity, Jack watched practice from the family and friends VIP area, met some cheerleaders and waited along the rope with others in the spot that coaches and players walk past on their way from the fields to the locker room.

Bill Belichick, among others, stopped by to say hello, and Jack didn't mention that back home in Montana, most teammates on his hockey team are Denver Broncos fans. Then there was the meeting with Chung.

"He was more talkative and friendly than I expected out of a professional sports player," Jack said, smiling.

Added Cooper, "We were in the 'no autograph' section, no pictures, so we clearly weren't trying. He handed over his gloves and said, 'Do you want me to autograph them?' He didn't have a pen, so he went down to where everyone was clamoring for autographs, took a Sharpie, and brought it back to sign. They just made a connection."

The connection was highlighted the following day, when Chung held a news conference and still had the "Jack Strong" band around his left wrist at the dais.

The next day, when the Patriots hosted the Redskins in the preseason opener and Chung made two tackles on the opening drive, Jack took note that Chung -- whose jersey he purchased at the team's Pro Shop before the game -- was still wearing it.

"I was really surprised, because a few times people have said they are going to wear a band and then it never really follows through," Jack said.

Chung, who has a 7-year-old son Taj, received a token of appreciation from the Berrys a few days later when a "Jack's Army" T-shirt was delivered to him after practice.

"Jack's Army" is the name Kate's co-workers in the neonatal intensive care unit came up with to answer Kate's call for support, and they bought screen printers to make the T-shirts in their homes. Among others, "Jack's Army" includes family, doctors inspiring them, Cooper's fellow firefighters -- who selflessly keep picking up his work shifts -- hockey teammates from the Missoula Bruins sending countless videos of their shaved heads, coaches who shipped his No. 84 road jersey to be by his bedside, and now Chung.

Of his meeting with Jack at practice, Chung explained that he sensed something special about him. Specifically, his positive outlook and resiliency stood out.

Cooper and Kate, who first met as students at the University of Montana, have been touched by Chung's gesture.

"His kindness was so sweet," Cooper said. "And then you watch his highlight reel and it's so fierce."

As it turns out, Chung and Jack are linked in another way, with Chung set to celebrate his 31st birthday on Aug. 19, and Jack turning 11 on Aug. 20.

By that point, Jack will have been through two rounds of chemotherapy since arriving in Boston. The family is anticipating being in town through at least April, with his medical care including learning to walk on a prosthetic right leg after a rare rotationplasty surgery, according to Cooper.

Prior to the second round of chemotherapy this week, Jack said, "I feel a lot better than I did, but I still feel pretty nervous about what's coming up. It does seem so big still."

It is, with an empathetic gesture by his new favorite football player providing a ray of light in hopes of easing the burden.

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## DB Keion Crossen



### **Patriots cornerback Keion Crossen never let himself quit**

By Mark Daniels

Posted Sep 8, 2018 at 9:23 AM

FOXBORO — Kerosene lanterns lined the living room floor. They left a distinct, terrible smell in the small two-bedroom house, but it was all the family had to keep warm on those rare cold North Carolina nights.

It's what Mark Speir noticed when he first walked in.

The Western Carolina coach went to the home in January of 2014 — a small house in Garysburg, population 1,000. Keion Crossen wasn't even sure the coach would show. A surprise snowstorm hit and nearly shut down the area. The family didn't have heat, so those lanterns were all had to keep warm. They were hard times, for sure. It was nights like this that made Crossen mature, and stay focused.

Speir sat down and Crossen told him his story. He explained how he'd wake up at 5 a.m. to catch the bus. There was only one high school in their county and the ride was anywhere from 45 to 90 minutes. He told him his hopes, dreams and struggles. He was a senior at Northampton County High School and had no scholarship offers to play football.

"Then he told me he wanted to be a preacher," Speir said. "The 'it' factor just pops out with Keion. At that time, we offered him, because he's a federal financial qualifier, we offered him a partial [scholarship]. After the first year, we put him on full."

Crossen just wanted a chance to prove he belonged on the football field, a chance to make something of himself and one day, heat that small house the proper way. He could've failed. Maybe he should've. It would've been easy for Crossen, a rookie on the Patriots, to give up.

That was just never his style.

"It's a mentality, man. You sink or you float," said Crossen, now 22. "The thing about it, I was always told, if you quit one thing, you're going to quit everything — especially when it gets hard. I always tell myself, it don't last forever, but if you can make it through this rough situation then you can make it through anything in life."

No offers

George Privott knew Crossen was special and a rare breed — a Division-1 athlete from Garysburg. He just needed a chance, so during the summer of 2013, the pair hit the road.

Together, Crossen and his coach from Northampton County High School traveled around North Carolina. The goal was simple — prove this teenager deserved a scholarship to play football. They traveled to football camps at North Carolina State, University of North Carolina and East Carolina. There were also stops at UNC-Pembroke and Guilford College.

Crossen ran faster than most. He jumped farther than most. He wasn't given a single offer.

"He'd get there, run 4.4s. He'd broad jump like 10-3's and 10-4's. Then they'd do 1-on-1 drills and he'd shut his guy down all through the thing," Privott recalled. "When I took him to [East Carolina]... he shut down this guy in 1-on-1s and it was somebody they were really eyeing. They offered him to be a preferred walk-on. Everywhere he went — N.C. State, Carolina, East Carolina — all wanted him to be a preferred walk-on."

The problem wasn't with Crossen's athleticism. It was that he was a 140-pound option quarterback/defensive back. He was too small, they said. The problem is you can't measure heart.

Crossen always had it. He learned about hard work when his father would wake him and sister up at 4 a.m. on the weekends to run at the local track. By the time Privott took over as the head coach, Crossen's work ethic became legendary.

The coach's favorite story is the one where he drove by the school's football field on a day where he canceled practice.

"He was the only one running 100-yard sprints by himself," Privott said. "That's some stuff right there that you just can't [teach]. Everybody else is gone. They're probably going home partying or what not, but he's out there committed and running 100-yard sprints by himself on the field. That's just the type of kid he was."

Putting on a show

A Pro Day wasn't enough for college coaches to offer him a scholarship, but it was enough to get him drafted in the NFL.

That was the plan all along by his agent, Lindsay Crook at MBK Sports Management. A former player at Cincinnati, Crook watched film and crunched some of Crossen's testing numbers. The analytics said he profiled as someone who should be drafted.

The problem wasn't his weight anymore. It was that he was barely on the NFL's radar. That's why Crook ended up getting Crossen into Wake Forest's Pro Day on March 13.

"Strategically, we thought about it," Crook said. "They had a couple of good guys as well. They had Duke Ejirofor (sixth round) and Jessie Bates, the safety who was drafted in the second round to the Bengals. We knew there would be a lot of exposure there."

In front of 40 scouts representing 29 NFL teams, Crossen went to work. Crook could hear the "oohs" and "aahs" from the crowd every time the corner ran or jumped. His 4.32 40-yard dash would've tied for first among all cornerbacks at the NFL Combine that year. His 39.5 vertical would've been second and his broad jump (10'11) and 3-cone-drill (6.67) third.

Crossen was in meetings with various NFL teams for three hours after the Pro Day. Instead of being elated, Crossen was unhappy with his performance. While preparing for that day, Crossen ran a 4.25 40-yard dash at Western Carolina.

"Before he ran, he was like, 'I'm legitimately trying to break John Ross' record (4.22). When he found out his time, he was legitimately upset he didn't," Crook said. "He didn't run well. He didn't run his best. He was flying, but he kind of had a little stumble out of the gate. He was generally upset he wasn't the fastest guy to ever do it."

"Yeah, I wanted to break the 40-yard dash record," Crossen admitted. "But, I still did what I had to do at the Pro Day."

He's right. The Patriots selected him with the 243rd pick in the seventh round. Following the draft, New England player personnel director Nick Caserio said Crossen put himself on their radar at that Wake Forest Pro Day.

"He showed up on a big stage just from a workout perspective," Caserio said. "[He] really blew it out of the water."

Summer in Foxboro

Gillette Stadium is a quiet place in June, once players break for the summer. The locker room's empty, so are the meeting rooms. Only concerts fill the stadium. Otherwise, you can hear a pin drop in the hallways.

This is where Crossen spent this summer.

He went back to Garysburg for one weekend before returning to Foxboro by himself. He trained and watched film over and over again. They say it takes 10,000 hours to become world-class in any field. Crossen needed to get his hours in.

"Home is great, but there's not much there. Obviously, the goal is to be a successful athlete and football player, but I also want to get my family in a better situation," Crossen said. "I had to work. I put a lot of work in. There's always this thing about 10,000 hours. If you put in 10,000 hours, you'll become the best at your craft. You always put in more time, but I always try to meet that goal."

"If I can put in 10,000 hours at my craft whether it's watching film or studying other defensive backs that are in this league, successful and highly respectful. That's who I want to become like, strive to be and be better than. You've got to put in the work to get the results."

When Speir called Crossen to check in, the rookie told his college coach that he refused to have any regrets. In the end, it paid off when he made the Patriots' 53-man roster.

"That was classic Keion. That's just how he is," Speir said. "He'll be that way as long as he's with the Patriots or in the NFL. That's his DNA. He's had every reason to fail and he hasn't failed yet. He had every reason to fail in the NFL and just be excited to be there. He wanted more."

When Crossen told him he made the team, Speir told him to "buy his mama some heat."

Maybe they won't need those kerosene lanterns anymore.

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## FB James Develin

# The Boston Globe

### **Secret's out: James Develin is a Pro Bowler**

By Jim McBride  
DECEMBER 20, 2017

FOXBOROUGH — James Develin had to keep a secret.

Develin's agent, James Ulrich, had set up a workout with the Florida Tuskers of the United Football League but there was a catch. The former standout defensive lineman at Brown was switching positions.

"He just said, 'Don't tell them you've never played fullback before,'" Develin said with a laugh.

Keeping that little secret or telling that little white lie was no problem for Develin. Fresh off a one-game stint with the Oklahoma City Yard Dawgz of the Arena League, he was back home trying to land an engineering job.

So, he put those résumés on hold and hopped on a flight to Orlando to continue building his football résumé.

"And things worked out," Develin said. "It's kind of a funny story now."

It's been quite a journey for Develin since that 2010 tryout in central Florida. After completing the season with the Tuskers (yes, he still has some of his memorabilia from that team), he landed in Cincinnati. He spent the final five games of 2010 and all of 2011 on the Bengals' practice squad before being released.

His next stop was back in New England, where he spent most of 2012 on the practice squad but has pretty much been a mainstay on offense ever since — not including 2015 when he spent the season on injured reserve.

Develin has won a pair of Super Bowls in New England and Tuesday earned his first Pro Bowl nod.

"It's cool to kind of look back on things," he said Wednesday. "It's definitely a proud journey of mine and something I will look back on with fond memories. But we have a lot of football here left, so the focus is definitely on these next two weeks getting two wins and carrying on into the playoffs."

The recognition is validation for Develin's commitment to hard work and perseverance. There were a number of times over the last seven years when he could have given up and fallen back on his Ivy League degree. Doing that, however, would have haunted him the way he haunts defenders who try to get in his way of clearing a path for tailbacks.

"It was a dream of mine," said Develin, who's only gotten his hand on the ball six times this season — all receptions — but gets them on opponents on every snap. "And I knew if I had never given it a shot, I would regret it. So, just from hard work and being in the right place at the right time and stuff like that, anything's possible."

Develin said the one fullback he tried to emulate was former Eagle and Patriot Kevin Turner. Develin grew up an Eagles fan and attended just one game growing up. In that game, Turner, who died in 2016 after battling ALS, made a great catch and Develin always remembered it.

Hard work has been Develin's hallmark at every stop along the journey. One of the first people to acknowledge Develin's Pro Bowl berth was receiver Andrew Hawkins. The two played together in Cincinnati and briefly in New England this summer.

"Was known for being the 1st one in the facility (by 5 am) & getting 3 hour [hardcore] lifts in before & after everyone left," Hawkins tweeted. "Never got his opp & was cut. He is now a pro bowl fullback & 2-time SB champ."

Develin confirmed Hawkins's accounts Wednesday afternoon, appropriately enough, after a lifting session.

“Oh yeah,” he said.

Matthew Slater, himself a seven-time Pro Bowler, had the highest praise for Develin, also a core special teamer.

“I can honestly say [that in] 10 years of pro football, I’ve never had a better teammate. And there’s no question about that. You talk about a guy that’s unselfish and does everything the right way. To see him get that honor, we’re all just thrilled for him.”

Count Bill Belichick, who gave him his shot here, among his biggest fans.

“I think it’s great,” said the coach. “He has the last couple of years fallen into a very consistent and productive role in the kicking game and offensively. His playtime has increased. His production has increased . . . whenever you see James, he’s working.”

As happy as Develin is to be selected to the Pro Bowl, it’s a game he hopes he never plays in. He’s got bigger dreams — another Super Bowl berth.

“That’s the ultimate goal and that’s what we’re working for,” he said.

No need to keep that secret.

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## QB Danny Etling



### **Danny Etling's Journey to the NFL**

By Crissy Froyd

Jun 21, 2018, 9:00am CDT

There are 38 seconds left on the clock.

The scoreboard reads 21-17 in Camping World Stadium. It's fourth-down and it's the last play LSU has to keep its hopes alive for the title of 2018 Citrus Bowl Champions. The snap is off from Will Clapp. Danny Etling looks to his right, and the ball is just off the fingertips of tight end Foster Moreau.

It's all over in a painfully winnable game that just barely slipped away.

Etling sits on the bench with his head down. The camera pulls away to show Notre Dame in victory formation. The clock ticks down from twenty seconds and then to zero as the Fighting Irish storm the field.

Etling looks up for a moment. He's in a daze. A chapter in his life has just slammed shut in an unceremonious way. Not at all the way he had planned it out. This is not how it was supposed to end.

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The Danny Etling story begins in small town Indiana. A place called Terre Haute that you've probably never heard of unless you're a native to the state.

It's the day before a big game and the South Vigo Braves are in the midst of a bit of a dilemma on special teams.

"It was my junior year and it was my first year playing. I played kicker and was trying to beat out a senior for the position," Adam Kahn says. "So one day in walk-throughs, the day before the game, the coach had me and the other kicker try five field goals. The starter at the time missed the first few, but I came in and hit every one of them."

Head coach Mark Raetz breathes a sigh of relief. The underdog has unexpectedly bested his starter, but he's got a kicker he can feel good about putting in tomorrow's contest.

Curiously, there's one person standing at the edge of the field who looks even happier than Raetz. It's Etling.

"Just seeing Danny get so pumped on the sidelines and running around getting everyone fired up was awesome," Kahn said. "You know, he was the most popular guy on the team and everyone supported him."

Danny doesn't care about status though. One guy making an improvement, regardless of how small, is a win for the whole team.

"So for him to do the same for me meant a lot to me as both a close friend and a teammate."

There's a reason why Etling was so loved and admired in Terre Haute. He set a standard of excellence with a football first mentality. Absolutely nothing was able to come between the high school signal caller and the pigskin.

"From the start, the guy was dedicated," Kahn said. "If we were going to hang out, he was going to work out first. When we all went on spring break, he was doing drills at the beach. If it was the offseason, he'd do some Sunday throwing with guys on the team. Just always doing something to make sure each day he got a little better."

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In 2017, Etling's final season as an LSU quarterback, fans and analysts alike saw an average athlete who would quietly fade into the background of sports history just as soon as he walked off the field.

But Bill Belichick and the New England Patriots saw something entirely different. Someone to throw in the mix to be the next heir apparent to arguably the best to ever play the game - Tom Brady.

The initial negativity used to bother Etling a little bit, but is something he's drowned out now.

"It's not something I'm really worried about anymore. Just because now I have the opportunity that I wanted. I really just focus on the present, the right now," he tells me.

"My family and my friends and obviously my coaches have been super supportive. Those are three groups of people whose opinion I really care about, and really trust. So as long as they have a high opinion of me, and my teammates as well, then I'm going to be at a good place in my life."

One of these "family members" is cousin Kit Hanley, who just so happens to share the LSU sports connection as a current member of the Tigers' swim team.

"Danny doesn't take no for an answer," she said. "He is one of the most determined and hardworking people I know. His love for football is unparalleled by most. He goes after what he wants, and he has immense grit doing it."

This strong love for the sport has been something that's driven Etling since his childhood years.

"It's a dream come true. Obviously, I've been dreaming of playing in the NFL since I was a little kid. Since when I started playing football. So, to get to come to a great organization like the New England Patriots, an organization that is so well respected, that has won so much is just an honor."

Yes, there's raw talent to work with there. Etling has NFL size at 6-foot-3, and has the arm strength necessary to compete in the pros. He won't turn the ball over either, as he threw just two interceptions his senior season.

But if there's anything to credit for him making it to this level and that will keep him a contender in New England, it's an unrivaled work ethic.

It's something that he's been known for since his days as a freshman at Purdue, where he competed for his first starting job alongside quarterbacks Rob Henry and Austin Appleby.

"Hard work is ingrained into the culture at Purdue," Henry said. "A lot of guys that go to Purdue to play aren't the most highly recruited players, so everyone feels they have something to prove. Danny was no exception. He came in and fit in great with that culture because his work ethic was so impeccable."

Appleby can concur.

"He always worked his tail off. Never had to worry about Danny doing what he needed to do during the week to get himself ready to play," he said. "He set a great example for his teammates as well. It was really cool getting to compete and push each other every day."

And it wasn't too long ago that Etling and Appleby went head-to-head again, but wearing different colors than Boilermaker black-and-gold this time.

"I always respected and appreciated Danny as a teammate and fellow quarterback. I'm really happy for his success and it was extra neat to be able to compete against him when Florida played LSU two years ago," Appleby said.

In that 2016 season, Appleby and the Gators snatched the win in a hard fought one in Tiger Stadium that ended in a score of 16-10.

It's clear Etling didn't let go of his tough mentality when he transferred to LSU to compete with Brandon Harris. If anything, he may have kicked it up a notch. Just ask former teammate and current New Orleans Saints center, Will Clapp.

“Every day after practice we would all leave for dinner. Even when everyone had left to go, Danny went back to the facility to watch more film after a long day,” he said. It was something he did every single day that eventually made people want to go with him and get some extra film in too.”

Sure, Clapp and Etling are a solid 1,500 miles away from each other now. But the distance doesn’t keep them from serving as motivators to one another.

“Danny and I stay in touch. Of course we’re both busy now, but every couple of weeks we get on the phone and probably talk for an hour, just catching up. We both just talk about starting from the bottom and trying to earn spots with a new team.”

Etling still keeps a line of communication with his former Purdue teammates as well. As a matter of fact, you’ve probably heard of their group chat before. And there’s a lot more to their conversations than just throwing a football.

“I text Danny occasionally to encourage him and let him know I am here to support him as a friend not only in football, but in life,” Henry said. “Our conversations are usually brief on the subject of football, and more about life, health and family.”

As significant as it may seem looking from the outside, Etling hasn’t made his newfound future with the Patriots a major topic of conversation.

“As far as him mentioning competing for a spot goes, he hasn’t said anything about it to me. But I do know this — he’s going to put his head down and work his tail off to become the best player he can possibly be and will do whatever is asked of him in New England to the very best of his ability. He’ll be ready for his shot,” Appleby said.

And prepared for his shot he’ll be. During the absence of Tom Brady from early Pats camp practices, Etling made the most of the extra reps he was given.

“I’ve learned a lot. I’m getting better in minicamp now, so you have to make sure whatever reps you get you can take advantage of,” he said. “That’s just kind of what I’m doing now as I keep going and keep moving forward as I continue to try and develop and become the player I want to be - the player that I think the Patriots want me to become.”

Securing the starting job down the line will not be any easy task. The seventh-rounder knows he’s more than just an underdog - he’s fighting to place his name on an NFL roster.

“I’m just trying to learn the system. Trying to find a place for myself here and trying to find a role and a job and all of those things.”

But it all boils down to one single concept. There’s a key to it all in the eyes of Etling.

“It’s really just consistency. That’s the main thing I really want improve on,” he said. “Whether that’s footwork, or knowing and understanding the offense, whatever else it may entail. It’s something that I’m working hard toward and going to continue to keep working on.”

And he won’t be loud about it either. Danny Etling is not your Josh Rosen, who names those chosen ahead of him as “mistakes.”

He knows his place.

“I’ve got a long ways to go,” he simply puts it.

Not surprisingly, Etling was the last player on the field on multiple occasions. It’s paying off, and reporters all around Boston are taking notice.

“...the seventh round pick out of LSU wasn’t half bad for his first showing,” The Boston Herald’s Kate Guregian wrote. “He was more on target than Hoyer. Without pressure, he was at ease throwing the football. Assistant quarterbacks coach Jerry Schuplinski worked quite a bit with Etling, who was the last to leave the field.”

ESPN’s Mike Reiss had something of the same tune to say about number 58.

“I also took note of how he has been one of the first players on the field, and one of the last to leave,” he noted. “While that alone won’t earn a roster spot, it could also be viewed as a reflection of his commitment to his craft.”

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According to his friends, the Mass Communications major is a man of many talents. When Etling is not grinding it out on the gridiron, you can catch him working on his rap game.

“A fun fact about Danny is that he may very well be the best rapper alive, low key,” Appleby laughed. “If you catch him at the right time and he spits a couple of bars, it’s actually incredible. Freestyle rap is definitely up there with the hidden talents.”

Or shooting some hoops.

“Danny is actually a pretty good basketball player. I feel he probably could have been a point guard, he plays basketball just like he plays quarterback. In the aspect that he’s always passing and setting everybody up for plays,” Clapp explained.

Wherever Etling is - no matter what he’s doing - he has a natural ability to draw people to him.

“Danny is a genuine, high character guy. He’s the type of guy any man would want his daughter to date,” Henry said. “He’s a great leader that people gravitate towards both on and off the field. He’s a humorous individual who does not take himself too seriously and can make light of any situation.”

Regardless of how hard Etling works, or how great of a person and friend he may be, it’s hard to ignore the fates of his predecessors. The careers of other LSU quarterbacks who have gone on to the next level have often ended in failure.

But Etling remains optimistic to become the first in decades to break the mold, and knows it will be no overnight process.

“I’m not really too sure about all of that yet, considering I haven’t played a game. I’ve just been practicing and trying to join in on this system as best as I can. That’s probably a down the road question. I’m just as inexperienced in the NFL as anyone.”

He’s taking it all one day at a time and seeing the situation right in front of him for exactly what it is.

“For me it’s been more of an adjustment to the NFL and trying to become a pro. I use this opportunity to grow as both a player and a person.”

Deep down inside though, Etling wants to be the next great. And there’s something so contagious about that grit and determination that makes everyone believe that it just has to be him, despite how highly the odds are stacked.

“I’d say Danny likes the limelight a bit more than some people might think,” Kahn said.

But it’s not to be confused with arrogance or a need for attention.

“Now, that’s not to be taken in a negative way,” he explains. “But just in the sense that he’s always been known as this low-key, under the radar guy. Especially with his approach to media.”

“But I know he lives for those big moments. He may not show it, but I know he’s working his tail off to get that moment to shine.”

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## DL Trey Flowers

# The Boston Globe

### **Trey Flowers's motto? Leave the all-you-can-eat buffet still hungry**

By Jim McBride

JANUARY 7, 2017

FOXBOROUGH — Trey Flowers's stomach is always growling.

On the field, in the weight room, during a film session, and even walking away from a big dinner spread, the 6-foot-4-inch, 265-pound Patriot is always craving a little more.

This season, opponents, particularly those opponents with a football in their hands, have been feeling the hybrid defensive lineman's bite.

"The kid quoted his dad every other word when I was around him," said Bret Bielema, Flowers's coach at Arkansas. "One time he was telling teammates, 'If you go to an all-you-can-eat buffet you better walk away from that table hungry.' Everybody's looking around like, 'What the hell is he talking about?' and Trey said, 'Never be satisfied.'"

Reminded of his father's words, Flowers, who really is a chip of the old block — he was born Robert Flowers III — laughed and said his father's message was simple: "Do all you can. Be the best you can. But be hungry for more."

It's a creed that has served Flowers well.

"Say you're in the weight room and you get your personal best in the bench press," said Flowers. "Well, you got your PR, so you did your best. But you still should want more."

More is exactly what the Patriots have been getting from Flowers, a fourth-round pick in 2015 who missed virtually all of his rookie season with a shoulder injury. This season, Flowers has picked up 46 tackles with team highs in sacks (7) and quarterback hits (12).

Flowers has caused headaches for offenses because of his ability to line up inside or outside and consistently make plays from either spot. He has the speed and power to be effective off the edge, but also the quickness and leverage to be a menace on the interior.

Though that versatility has really developed in New England, Flowers did some jumping around at Arkansas, particularly his senior year. Bielema had utilized J.J. Watt in that capacity during their time in Wisconsin and he was sure Flowers could handle the responsibilities, as well.

"One thing that jumped out to me right away was that Trey had those country strong, big hands that were hanging there like meat hooks and he knew how to use them," said Bielema. "It was very similar to J.J. I remember J.J. used to do those one-handed slaps that would send guys spinning and right away it was the same way with Trey, he had that country strong sense to him."

Bielema said his staff would identify the "fish or weakest link" on an opponent's offensive line and they would line up Flowers against him. It wasn't just Flowers's physical gifts that allowed Bielema to exploit those matchups. It was his encyclopedic knowledge of the defense.

"When we would hand out a test to a defensive lineman or a linebacker and we'd drawn the formation and say, 'Where do you align?' a lot of them would just draw themselves into the picture and that's it," said Bielema. "Trey would draw all four D-linemen, all three linebackers, and all four DBs, and 99 percent of the time he'd be exactly right on every one of them."

It's one of the main reasons Bielema said he'll be offering Flowers a coaching spot as soon as his playing days are over.

“He may have mentioned that,” Flowers said with a hearty laugh. “But hopefully that won’t be for a long, long time.”

Flowers fondly remembers taking those pop quizzes and the benefits of being thorough with them.

“It helps if you did have to change your position or if you need to help someone else out,” he said.

Flowers’s rapid ascent from forgotten fourth-round pick to formidable presence may have caught a lot of people off guard, but it’s been no surprise to those who have spent any time around him.

He was never going to be content being anything other than a starter. It was another of his father’s quotes that drove him.

Big Robert would tell him, “If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got.”

Again, Trey said, the message was simple.

“Say you’re doing something good and you keep doing it, you’re going to continue to get good results,” he said. “But if you’re not doing something good and you’re expecting to change your spot on the depth chart but you’re not doing anything to affect that change, then you know, you’re just going to stay the same.”

Complacency wasn’t tolerated in the Flowers home. The work ethic was engrained. Of Robert and Jacqueline’s 10 children (Trey is No. 7), five were Division 1 athletes. In addition to Trey, two brothers played football, one played basketball, and a sister played soccer.

According to Bielema, Big Robert said that of all his kids, Trey “had that extra little heartbeat.”

That was apparent from a young age.

“He had that ‘it’ factor,” said Sam McCorkle, who coached Flowers at Columbia High in Huntsville, Ala., one of many stops in a 43-year career. “Plus, he worked so hard. And he was so smart.”

After being lightly recruited out of high school, Flowers settled in in Fayetteville and got better each year. After his junior season (and first under Bielema), Flowers contemplated entering the draft. The thought of life without Flowers didn’t sit well with the coach.

“I went to visit with him and his dad at their home and I talked him into staying,” Bielema said. “One of the best recruiting jobs I did the whole year. I think it did end up turning out real well for him.”

It’s turning out pretty well for the Patriots, too.

“He’s been very productive for us in there, he’s caused a lot of pressures and his penetration in the middle of the pocket a lot of times opens things up for one of the other defensive tackles or defensive ends that wrap around into the space that he has created with that penetration,” said coach Bill Belichick. “So it’s not just the plays that he makes, but he creates some for his teammates, too.”

The man known as the “Waterboy” during his Razorback days — “Because he was kinda freaky [like the movie character],” said Bielema of Flowers — is now known as “Technique” for his precise play.

“That fits him to a T,” said Bielema. “He just absorbs everything you give him.”

And no matter what you give him, it’ll never be enough.

Just listen for the growl.

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## CB Stephon Gilmore

# The Boston Globe

### Stephon Gilmore Should Work Out Well With the Patriots

By: Ben Volin  
March 25, 2017

ROCK HILL, S.C. — Talk to the people who know Stephon Gilmore best and two character traits quickly emerge:

First, Gilmore doesn't say a whole lot.

"He's always been a good listener," said his mother, Linda.

"He's not a Ray Lewis type, with the fiery speeches. You have to drag words out of him," said Ellis Johnson, Gilmore's defensive coordinator in college. "It's not shyness, that's just him. He's very self-assured, but he doesn't run his mouth."

Two, Gilmore takes coaching well.

"He wants to be told exactly what to do and how you want it done, and then he'll go out and he'll try to do it," said Dennis Thurman, Gilmore's defensive coordinator in Buffalo the past two seasons.

"He's a guy that's quiet, that's going to do exactly what's asked of him, and he's going to fit right in," said Ruvell Martin, Gilmore's former teammate in Buffalo.

Physically, Gilmore has all the tools — a 6-foot-1-inch frame, 4.4 speed, the strength to match up against the NFL's biggest receivers, and he doesn't turn 27 until September.

But those other two qualities help explain why the Patriots broke all of their supposed rules and made a huge investment in Gilmore.

Normally prudent in free agency, and with a well-documented history of playing hardball with their own stars, the Patriots opened their checkbook for Gilmore when free agency opened March 9.

They blew away the market, signing Gilmore to a five-year, \$65 million with \$31 million fully guaranteed. It's the largest total value and second-largest guarantee ever given out by the Patriots, behind only Tom Brady. It's the big contract that Jamie Collins and Chandler Jones couldn't get.

"I really feel like he will thrive in New England with the way they handle their business, because they're exact, and that's the way he likes to be coached," Thurman said. "I just think it's a match made in heaven. I really do. I couldn't be happier for him."

Belichick wants players who love football, and Gilmore fits that criteria. He grew up in Rock Hill, a town of about 70,000 situated 25 miles south of Charlotte. It is nicknamed "Football City, USA" due in part to the number of players it has sent to the NFL. Jadeveon Clowney, Johnathan Joseph, Cordarrelle Patterson, Chris Hope, and former Patriots tight end Benjamin Watson all hail from Rock Hill.

Gilmore's father, Stevie, spent hours tossing a football to young Stephon while the two watched games on TV. At age 7, Stephon was running cone drills in the family's driveway. The drills paid off, as Stephon clocked the sixth-fastest time in the three-cone drill at the 2012 NFL Combine, out of hundreds of participants.

"My dad pretty much put me in the game since I was 7, so I love the game," Gilmore said. "People say you think about it 24-7. It's probably close to that."

The oldest of six children, Gilmore was a quiet leader in his household.

“He wasn’t trying to replace my dad, but he was like a father figure,” said his sister, Scarlett Gilmore, 16. “When he tells us something, we know it’s not just talk. We know we should actually listen.”

Gilmore was a natural athlete, excelling in football, baseball, basketball, and track. South Pointe opened in 2005 when Gilmore enrolled as a freshman, and on the very first play in school history, Gilmore ran 70-odd yards for a touchdown on the freshman team. In his senior season of 2008, Gilmore was the quarterback in a spread-option attack and led South Pointe to a 15-0 record and a state championship.

He was a Parade All-American, South Carolina Mr. Football, and the MVP of the North Carolina-South Carolina all-star game. His No. 5 has unofficially been retired at South Pointe.

But Gilmore didn’t simply rely on his natural athleticism. One year he asked then-South Pointe coach Bobby Carroll to open the weight room on Christmas Day. As a senior, he asked Carroll if he could come work out at the school on Sundays after church.

“I told him he couldn’t work out by himself, so he brings somebody with him,” Carroll said. “Not long after that there were eight to 10 of them lifting on Sundays, and he was the one that kind of started that.”

South Pointe principal Dr. Al Leonard tabbed Gilmore as one of the school’s ambassadors when it had visitors. Gilmore was not the best student, but he graduated from South Pointe in December of his senior year so he could enroll in college for spring practices.

“If he wasn’t in the weight room, then he was probably getting tutoring, because he did whatever he had to do to stay on course with his goals,” said Strait Herron, Gilmore’s defensive coordinator and now the head coach at South Pointe.

The football team now hands out the Stephon Gilmore Award at the end of every season to the player who best exemplifies hard work and unselfishness.

“Just a great young man,” Leonard said. “He really does show that hard work does pay off. You all are getting a good one.”

Gilmore had offers from all the major schools. Alabama’s Nick Saban, one of Belichick’s close confidants, wanted him badly. But Gilmore chose South Carolina, about an hour south of Rock Hill, to be a part of a star-studded recruiting class that included current NFL receiver Alshon Jeffery.

Gamecocks coach Steve Spurrier wanted to use Gilmore on offense, but Gilmore knew his best chance of getting to the NFL was at cornerback.

Gilmore had barely played defense when arriving at South Carolina but was determined to make it work.

“I have never been associated with a student-athlete at that age that was mature as he was,” said Johnson, a coach since 1975. “The kid is 17 years old and he’s evaluating himself like a 35-year-old NFL scout. He wanted to be an NFL cornerback, so that’s what he made himself into.”

Gilmore’s technique was raw, but he started as a true freshman and started all 40 games for the Gamecocks in three seasons.

Gilmore honed his technique battling Jeffery every day in practice. In SEC play, Gilmore covered A.J. Green, Julio Jones, and several other players who reached the NFL. Those battles brought out Gilmore’s competitive side.

“Every now and then at practice, you’d look back and they’d be fighting like hell,” Johnson said of Gilmore and Jeffery. “A lot of times it’d get heated up and they’d get wrestling over the ball, and then it would be over in five seconds.”

And like at South Pointe, Gilmore’s college coaches never worried about him getting into trouble. He began dating Gabrielle Glenn, a sprinter at South Carolina who was a 2010 All-American in the 4 x 400-meter relay. The two married in 2014.

“He was never on the academic report, missing too many classes or anything like that,” Johnson said. “He just focused on the task at hand and got it done.”

Gilmore declared for the NFL Draft after three seasons. His coaches thought he'd maybe be a second-round pick. After showing off a 4.38 in the 40, 36-inch vertical leap, and his stellar three-cone score, Gilmore became the 10th overall pick in the draft, the second cornerback off the board.

Gilmore's draft position, and newfound millions, didn't change his attitude.

"He was a kid that was always on time, always had his books, ready to pay attention, ready to listen," said Martin, who sat next to Gilmore in team meetings in 2012. "We would sit down in team meetings and go over fines for the week, and never once did you hear his name called."

Gilmore was still raw when the Bills drafted him, and the instability in Buffalo didn't help. He had five defensive coordinators in five seasons and didn't really start coming into his own until his third or fourth year.

There are two knocks on Gilmore — he's not the most physical tackler, and he's had an injury bug. He has played in 68 of a possible 80 games, and made it through all 16 games just once in five seasons, his rookie year.

Gilmore had major surgery to repair a torn labrum in December 2015 but responded by playing in 15 games last season, securing five interceptions and earning his first Pro Bowl selection.

Gilmore is best used as a physical, press-man corner, but his willingness to take coaching and do whatever is asked of him should help him thrive in New England, where Belichick wants things done precisely.

"The most important thing is he is going to go out there and do exactly what they ask him to do," said Thurman, the ex-Bills defensive coordinator. "He's a pro all the way around. He handles his business, he's on time. He's going to thrive with their coaching staff and the way they do business."

The new contract doesn't seem to have changed Gilmore, either. He has been working out in Charlotte four days a week since January, putting in eight-hour days with multiple workouts and massage work.

"My phrase for Steph is 'silent but violent,'" said Jeremy Boone, Gilmore's personal trainer in Charlotte. "As far as competitiveness, he won't say a word, but nobody hates losing more than him. We kind of have fun — how can I get him riled up in the moment? But he's kind of a straight-laced guy."

The Patriots were on Gilmore from the start of free agency after facing him eight times in five years, but several teams were hot on his trail — the Bears, Titans, Buccaneers, Cowboys, Jaguars, and others. The Patriots stepped up their offer at the last minute to land their cornerback, and Gilmore, who has never played in the postseason, is excited to play for a winning organization.

Gilmore has been texting with Devin McCourty, excited to get started with the Patriots' offseason workouts in April.

"It's surreal when you go in there and see [the Super Bowl trophies]," Gilmore said of Gillette Stadium. "They just brought me in to hopefully be a piece to go get another one."

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## K Stephen Gostkowski



### **He filled big boots: Gostkowski on cusp of own legend**

By: Adam Kurkjian

Sunday, December 21, 2014

FOXBORO — Stephen Gostkowski's pure numbers depict a kicker who epitomizes clutch. But in terms of pure emotion, the picture gets cloudier for many Patriots fans.

Unlike his predecessor in Foxboro, Gostkowski doesn't have that signature moment to elevate him to legendary status. When it comes right down to it, he simply hasn't had the opportunity.

For Adam Vinatieri, there was the January 2002 "Snow Bowl" kick against the Oakland Raiders that helped the team reach Super Bowl XXXVI. Vinatieri then booted the game-winner against the St. Louis Rams for the franchise's first Lombardi Trophy.

Gostkowski has played in two Super Bowls, but didn't attempt a field goal in the 2008 loss to the Giants. (In fact, Bill Belichick famously eschewed a 49-yard attempt by his then-second-year kicker for an ill-fated punt on a third-quarter fourth-and-12.) In the 2012 loss, Gostkowski made his only field goal attempt against the Giants, a 29-yarder in the second quarter.

What Gostkowski has lacked in drama, he's made up for in consistency.

"I just feel so comfortable when he goes to kick the ball and he does it in such a fashion that he makes them all," former Patriots kicker and radio analyst Gino Cappelletti said. "He's going to pump it through there."

The numbers bear that out. Currently, Gostkowski sits fourth all-time in field-goal percentage at 86.6. He's 71-of-74 in fourth-quarter attempts (one was blocked) and 3-of-3 in overtime. In kicks that could either tie the game or put the Patriots ahead in the fourth quarter or overtime, he's 20-of-21.

The only time he's blown a late kick that cost the Pats a game came two years ago in a 20-18 loss to the Cardinals, when he missed a 42-yarder with five seconds to play. Even in that game, he hit four field goals.

As Cappelletti said, "He's automatic."

#### **Keeping the task routine**

Gostkowski describes his approach to making a pressure-filled kick the same matter-of-fact way others may characterize their daily routine at any other job.

"I really don't think too much about it," he said. "I try to just treat it like a normal kick. It's hard to do, but I don't worry about the consequences. I just worry about what I have to do to make the kick.

"I'm not a big celebrator so I just try to act like I've been out there and done it before. I just don't want to show any kind of nervousness or any kind of panic. I just try and make everything look like I know what I'm doing."

It's safe to say he knows what he's doing. Last weekend, he passed Vinatieri for the franchise lead in career points, now with 1,165 — three weeks after surpassing Cappelletti for second place.

Gostkowski maintains as much humility as accuracy when it comes to his accomplishments.

"We have a good offense," he said. "We kick a lot of field goals. Other teams don't. I don't worry about that stuff. I'm just trying to make as many kicks as possible. When I do miss, I try to make sure that one miss doesn't lead to two and two to three. I try to just make as many as I can."

#### **When opportunity knocks**

Devin McCourty remembers the first time Gostkowski earned his trust as a big-game kicker. It was during McCourty's rookie season of 2010 and Gostkowski nailed the overtime winner against Baltimore.

"I just remember running on the field and everybody trying to run up to him," McCourty said of the 23-20 win in which Gostkowski both made the tying field goal with less than two minutes left in regulation and a 35-yarder to win it. "I think that might have been the first game I've ever been in where time's gone and it's all up to the kicker to make the field goal and Steve came through.

"Every time after that . . . I don't think there's (been) doubt in any player's mind. If we give it to Steve with any amount of time — to tie, to win, whatever it is — I think it's complete confidence throughout the whole team that he's probably going to win the game for us."

Gostkowski has his personal favorites, too.

"There's definitely ones that stick out: The game-winner I had my rookie year in San Diego," Gostkowski said of the 31-yarder with 1:10 to play that gave the Patriots the 24-21 divisional-round win in the 2006-07 season.

"I had a go-ahead in the AFC Championship my rookie year that (the Colts) unfortunately came back and scored."

He actually kicked two go-ahead field goals in the fourth quarter of that 38-34 loss.

"That was cool," he said. "Having some big kicks in the playoffs kind of helped me feel like I belonged here. I would say that my rookie year, any time you kick a bunch of fourth-quarter kicks, game-winner, tying, stuff like that, those are special."

But befitting a player whose hallmark is consistency, Gostkowski doesn't define himself by game-winners. He takes the most pride in converting the next attempt after a missed one.

"That kind of sets the tone for my mental toughness to where I'm not going to let one bad game lead to two or three bad games," he said. "That's what I try to pride myself on."

The Patriots, currently the AFC's top playoff seed, are among the favorites to make it to the Super Bowl. Presumably, Gostkowski could find himself in the same position Vinatieri did against the Rams.

"It was right down the middle," Cappelletti said of Vinatieri's winner. "I can see Stephen doing that as well."

Still, Gostkowski maintains he doesn't get caught up visualizing the type of kick.

"No, I don't think about that stuff," he said. "I just worry about what's going on. You can't make your opportunities. I'm ready for any opportunity that I get. I don't worry about that stuff."

When the time comes, his track record shows that maybe Patriots fans won't have much to worry about, either.

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## TE Rob Gronkowski



### **Same Old Gronk—or Maybe Better**

*Rob Gronkowski's stunning return to dominance this season after two years battling injury highlighted the dedication that was mostly lost amid his party persona. Now wiser in his ways—well, maybe a little—he could be the key to another Patriots Super Bowl run*

BY PETE THAMEL

Wed Jan. 7, 2015

The black iron gates protecting the suburban Massachusetts estate swing open. A visitor walks up the long driveway to a five-bedroom house—bigger than a McMansion, smaller than an actual mansion—and is greeted by a man with thinning dark hair and the squat build of a former high school fullback. A red T-shirt draped over his beer belly reads, "I'm Kind of a Big Deal." He offers a firm handshake: "Rob Gronkowski, nice to meet you."

From a few yards away, near the doorway with its number 87 welcome mat, the real Gronk's laugh—"huh, hut, huh, hut"—sounds like a quarterback pleading for a snap. The man at the top of the driveway is actually Robert Goon (really), who along with being a friend and confidant serves as Gronk's contractor, dishwasher, airport chauffeur, security guard and roommate.

Goon's duties include driving and caring for the white party bus that's parked in the driveway. Gronk bought it from a church on Long Island last summer, thoroughly renovated it and nicknamed it the Sinners Bus. It seats eight comfortably and includes hardwood floors, blinking lights and the kind of sound system one would expect from a nightclub on wheels. Goon flew to Long Island to pick it up and drive it back to Foxboro. It now doubles as an airport shuttle and a tailgate vessel for members of the Gronkowski family flying in for game weekends. "Just a normal party bus, nothing too crazy," Dan Gronkowski, Rob's older brother, says nonchalantly.

Believe it or not, Gronk's ownership of the bus can be viewed more as a sign of maturity than of debauchery. After years of being an easy subject for iPhone paparazzi, with gawkers buzzing around him at bars and snapping shirtless photos that inevitably found their way online, Gronk has seen the value in hosting the party instead of seeking it. Goon serves as the driver and makes sure everyone gets home safely—instead of Uber, Gronk jokes, they have Goober. "You can still be having fun," Gronk says, "but maybe it's in more of a setting where people don't know what's going on."

Let's be perfectly clear: Rob Gronkowski, still only 25, is not a paragon of maturity and conformity. He wasn't suddenly transformed by the thoughts of career mortality that came with the six surgeries that forced him to miss 17 games over the 2012 and '13 seasons. When asked if he has considered what he would do after football, Gronk hesitates and says, "No." From the other side of the house, Goon screams, "MINI GOLF!" If you need more proof that Gronk is still Gronk, take a look at the new Entourage movie trailer, in which his beer-funneling skills are on full display. As the Sinners Bus demonstrates, Gronk is simply partying smarter.

They're celebrating with him all around New England. Gronk looms as one of the most important players in the 2015 NFL playoffs, thanks to a comeback from ACL and MCL tears that defied medical norms. Gronk's return resulted in 82 catches this season; his 1,124 yards and 12 touchdowns led all NFL tight ends. And with New England clinching home-field advantage through the AFC title game, having Gronk in full health—he played 15 games this season, missing only the meaningless Week 17 loss to Buffalo—and MVP form entering the playoffs for the first time since '11 could well mean the Sinners Bus ends up pulling into Glendale for the Super Bowl.

The last time we saw Gronk playing consistently at this level—requiring double teams, dragging three defenders through the red zone and flummoxing opposing coordinators—was in 2011. The Patriots predicated their offense that year on Gronk and Aaron Hernandez, and the second-year tight ends dominated all the way to Super Bowl XLVI. The Patriots lost to the Giants in that game, but everything changed for Gronk during that season. His name became a verb ("You've been Gronked!") and his quips ("Yo soy fiesta") landed on T-shirts. Something as simple as going to dinner in Boston's North End became such a chore that his teammates stopped inviting him to avoid the inevitable scene. He understood.

The moment Gronk morphed from NFL star to TMZ target can be traced to October 2011, when adult film actress BiBi Jones tweeted out pictures of herself and Gronk, who was wearing his goofy grin and no shirt. Jones revealed

later in a radio interview that Gronk requested she tweet out the picture so he could get more Twitter followers. (She had about 100,000 and he fewer than 60,000; he's now up to 672,000.) The incident exhibited Gronk's most enduring and endearing trait: his simplicity.

As Gronk's profile rose, his core personality remained entrenched in the FGK House. That's the four-bedroom faux frat house in Foxborough where Gronk lived during the 2011 and '12 seasons with linebacker Dane (Freshman) Fletcher and journeyman linebacker Niko Koutouvides. Defiantly unrefined, they duct-taped the initials FGK (Fletcher, Gronkowski, Koutouvides) to the living room wall like fraternity letters. "[Gronk and I] were into the same things—girls and hanging out and having a good time on top of football," Fletcher says.

Fletcher, Gronk and Kouty didn't bother buying silverware, instead taking plastic utensils and plates from the Patriots' facility and washing them for multiple uses. A bum leg caused the kitchen table to topple over with the slightest nudge. Fletcher got endless entertainment from Henry, a fake mouse that he'd tie with fishing wire and place in the fridge and cupboard. "Rob never failed to scream," Fletcher says. "He's such a wuss."

Gronk worked harder than he partied, something his friends insist got overlooked as his public image grew. "Don't get lost in his awkward silliness," his college coach, Mike Stoops recalls saying. "It's not immaturity. He's a great competitor."

FGK hosted teammates for endless Cornhole tournaments and backyard archery, thanks to Fletcher's bringing his bow and arrow from his native Montana. As Gronk set an NFL record for tight ends by snaring 17 touchdown passes in 2011, Koutouvides estimates that Gronk washed his bedsheets about once a month—"if we were lucky." Kouty cracks up at the memory of the lone wrinkled navy suit and yellow dress shirt that Gronk tossed on the floor after every game, only to pick it all up a week later. Gronk donned the same pair of size-16 Converse sneakers he'd had since his rookie year: Fletcher witnessed the gradual corrosion of the kicks from sparkling white to garden-soil brown. "He does not care one bit about material items," Fletcher says. "That's the cool thing about him."

Gronk worked harder than he partied, something his friends insist got overlooked as his public image evolved into its Zubaz-clad, shirtless, dating-show phase. On road trips Gronk would arrive at the team hotel and go into a plank pose—a taxing yoga posture—for long stretches. He'd cook broccoli or mixed vegetables with almost every meal. Former Patriots offensive coordinator Bill O'Brien recalls Gronk's consistently running 30 or 40 extra routes with Tom Brady after practice. "He's one of the hardest-working guys I've ever been around," O'Brien says.

It soon became hard to ignore the buzz around Gronkowski. Steelers defensive back Ross Ventrone, who moved into FGK in 2012 while with the Patriots, recalls an afternoon trip to see a movie on a weekday turning into an hourlong impromptu autograph session. A simple man suddenly couldn't do the simplest things. "He's such a good dude," says Ventrone, "he could never walk away and never would."

Rob Gronkowski arrives in the Patriots' locker room by 7 a.m. every day and doesn't walk around so much as he bounces, like a puppy let outside after his owner's long hours at work. On a recent day he giddily read a Christmas message for fans in Spanish—"Yo soy Roberto Gronkowski"—while a smiling Brady walked by and declared, "And the Oscar goes to . . ."

The daily glee that Gronkowski brings to the office is in powerful contrast to the depths he reached in 2013. In November 2012 he had broken his left forearm while blocking on an extra point play; then he broke the arm again in January. Complications that off-season, including an infection that required surgery, delayed his recovery and forced him to miss the first six games of the 2013 season. He was playing in his seventh game that year when another major injury struck. Against Cleveland on Dec. 8 Gronkowski charged upfield after catching an over-the-shoulder pass from Brady. Browns safety T.J. Ward's left shoulder pad collided with Gronkowski's right knee with such force that it spun the 6-6, 265-pound tight end around like an Olympic diver, his head smashing into the turf so hard it knocked him unconscious. When he awoke to see his parents and the Patriots' training staff in the locker room, Gronkowski learned he had a serious injury, later diagnosed as a torn ACL and MCL. He recalls thinking, Why is this happening again? Why me?

Gronkowski needed to wait a month for the swelling to subside before having surgery. The day after the operation he looked at physical therapist Ryan Donahue and asked, "Am I ever going to play again?" Gronkowski had undergone five surgeries the previous two seasons, four that stemmed from the broken arm and one, in June 2013, to repair a herniated disk in his back. But those injuries did not compare in recovery time, rehab and career-threatening scope to the knee injury.

Gronkowski brought an intense focus to each tedious rehab session. Says Ryan Donahue, his physical therapist, "He felt like he had to earn everything."

Gronk's comeback was fueled partly by his work ethic and partly by genetics. Donahue rehabbed Gronk at the Andrews Institute in Gulf Breeze, Fla., for two weeks postsurgery and was so dumbfounded by how little Gronkowski's quad muscles had atrophied after the operation that he pulled aside legendary surgeon James Andrews to show him. Gronk also brought an intense focus to each tedious rehab session, which began with quad-muscle flexes and then progressed to simple leg lifts. Five or six days into his rehab, Gronkowski began trending back toward his usual puppy-dog optimism. He worked up to reps on a recumbent bicycle and soon requested a higher level, but Donahue held him back. To challenge himself, Gronkowski curled 35-pound barbells while working his leg on the bike. "He felt like he had to earn everything, which I really admire," Donahue says.

After the Andrews Institute rehab, Gronk moved to Miami for the off-season. Every weekday for three months he worked with physical therapist Ed Garabedian at Doctors Hospital in Coral Gables, while periodically checking in with Patriots trainer Jim Whalen. Garabedian is considered to be a knee Yoda: He has guided Frank Gore, Edgerrin James, Willis McGahee and Fred Taylor back into form after ACL injuries. On some mornings Garabedian arrived before 7 a.m. to see Gronkowski waiting for him. Other days, Gronkowski would call and say he didn't feel like coming, only to walk in the door a minute later saying, "Gotcha!"

To break up the monotony of rehab, Gronkowski took his own party to Miami. Bummed by the lack of music at the hospital, he brought in portable speakers to stream '80s tunes. Garabedian could usually tell if Gronkowski had gone out the night before, as his knee would be swollen from standing for hours, but he stresses that the tight end was a diligent patient. Gronkowski's work led to a recovery whose only comparison in terms of speed and effectiveness—he was essentially back in full form in nine or 10 months—is Adrian Peterson's return in 2012. "Medically speaking, we expected him to be playing and effective," Donahue says. "But as far as being an MVP candidate, that's unheard of."

Heading into the 2010 NFL draft, Gronkowski was a vexing prospect for Bill Belichick to evaluate. Gronk had starred during his first two seasons at Arizona—catching 16 touchdown passes—but missed his entire junior year in '09 with a lower-back injury. He still received a second-round grade, a testament to his athleticism and production. Belichick notes with his trademark Saharan wit that spending 10 or 15 minutes with Gronkowski may not create the impression that he's a consummate pro. ("It might be a little bit different," Belichick says, flashing a millisecond smile. "Potentially.") Belichick's homework included a 15-minute call with former Wildcats coach Mike Stoops, a notoriously frank evaluator, who offered an unwavering endorsement: "Don't get lost in his awkward silliness," Stoops recalls saying. "It's not immaturity. He's a great competitor."

When Gronkowski arrived for his predraft visit in New England, the Patriots simulated the team's classroom experience. O'Brien and fellow assistant Brian Ferentz taught him blocking schemes, which Gronkowski absorbed and then demonstrated after ripping off his coat. "We were laughing our asses off, he was blocking the hell out of us," says O'Brien, now the Texans' coach. By the end of the meeting, Gronk's yellow dress shirt was untucked and stained with marker from the grease board. And the Patriots were sold, trading up to get him in the second round, one of Belichick's shrewdest moves.

At 6-6 and 265, Gronkowski is one of the few players in football who can match up against any defender on the field. Here he tussles with 240-pound Jets linebacker Demario Davis. (Al Tellemsans/SI/The MMQB) Since New England fully integrated Gronkowski into its offensive game plan in Week 5 against Cincinnati this season, the Patriots' offense has averaged 34.5 points per game (excluding the Week 17 finale when Gronk rested), compared with 17.8 when he was out or limited. Brady compliments Gronk's improved understanding of coverages and his ability to make "adjustments to adjustments to adjustments." Tight ends coach Brian Daboll says Gronkowski sees coverages from corners, linebackers and safeties, depending on the opponent.

Gronk's value to New England may best be quantified by a third-and-goal play from the three-yard line against the Dolphins in Week 15. When Gronk split wide right, just a few yards from the sideline, he pulled Miami safety Reshad Jones away from the middle of the field with him. Jones needed to shade over the top to help linebacker Dion Jordan, who couldn't expect to guard Gronkowski one-on-one. With a gaping hole in the defense, Brady checked down to a handoff, and running back Shane Vereen slithered into the end zone for a touchdown. Gronk can neuter a defense without coming close to the ball. "We're watching greatness," says Gronk's fellow All-Pro Darrelle Revis. "Tony Gonzalez. Antonio Gates. He's in the same shoes with them. He's a problem child out there."

Don't be surprised if that problem child reappears in the Super Bowl, Sinners Bus and all. And don't be afraid to jump aboard and crack a beer. After all, Goon is driving.

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## The Rob Gronkowski story not often told: Generosity to charitable causes

Mike Reiss, ESPN Staff Writer  
November 5, 2015

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. -- Two weeks ago, New England Patriots tight end Rob Gronkowski was a surprise guest at a Massachusetts middle school. This Saturday, he'll welcome a child to Gillette Stadium as part of the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Everyone knows about the force that Gronkowski is on the football field, but this is the side of him that isn't often talked about.

Few Patriots give as much time to charitable and community endeavors as Gronkowski.

"I don't think that Rob has ever had a bad day," owner Robert Kraft said. "His happy, go-lucky attitude is infectious, which makes him a great ambassador when he is out in the community."

Such was the case in Gronkowski's most recent community appearance, on Oct. 20 at Holten Richmond Middle School in Danvers, Massachusetts. The parents of two students had bid on an auction item at the annual Patriots Charitable Foundation gala to bring Gronkowski to school, which is the second year the star power of Gronkowski has raised big money for the franchise's charitable arm.

The visit was a surprise to many, and as is usually the case wherever Gronkowski shows up in New England, a frenzied excitement erupted when he arrived -- from students and many staff members.

"It's all smiles, the whole school going crazy, everyone going wild," Gronkowski said. "When it's like that, it is fun for both parties."

Gronkowski answered questions at a school-wide assembly, took selfies, and then had a meet-and-greet with 30 students as he signed autographs and taught them how to spike a football.

"He was so accessible to the kids, down to earth," said Adam Federico, the school's principal. "He was at their level and they really enjoyed how authentic it was to spend time with somebody like him. The message was great to the kids, about the importance of being involved with sports and activities in school, and I think they took it to heart."

That appearance came five weeks after Gronkowski greeted military members and their families. The Department of Defense event, coming two days after the Patriots' season-opening win over the Pittsburgh Steelers, was for families who are adjusting to having a loved one overseas.

In July, Gronkowski visited Boston Children's Hospital, teaming up with a local foundation that raises funds for cancer research. Gronkowski has shaved his head at the foundation's annual buzz off event each of the last few years.

In June, he was at Massachusetts General Hospital as part of an employee recognition and volunteer program. Prior to that, he was part of the team's "trophy tour" to Foxborough schools in which the Lombardi Trophy was shared with students. He was also part of a Play 60 event in local schools to promote healthy diet and exercise.

Kids raced to decorate their favorite Patriots players like Christmas trees during the Patriots' annual holiday party. Courtesy of the New England Patriots

And he's always a regular at the team's annual children's holiday party where kids decorated him like a tree, as well as volunteering as part of the Patriots' annual Thanksgiving Goodwill event in which turkey baskets are donated and delivered to families' cars.

"If I call him to do something, he'll do it for me," said Donna Spigarolo, the team's director of community relations. "His enthusiasm is contagious, no matter where he goes, and he always brings a smile to the room. It's a joy to work with him."

Spigarolo recalled her first meeting with Gronkowski during his rookie season in 2010, as he was at a Patriots community event in which a new playground was being built. The two sat next to each other on the bus to and from the event, and by the end of it she remembers Gronkowski asking to be part of more of them.

He often was, before his rising profile changed the dynamics a bit.

"As he became more of a star, his time became torn between different places and he couldn't be with me every week," Spigarolo said.

Gronkowski's tough run with injuries late in 2012 and into 2013 also didn't help, but he still has exceeded expectations. The Patriots mandate players to make a certain number of community appearances each year, but Gronkowski has easily spiked the minimum requirements over the years, sometimes bringing his brothers and making it a family event. In addition to being part of Patriots-based charity and community endeavors, he also does some on his own.

"You can't do it all. You get many requests all the time, but I still have to focus on football, still have to live my life a little bit," he said. "But there are definitely times during the week when you want to take time out.

"I was always blessed growing up with opportunities and access to facilities, equipment, and playing with my brothers in the backyard to be the best athlete I could be," he continued. "Everyone always helped me out growing up, and everyone now supports me Sunday. So whenever there's a chance to give back, to the community, to the less fortunate kids so they have the opportunity to gain the most potential they can in their life to be success, it's always good to do."

On the field, Gronkowski's impact arguably has never been greater, most recently evident as he caught 17 passes for 221 yards and two touchdowns in the club's last two victories, and was credited by head coach Bill Belichick for creating opportunities for others even when he didn't register on the stat sheet.

He's also been productive in the marketing game, saying that he lives off his endorsement money and has never spent anything that he's earned as part of his contract. In fact, the first question Washington reporters asked him on a Wednesday conference call was about a party cruise he's sponsoring after the season.

Stories of Gronkowski the party man are plentiful, as are those of Gronkowski dominating on the football field. But even as his star has risen, and demands on his time have grown, he's still stayed grounded to the point that following through on community and charity events is important to him.

And, more importantly, to those he's reaching out to.

"I'm not sure Rob even knows how impactful his visits to schools and hospitals are," Kraft said. "I think he just genuinely enjoys meeting people and making them happy."

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## DL Lawrence Guy



### **Patriots' Lawrence Guy tackled learning disabilities to thrive in NFL**

By Mark Daniels

Posted Dec 10, 2017 at 11:56 AM

FOXBORO — Lawrence Guy, as a child, struggled with words and numbers. He had trouble reading and retaining information. He had trouble keeping up with his peers. To make it worse, he wasn't getting the help he needed.

Guy's early memories of school are full of angst. Growing up in Las Vegas, he was placed in special-education classes in elementary and middle school. The teachers didn't know how to help him there. They thought he was dealing with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), but without the proper testing, no one realized Guy had more hurdles to overcome.

"In middle school, they put you in a self-contained class because they didn't want to deal with it," Guy said. "Like every kid who has a learning disability, it was difficult. If we had the proper testing, we would've taken different measures. It was challenging through elementary and middle school."

At Western High School, Guy turned into a legitimate football recruit. But in order for him to qualify academically, he had to take the same classes as his peers. He struggled but got through it. He still didn't have a name for his disability.

That came a year later, in 2008, when he accepted a scholarship to Arizona State University. Because of the school's willingness to help students with disabilities, Guy picked the Sun Devils over several top-tier football programs. When he enrolled, they gave him the proper testing. For the first time, at age 18, he learned he had dyslexia, which caused him to read letters backwards, and dyscalculia, which caused him to confuse numbers.

"I wouldn't want someone else to have gone what I've gone through," Guy said.

Nine years later, the Patriots defensive lineman is a different person.

#### Stubborn first step

Growing up, Guy was bullied for being different and in special-education classes. In college, the thought of attending the school's Disability Resource Center gave him that same feeling of embarrassment.

Guy was unwilling to step foot in that building and that first semester was a disaster. In danger of failing and being ruled academically ineligible, his father was called and a meeting was held. Among the people there was Jean Boyd, the associate athletic director for student development.

"Athletes, elite athletes especially, because they gain so much positive feedback from people based on their athleticism, they feel like they're super heroes. He felt like he was Superman," Boyd said. "When you go over to a Disability Resource Center, there's not just people who have learning disabilities, you have folks who are maybe blind or they have physical disabilities and things like that. ... He was fighting it because he didn't necessarily look like other people there.

"Because he was struggling, we had to sit him down and communicate that, whatever goals you have yourself or whatever goals you have for your family, those things are being jeopardized because of your stubbornness or lack of willingness to evolve your thought process about what you were born with."

That meeting was an eye opener for Guy. Afterward, he went to the Disability Resource Center and received the proper help for the first time in his life. ASU paired him with a learning specialist, who communicated with his football coaches.

With the help of specialists, Guy discovered how to learn again. For example, he had trouble retaining information with assigned reading. He found out that he had the option to listen to books on tape, which helped him better retain information.

"Before, you're hesitant [because] of the name of [the center]," Guy said. "You're hesitant of being in there. When they said give it a shot, I said, 'I have nothing else to lose.' ... It was more guidance through the process. I could do everything, but it wouldn't be in the exact order it needed. So, it was, 'Hey, switch this around. Look at what you read.' That helped me out."

#### New outlook

Guy's transformation at ASU was dramatic. By his sophomore year, he was thriving academically and was enjoying classes for the first time in his life. He took advantage of every tutor offered and was allowed extra time to take his exams.

Before long, Guy was a dual major in education and sociology. After nearly failing, his grade-point average rose to 3.5. He was named a "Scholar Baller" for his efforts. By the time he was an upperclassman, he was an advocate for the Disability Resource Center.

"By the time he got to be an upperclassman, he was sitting with our athletes, even from other sports, who were reluctant to use the services," Boyd said. "Then he also got involved with the community and would talk to young kids about the importance of education."

"It was what I struggled with," Guy added. "I knew if I was able to go to it, why shouldn't other people go to it also? There shouldn't be a stigma about, 'Hey, don't show up to the building because of the name.' There's nothing wrong with the building. ... At the time, I was like, 'Well I'm going, you might as well join me. Don't let the resources sit there and waste. You're not going to get it back.' "

His coaches took note. ASU defensive line coach Grady Stretz remembers Guy's struggles early on. Often in meetings, he'd be goofing off or watching YouTube videos. A couple of years later, Guy was in that room 30 minutes early, studying film.

"Over the months and years at ASU, he really did mature," Stretz said. "When you evaluate him in high school football, he was a man among boys. Unfortunately, on the flip side of it, when it came to the classroom and academics, due to his disabilities, it was kind of the polar opposite. But as time went by and he got dialed in and dedicated himself, you could really see him grow as a man. He's one of those guys, you never forget about."

#### Lifelong learner

This year marks Guy's seventh in the NFL. The Patriots are his fifth NFL team. This season, he's started a career-high 11 games on the defensive line. With four games left, he's seven tackles away from setting a career-high.

When asked about how well Guy has learned the defense, Bill Belichick was quick to note that the defensive tackle "picks things up well."

"I think he was really in a good place in the spring," Belichick said. "He's really been great. He knows his job, works hard at it, communicates well, understands what the offense is doing, has a good awareness of blocking schemes and tendencies and so forth."

Now 27, Guy learns differently, but his ADHD, dyslexia, and dyscalculia haven't affected his ability to pick up the Patriots system. When the Patriots signed him to a four-year, \$20-million contract, he took his lessons from ASU and applied them to learning the fifth playbook of his NFL career. For Guy, it's about "studying and grouping."

When tasked with learning 200 plays, he places them in groups. That helped him learn the play's names and aspects of each call. With each play, he'll write it down multiple times, which helps him remember. When he's in a meeting room, Guy acknowledges he's usually one of the first people to ask a question.

"Football's easy. Football's a whole different [story]," Guy said. "Classroom is a lot different. Football is a whole lot of X's and O's. That's repetitive. You're going out there and moving through the stuff. You're not moving through anything in the classroom. You're reading. You're trying to retain."

“A playbook is easy to me. That’s one of the easiest things. It’s like, ‘How can you pick this up and struggle [otherwise]?’ Well, it’s different. I can learn 200 plays. It’s very simple to do. I’m going to go through it repetitively every single day.”

Guy takes pride in telling his story. He’s no longer embarrassed. He’s no longer afraid to learn.

“The journey hasn’t stopped it,” Guy said. “I’m continuing to learn more and more every day I live. Going through what I went through, I look at it and I’m glad I went through it. It built me into who I am as a person.”

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## WR Chris Hogan

# The Boston Globe

### **Patriots' Chris Hogan took an unusual route to the NFL**

By Jim McBride

JUNE 6, 2016

Chris Hogan took four seasons off from football but he never really stopped playing the game during his time as a lacrosse player in State College, Pa.

"He certainly played lacrosse like a football player," recalled former Nittany Lions coach Glenn Thiel. "He was very physical and he was such an athlete. Physically, he could just overwhelm lacrosse players."

Coming off a stellar career at Ramapo (N.J.) High, where the future Patriots receiver was a first-team All-New Jersey performer as a junior and senior in lacrosse and an all-state first teamer as a senior in football, Hogan had a decision to make.

With offers rolling in to play Division 1 lacrosse (from perennial powerhouse programs Syracuse and Virginia, among others) and Division 1 football (including Rutgers and UConn), it wasn't an easy decision.

"It was tough," Hogan said last week after wrapping up his OTA duties in Foxborough. "I loved playing both sports. When it came down to it, I felt Penn State was an amazing school. I loved the campus. And it was an opportunity to help build a rising [lacrosse] program. It was tough, but I've never regretted my decision at all."

No regrets, but Hogan never really lost the football bug. Living in the shadow of Mount Nittany, reminders were everywhere. It was a difficult adjustment to not strap on the helmet and shoulder pads (at least the football kind) when he arrived.

"Actually, I struggled even going to the games because I felt like I should be out there playing," he said. "It was a rough first fall for me."

Still, he went about the business of being a lacrosse player — a dominant one according to Thiel, who acknowledged it was a bit of a coup to land an athlete of Hogan's caliber.

"Obviously he was a great athlete," said Thiel. "But his size set him apart. He was 6-2, 6-3, 215 pounds — we just didn't see that on the lacrosse field, very seldom. There are some guys playing now that size but he was unique then."

Hogan was such a presence on the field that he often intimidated opponents before the opening faceoff.

"Just putting him on the field, the other team had something to worry about," said Thiel, who retired in 2012 after 33 years leading the Nittany Lions. "Then on top of that, he was a good lacrosse player. I mean, big, strong, fast, could get his shot off. He was unique."

Hogan started all 13 games as a freshman in 2007 and scored 11 goals. He played just three games as a sophomore because of a high ankle sprain — a turn that would prove fortuitous as Hogan was granted a redshirt season.

Hogan came back with a vengeance in 2009, collecting a team-high 29 goals and 133 shots. Showing his patented physical play, he also led the Nittany Lions with 10 penalties.

For his efforts, he was named first-team All-ECAC and chosen a captain for his senior season. Hogan also proved to be the poster boy for the program.

"Younger kids coming in saw the product that he was — the size, the speed, the strength — and they would try to emulate that," said Thiel. "He was somebody people wanted to mold themselves after."

Though Hogan's numbers dipped his senior season (15 goals, 24 points), there was a good reason.

"We switched him to defensive midfield because we wanted to get more out of transition from defense to offense," said Thiel. "He would get us running so we could create offense instantly . . . So he really did everything for us over the three full seasons."

#### Scratching that itch

It was the first of several transitions for Hogan, who was set to graduate but still had a year of college eligibility because of that ankle injury. It was time to scratch that football itch that had never left.

"It was something that was definitely in the back of my mind always," said Hogan, who believes all the cutting he did in lacrosse has helped him getting in and out of his breaks on pass routes. "I always thought that I could play football at the college level . . . I thought about it constantly."

After exploring his options and talking with former high school rivals Kenny Amsel and Nick Romeo, who were enrolled at Monmouth, Hogan met with Hawks coach Kevin Callahan, who had recruited him in high school.

"I sat down with him when he came to campus and just loved everything about him," said Callahan. "We knew he hadn't played in four years but we weren't overly concerned about that."

Much the way he made an instant impact in State College, Pa., he did the same in West Long Branch, N.J. There was no evidence of rust.

From his first workout with the Hawks, Hogan stood out, according to Callahan. The coach said he normally would hesitate to bring a player in for just one season, but it was clear this was no normal case.

"He's not a guy you had to watch practice 10 times to figure out he was special," said Callahan. "We saw him run a route and we said, 'Wow, we really have something here.' "

He quickly picked up the playbook and secured a spot as a receiver, but his role would soon expand. After three games and several injuries, Callahan found himself thin in the secondary. After scanning his roster, Callahan found a solution — the new guy.

"I approached him and he said, 'I can do that,' " said Callahan, who thinks the four years away from the pounding of football may have prolonged Hogan's career. "So we kind of gave him what he needed to know, didn't overcoach him an awful lot to be honest, just enough so that he'd be playing within the scheme, and he was a starting corner the rest of the season."

Again, Hogan paid immediate dividends. In his first game at cornerback he picked off a pair of passes in a win over Duquesne. He also added a 41-yard catch.

For nine games Hogan played full time on defense, about 15-20 plays on offense, and on all the special teams units. He may have played only one season, but he packed plenty into it.

"Chris has great instincts, and most of all he's a very dependable, reliable athlete," said Callahan. "Meaning, if you tell him part of a play or a play design or pass concept and you tell him he has to be in a certain place at a certain time, he's going to be there. He's going to find a way to get there."

Hogan finished the season with 28 tackles and three interceptions, 12 catches for 147 yards, three TDs, and dreams of continuing his football career.

"My agent [Arthur Weiss] didn't sugarcoat it at all, he told me it would be a tough road," he said. "But I didn't want to regret not trying it."

Hogan carried the ball during a 2010 game against Bryant. He had 12 catches for 147 yards in his season at Monmouth, and also had 28 tackles on defense.

#### Bouncing around

Hogan joined some teammates in NFL Combine training drills with the hopes of catching some eyes. And though he didn't get invited to the big cattle call in Indianapolis, he turned heads during Fordham's Pro Day.

Callahan remembers getting a call telling him Hogan was the top performer at that workout.

"I remember that day like it was yesterday," said Hogan. "It was an emotional day. I was able to put up some really good numbers. My 40 [time] was good. My shuttle was good. Bench press was good. Everything I did was enough to impress some people. Enough to be one of those guys they wanted to work out after and do some drills."

Hogan signed with the 49ers in July 2011, but it was a quick stay. He was scooped up by the Giants and spent a short stint on their practice squad before being released.

His next stop was Miami, where he gained a bit of fame and the nickname "7-11" from Reggie Bush because he was "always open" during the Dolphins' turn on "Hard Knocks." He was cut from Miami's practice squad in September 2011.

Hogan signed with Buffalo in 2012 and was there until signing with the Patriots in March.

"I jumped around a lot," said Hogan, who "never gave pro lacrosse a thought" after diving back into football. "And every single spot I was at I had a lot to learn and was able to do just that. I got a lot of opportunities and I was able to make the best of them."

His latest is in Foxborough. With top targets Julian Edelman and Danny Amendola coming back from injuries, Hogan was asked if he has been able to build a quick rapport with Tom Brady.

"There's a lot of opportunity out there," Hogan said. "It's only OTAs, but I've been working with all the guys. For me, it's just about getting the offense down and learning how we play around here, and that's what I'm focused on."

Thiel, his former lacrosse coach, will be focused on Hogan. "I sure hope Brady can throw him the ball a few times."

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## The Boston Globe

### Behind demanding careers and a complicated life, a beautiful love story

By Tara Sullivan  
DECEMBER 23, 2017

FOXBOROUGH — Ashley Boccio's work day was scheduled to start at 7:30 a.m. Friday, with the first of her five surgical cases at Long Island's Northwell Hospital setting off a fairly typical day in the life of a third-year resident. This final year of Boccio's residency in podiatry is set to conclude in July, but for now the young physician is at the whim of the hospital's schedule makers, on call or in the operating room whenever needed.

Chris Hogan, a.k.a. Ashley's husband, was scheduled to start his day Friday in the early morning hours as well, with the first of his team meetings at Gillette Stadium setting off a fairly typical day in the life of a professional football player. This fifth year of Hogan's NFL career appears destined to conclude in February (at the Super Bowl in Minnesota), but for now, the 30-year-old wide receiver is at the whim of the Patriots' schedule makers, on the field or in the film room whenever instructed.

Two demanding careers. One complicated life.

At some point Friday evening, after Boccio had finished those surgeries, after she'd packed the family's SUV, after she'd loaded 9-month-old twins Chase and Parker into the back seat, after she'd crossed the Throgs Neck Bridge and hit Route 95 to cover the 200 or so miles between Port Washington and Mansfield, these two crazy lives would come together once again, ready to celebrate a large family Christmas in Massachusetts. Yet this is no holiday exception for Chris and Ashley, a remarkable young couple who have turned work-life balance into an art form, navigating through two similarly all-consuming careers to keep one growing family intact, emerging from a year of life-altering changes (a breakout football season and Super Bowl win, the birth of the twins and their wedding) with an even stronger commitment to each other.

One pro football player in New England plus one surgical resident on Long Island equals no problem, not when you have each other. And FaceTime. And an amazing nanny in the form of Chris's sister, Erinn. And two sets of grandparents armed with helping hands. And a house on Long Island plus an in-season rental in Massachusetts for

Chris and their two Great Danes, Jersie and Titan. And, as my own Irish mother used to say, the patience of two saints.

Of course they realize it's more than a little bit nuts. As Ashley says during a short break at work in the busy days leading up to Christmas, "I don't know how he does it." As Chris marvels after a long day of practice leading into a Christmas Eve game against Buffalo, "I don't know how she does it."

The answer is obvious: They do it together. There is a beautiful love story, one to restore faith not simply in the power of mutual respect, but of the sustainability of young devotion, of the connection built through shared dreams, of the magic that happens when two people truly want what's best for each other, willing to do whatever they can to make it happen.

For years that onus fell to Ashley, who watched the fellow standout lacrosse player she met at Penn State trade in one sport for another to pursue his NFL dream, who remained by his side and at his back as he transferred to New Jersey's Monmouth University for one season on the football field, who traversed the country with him even while graduating and attending medical school, working together through football stops in San Francisco, New York, Miami, Buffalo, and finally the payoff in New England. Chris hit it big with the Patriots, the breakout star in last year's AFC Championship game win over Pittsburgh, a key contributor in New England's thrilling comeback win over Atlanta in the Super Bowl, delivering on the three-year, \$12 million offer sheet he'd signed before the season.

But Ashley was hitting it big too, earning her residency in the demanding surgical world, working through her pregnancy and returning after just four weeks of maternity leave, relying on those same uber-competitive genes as her husband to crush whatever challenge came her way.

"Ashley's made countless sacrifices, put up with me being all over the country, training camps, being away six months of the year. I will never be able to repay what she's done for me in my career," Chris said. "On the flip side of things, I know how hard this woman has worked from Day One to get to med school, studying through the night, all week, every single day, to pass all her boards, all of her exams, get to residency, work like a frickin' dog, 24-hour call a couple days a week, weekends, she just does it.

"You'd look at her and never know what she does, how easily she handles it. She works very hard in her profession, is very good at what she does. I support my wife. I want her to have a career. I want her to be happy, to have success at what she does. It's hard for us, being away, to balance having twins, dogs, the house, the list goes on and on. But at the end of the day, she's worked so hard to get where she's at, I would never ask her to give that up. If anyone was to give up something, I would give up something to sacrifice for her to be able to live her dreams. I couldn't be more proud of her and what she's accomplished."

He sees her in action across the FaceTime app every evening, getting the babies fed, washed, and dressed for bed. She laughs as he cajoles smiles out of the twins — Chase is a breeze, Parker makes him work for it — and they connect through conversation until the next weekend visit arrives, talking through their plans after her graduation, when she hopes to join the private orthopedic practice her father, also a surgeon, belongs to.

"From 200 miles away, he is totally involved, there every night," Ashley said. "He's amazing. And he's my biggest cheerleader. He's supported me through this 100 percent. This is the life I always dreamed of and I can't believe it's reality. Every day gets sweeter and sweeter, especially with the kids getting older and older. They're starting to crawl, cruise, standing. And knowing I get to see Chris on the weekend keeps my head up, keeps me going."

Because it's hard when she wakes up at 2:30 on a postgame Monday morning to start the drive back to Long Island, hard when she hears the cries at 4:30 a.m., tending to the babies at an hour that qualifies as the middle of their night but signals the start of her day. But truth be told, she savors these early morning feedings for the time spent together.

"They are the most determined, motivated people," said Erinn, herself a former college lacrosse player who is returning to school to add a nursing degree to the business one she already earned, but who moved in with Ashley and the kids while completing prerequisite courses. "Each recognizes how important the other's goals are in life. Each is the other's No. 1 fan and supporter. I think it's amazing. Chris puts Ashley's career at the same level as his NFL dream. They're completely different, but he values that as much as he values his dream. They both know this isn't a long-term thing; this is going to make their lives better and set them up for a beautiful life for their kids. I don't know how they make it work, but they make it work. That's Chris and Ashley. They'll figure it out. They always end up on their feet."

Two demanding careers. One complicated life.

And they wouldn't have it any other way.

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## QB Brian Hoyer



### **It was a long road back to Patriots for Brian Hoyer**

Jeff Howe

Thursday, November 30, 2017

FOXBORO — Brian Hoyer probably can't remember every difficult conversation he has endured throughout his nine-year career, though there is one he'll never forget.

For that had a desirable ending.

A month ago today, Hoyer was shopping for his 5-year-old son's Halloween costume when 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan called his cell phone. Hoyer found it strange because they had been together three hours earlier. Shanahan explained the 49ers had acquired quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo from the Patriots in a deadline deal, and Hoyer no longer had a spot on the roster.

But if Hoyer was willing to move his wife and kids across the country, the Patriots wanted him to again back up Tom Brady. The caveat soothed the pain of the benching from two weeks earlier, the latest blow in Hoyer's grinding career.

"I was in shock," Hoyer said. "Once I realized what was going to happen (with the Patriots), I was really excited to get a chance to come back here. The thing I was nervous about was telling my family that we had to move again. I never planned on that in a thousand years. It's like Murphy's Law. Everything that could happen has happened to me in my career.

"I knew it was a special opportunity. If in San Francisco, the worst thing possible happened, then this was the best scenario."

Back to school

Hoyer first joined the Patriots as an undrafted free agent in 2009 and beat out 2008 third-round pick Kevin O'Connell, veteran Andrew Walter and Matt Gutierrez for the backup job, which he kept for three full years. He staved off 2011 third-rounder Ryan Mallett but couldn't keep his perch in 2012.

When the Patriots cut Hoyer after training camp, he had such a tough time finding another NFL job that he returned to his high school, Saint Ignatius in Cleveland, to work out. He threw routes against invisible defenses and even played scout-team quarterback in 7-on-7 drills until the Steelers lost Ben Roethlisberger and Byron Leftwich in consecutive weeks in November.

"I will always have a special place in my heart for the Steelers," Hoyer said. "When no one else wanted me, they signed me."

Hoyer was released three weeks later so the Steelers could promote a practice squad cornerback to replace injured Ike Taylor, but they planned to re-sign him after that weekend's game. So Hoyer drove home to Cleveland to have dinner with his wife, Lauren, and son, Garrett, when he got another surprising call.

Arizona general manager Jason Licht, who was the Patriots director of player personnel when they signed Hoyer, informed the quarterback the Cardinals had claimed him off waivers for the final three weeks of the 2012 season. Hoyer was so stunned.

"Can you get on a flight tonight?" Licht asked.

"Uh, how about tomorrow morning," Hoyer said.

The logistics were complicated. The game plan, well, the Cardinals star receiver made that easy.

"It was basically just look for Larry Fitzgerald," Hoyer laughed. "I remember Larry in the huddle being like, 'Just throw it to me.'"

### Homecoming

The Cardinals released Hoyer in May 2013, a month after acquiring Carson Palmer, and he took a dream opportunity to play for his hometown Browns. Like many Cleveland natives, Hoyer grew up with a Bernie Kosar jersey, so brown was in his blood.

By Week 3, Hoyer surpassed Jason Campbell and took the reins from an injured Brandon Weeden. He led the Browns to three consecutive victories, completing 59.3 percent of his passes for 615 yards, five touchdowns and three interceptions. But his season ended in heartbreak on "Thursday Night Football" against the Bills, as his cleat got caught in the turf when he took a shot from linebacker Kiko Alonso, and he tore his ACL.

"You finally get your opportunity, and you're in your hometown, and it's a fluke play," Hoyer said. "That was it."

Hoyer knew he'd start again in 2014, but the Browns were thirsty enough for a big-name solution that they drafted Johnny Manziel in the first round. Still, Hoyer led them to a 7-4 record before stumbling to a pair of losses and getting replaced by the hype machine. Hoyer is one of just two Browns quarterbacks (Derek Anderson) to win seven games in a single season since 2003, and the Browns are 4-42 since benching him.

"We hit a rough patch, and I think at that point they were waiting for any chance they could to put Johnny in (as the starter)," Hoyer said. "Obviously, we saw what we got when that happened. (Do) I wish it worked out? For sure. How great would it have been to have a long career in your hometown? But it didn't. That's just the way the NFL works."

### More reunions

Hoyer rejoined forces with former Pats offensive coordinator Bill O'Brien in 2015 with the Houston Texans and won five of his nine starts before a nightmarish 30-0 loss to the Chiefs in his playoff debut. That offseason, O'Brien was overruled by owner Bob McNair and general manager Rick Smith, who signed Brock Osweiler to a laughably bad four-year, \$72 million contract and cut Hoyer.

Hoyer then reunited with Bears offensive coordinator Dowell Loggains, who was his QB coach with the Browns. He replaced an injured Jay Cutler and had the best spurt of his career, completing 67.0 percent of his passes for 1,445 yards, six touchdowns and no interceptions, but the Bears won just one of his five starts before he suffered a season-ending broken arm.

If nothing else, Hoyer shook the horrid feeling of his playoff loss with the Texans.

"That was probably the worst I've ever played," Hoyer said of the playoff game. "That was the best thing for me to go to Chicago the next year and get a chance to play because I just wanted to show that (playoff) game was an anomaly. That wasn't who I was as a player. . . . It was just that one game. As I've learned in the NFL, people make snap, rash decisions, and I had one bad game, and they wanted to move on from me. What can you do but just go keep playing?"

Hoyer and Shanahan, another former Browns coach, joined up with the 49ers last offseason, but he lost his starting job to C.J. Beathard after an 0-6 start. In a long, arduous way, it gave Hoyer a second opportunity with his original team.

The perennial underdog who has had to move his family from city to city on an almost yearly basis might have found a home again.

"As an undrafted guy to beat out a few guys and then to be the opening day starter for three different franchises, that doesn't just happen by accident," Hoyer said. "I've earned a lot of stuff in this league. It's cool to come back as a veteran."

"For me at this point, I want to have fun and win. What better place than here to do that? It was a blessing when the whole thing went down."

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## OL Shaq Mason



### **Shaq Mason's drive came from watching mom**

By Mark Daniels

Updated Oct 20, 2018 at 8:23 PM

FOXBORO — Alicia McGuire always stressed the importance of academics to her son, even if it came at a cost.

Anytime her boy received good grades, she rewarded him. That usually meant a special meal at a restaurant of his choosing. Since Shaq Mason was a straight-A student, there were many dinners, usually at Ruby Tuesday.

There in Columbia, Tenn., Mason flipped through the menu. He usually settled on cheesy fries for an appetizer and then a nice entree. For a single mother, working up to three jobs to stay afloat, it wasn't easy to pay for these special nights. That's why McGuire only ordered an appetizer. On other occasions, she'd just sip on water.

When her son asked why she wasn't eating, she'd hide the truth.

"I'd just let him eat and I'd get some water and be like, I'm not hungry," McGuire recalled. "As a kid, all he knows is that I'm working and he's getting everything that he needs. He wouldn't have known that we were poor. He probably thought we were rich. He may have not known that I was working paycheck-to-paycheck sometimes. He just knew that mama took care of him. He didn't know what was going on behind the scenes."

When Mason was teenager, he asked his mom about those nights. She explained that she didn't eat because she couldn't afford to. It was always more important that he enjoyed those dinners, since her goal was to reward her son and shield him from her own struggles. When the truth hit him, it opened his eyes to just how strong his mother really was.

"There's things that, growing up, that you didn't know, that she hid from us," Mason said. "But once I got older, in high school, I was like, 'wow, this is really how we're living.' It was something I didn't know. I thought it was normal."

Little did McGuire know, her work ethic rubbed off on her oldest son, who's now living his dream with the Patriots.

#### **'No alternative'**

McGuire was a 21-year-old student at Martin Methodist College when her son was born on Aug. 28, 1993.

She briefly stopped her education to focus all her time and energy on her boy. She knew it wouldn't be easy and part of her was worried. McGuire saw firsthand what could happen when a male strayed down the wrong path in life. So, with no financial help from her son's biological father, McGuire began worked two, and sometimes three, jobs to pay the bills. Her main source of income was factory work, but that wasn't enough, so she did side jobs like clean houses.

"It's just one of those situations in which once becoming pregnant, knowing that now that I have a child to take care of, you have to hit the ground running and it's all about him at that point," McGuire said. "That was my focus — take care of my son. I looked at it as not having an alternative, but to work and work and work and work."

She preached education and hard work to her boy. When times were tough, she taught him that things could get better. When the factory closed, the company offered employees a chance to go back to school. She did that and eventually got into the corporate world.

Growing up in that environment wasn't easy, but Mason soon realized how his mother's work ethic influenced him.

"The hardest working person I ever met is my mom. I never met anyone who worked harder than her," Mason said. "She provided for me and my [younger] brother. All those years with no help. I just learned from her to always, she told me at a young age, 'it always can get better.' We know what the bottom feels like, so it can only go up from here. That's something that always stuck with me."

## **Learned from mistakes**

When Mason was a boy, he was involved in nearly every sport offered each season. He played football in the fall, basketball in the winter and baseball in the spring. If that wasn't enough, he even took karate lessons.

McGuire was always a sports fan — that's why she named her son Shaquille Olajuwon Mason, after her two favorite basketball players. However, turning him into an athlete was never the goal. She wanted to keep him safe, and needed to keep him busy.

"Growing up, the way we grew up, my most important goal was to not let him be a statistic," McGuire said. "I've always been a sports person. I love sports. But I couldn't care less if he played a down of football or shot a hoop in regards to his education. So I always pushed his education first but I always wanted to occupy his time because I felt like I didn't want the streets to get a hold of him."

McGuire saw what could happen. Two of her brothers went down the wrong path and ended up in and out of prison. She knew if he got into the wrong hands, he could've easily been interacting with drug dealers instead of football coaches.

As Mason grew up, he witnessed several events that turned out to be teaching moments. That's why every day his mom told him the same thing — and still does — "make good choices."

"I was exposed to a lot. You get the picture. I was exposed to a lot of things at an early age," Mason said. "Thankfully, thankful to god, I didn't fall victim to those things. Likewise, my uncles had been in prison, but one thing I can say, they always thought me — 'don't do this. This is not the route you want to take.' They were role models to me as far showing me the route not to take. They told me, 'you want to be better than us.' Things like that. I could've easily feel victim to it, but thankfully I didn't."

Mason never strayed. He was a great student and excelled in sports. His focus is what set him apart among his peers. Before you knew it, Mason approached academics and football like his mom approached her work — he hit the ground running and never turned back.

## **He beat the odds**

When he was 5, Mason would tell anyone who asked, he wanted to be a football player, but no one really thought it was possible. That story usually doesn't happen in Columbia. It was a pipe dream.

"That was always a goal of mine." Mason said. "That's every kid growing up, but coming from where I come from, that's not realistic."

Even after he earned a scholarship to Georgia Tech, it didn't hit him or his mother that he was actually going to the NFL until his senior year.

The truth is Mason's an outlier. When you combine an elite work ethic in an elite athlete, you usually get positive results. Like his mother, this offensive guard never stop working. When the Patriots drafted him in the fourth round in 2015, he was considered raw. Sure, he was already a solid run blocker, but he was far from being a complete offensive linemen. Before you knew it, Mason was just that and a full-time starter by his second season.

That didn't happen by mistake.

Mason always put the effort in. McGuire saw him putting in the extra work — before practice, after practice. He even ran on the weekends and made sure he ate right. Of course, it's easy to see where that comes from.

"A lot of my drive comes from her," Mason said. "Just from seeing what she did. She motivated me to want to take an extra mile — like she did."

Last year, Mason bought his mother a new house in Columbia. This year, he was rewarded for his hard work with a five-year, \$45-million contract from the Patriots. On the field, he continues to get better. Mason's arguably the most talented offensive linemen on the team and one of the best guards in the NFL.

“Hard work pays off. He worked so hard. He always just strives so hard to do better and better,” McGuire said. “He’s always just push, push, push. I think it’s because he always wanted to be better.”

Like mother, like son.

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## DB Devin McCourty



### **Guregian: Devin McCourty has become Mr. Patriot**

Karen Guregian

Wednesday, January 11, 2017

FOXBORO — Devin McCourty didn't play with Tedy Bruschi, Willie McGinest or any of the Patriots greats from those early championship teams.

Yet he'd certainly fit right in at the head of the table.

Now in his seventh season, McCourty has all the i's dotted and t's crossed in that Patriots kind of way. The Pro Bowl safety has evolved into a similar kind of leader. On the field, off the field, he shows up at the most important times. He's also pretty good at taking care of all the mundane but necessary tasks needed to keep the locker room functioning at a peak level.

"To me, in my mind, Devin is Mr. Patriot," fellow captain Matthew Slater said. "He just does everything the right way, whether it's on the field, off the field, the type of man he is, what he does in the community. I can't think of a better example of what this organization hopes to stand for than Devin McCourty."

McCourty has been thrust to the forefront in dealing with the media, in part a responsibility of being a captain, but also because he handles the job so well. He's well-spoken, but in true Patriots fashion gives nothing away, a trait Bill Belichick appreciates in his captains.

McCourty just shows everyone the way. It's like he's taken the baton from Bruschi and McGinest and has become the face of the Patriots defense.

"He definitely is exactly what the Patriots embody and embellish — team players. And it's very natural for him," cornerback Logan Ryan said. "He's a unanimous captain every year. He does everything for the team and has a lot of fun doing it. He's a good Mr. Patriot. If a play needs to be made, he makes it. If something needs to be done in the room, he does it."

Former Patriots safety Rodney Harrison said the tipoff to how Belichick and the organization felt about McCourty, and where he stood, came during free agency two years ago when they extended him to a five-year, \$47.5 million deal at the 11th hour. Belichick personally called McCourty to seal the deal.

"If he didn't fit in that (Patriots) mold, they would have never paid him the type of money they gave him," Harrison said. "Bill has let other guys leave in free agency. I think they understood he was a very, very important piece, even if they had to overspend on him."

McCourty certainly made some huge plays down the stretch this season, helping the team to a 14-2 record, home-field advantage and a date Saturday night in the divisional playoffs against the Houston Texans.

Perhaps his biggest play thus far, one that's considered the signature moment and defining play of the regular season, happened in Denver in Week 15. In the fourth quarter, McCourty delivered a jarring hit to Demaryius Thomas at the sideline to break up a fourth-down pass. It essentially sealed the game.

"That's big-time," Harrison said. "Nobody (cares) about the Pro Bowl and racking up a bunch of big numbers, that's fine. If you ask me, it's all about making key plays in big moments of games. That's what people remember."

People definitely mention that play. Or they mention McCourty's ongoing charitable work. Or they mention listening to him at the podium, speaking the word of the Patriots every week.

"I've always been taught it's what you do, not what you say. That's what my mom preached," McCourty said. "That's me in a nutshell. I'm not a guy who says a ton. I'm not a yeller or a screamer. But I think guys learn the most from your actions and what you do on a daily basis. That's what they see most."

McCourty learned the Patriots Way mostly from former teammates Jerod Mayo, Vince Wilfork (who will be in town Saturday with the Texans) and Logan Mankins.

"Everyone talked about how Logan never missed practice during his career. I'd hear things like that, then playing defense with Vince and Mayo, I was just trying to follow the things they did and what they represented," McCourty said. "Vince obviously played with a lot of those guys, and Mayo caught the back end (from the early championship guys). It might be just from them and what they learned."

Well, he learned his lessons well. He was voted a captain his second year on the team. That was a bit daunting for McCourty, but he's grown into the role and now embraces it.

"The plays on the field, I don't have much control. Sometimes they just happen, but I think when you talk around the locker room or have meetings with the guys, you just get a feel for it, when you need to say something," said McCourty, a captain for six seasons. "When something needs to change, anything you feel you need to do, that just hits you, and you feel comfortable doing it."

Slater believes McCourty is timeless.

"You put him in any era, you plug him in the early 2000s or plug him in now, I think he'd fit in, and you'd say the same thing about him," Slater said. "I think we're very fortunate to have a man like him in our locker room on our team. He's true in his convictions, and obviously we know him for his performance on the field."

"He is Mr. Patriot, no question about it."

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## RB Sony Michel

The logo for 'THE ATHLETIC' is displayed in a bold, orange, serif font against a black rectangular background.

### **‘Everybody loves him’: Sony Michel bringing passion for family and hard work to the Patriots**

By Jeff Howe  
May 4, 2018

There was the fourth touchdown of the evening, a 27-yard, Rose Bowl-winning score that sent Georgia to the national championship game in January.

But that’s not Sony Michel’s brand of football.

There was the three-touchdown performance against Clay High School to propel American Heritage to Florida’s state championship in 2013.

But that’s not Sony Michel’s brand of football.

Pick a highlight, any of Sony’s PlayStation high-steps or YouTube dedications, and stare in awe at the stat sheets.

Not Sony Michel’s brand of football.

“You know this kid is not just doing it for show,” former Heritage coach Mike Rumph said of the Patriots’ first-round pick.

When running back Sony Michel carries a game, his team, his ball, he is carrying his parents, his sister, his brother. They are Sony Michel’s brand of football.

“He is doing it to make something better for him and his family,” Rumph finished.

‘A Sony thing’

Michel was an unwilling, 7-year-old offensive lineman at the dawn of his football career. The position was the product of his size, and his big brother, Marken, was up front alongside him. But Michel hated it, to the point where he wanted to quit to do something, or literally anything, that was more exciting.

Thing was, Michel’s parents weren’t having it. Quitting flew in the face of their belief system. About six years after Michel’s older sister, Lamise, was born, Jean and Marie Michel immigrated from Haiti to Florida with Lamise in search of something better for their family. So on a far greater scale, they recognized the importance of seeing something through, so Michel wasn’t about to get the green light to quit football after a day.

Good thing, because it didn’t take long for his coaches to have something of a Sony sense when they switched him to running back, and that’s where he found his soul and the purpose behind his presence on the football field.

The Michels lived in a first-floor apartment in a working-class neighborhood in Hollywood, Fla., and Sony had a motor that wouldn’t stall. He’d wake up in the morning, do his chores, cut the grass, go play a baseball game and then return home to change and head back out for football. By junior high, Michel flourished as an athlete who was a lot more physically imposing than anyone his age, so much so that Byron Walker will never forget his lucky introduction to the seventh grader.

Walker, who at the time was the American Heritage head coach in nearby Plantation, was hosting a meeting with the Florida state coaches association when he happened upon two people in search of directions in the school lobby.

“It was Sony and his youth coach,” Walker said. “I asked the coach where he coached, and he told me. And Sony really looked like a grown man. I said, ‘Where do you coach?’ He says, ‘I’m a player. I’m in seventh grade.’ I said, ‘Man, you need to come to American Heritage.’ He said, ‘Well, I’d like to,’ and lo and behold without any further contact, he and his brother Marken enrolled in January, which was my extreme good fortune.”

It worked in Michel's favor, too. American Heritage is one of the most prestigious academic schools in Florida with a tuition that can approach \$25,000 without scholarships or forms of financial aid, which the Michels qualified to receive.

Michel became an instant sensation on the field. And because, in Florida, junior high students can play varsity sports if the schools share a campus, Michel joined the football team as an eighth grader. Walker dispatched Michel to the junior varsity squad on the first day of practice but that thought, however sensible it seemed on the surface, didn't last the day. The outcome probably should have been predictable.

"He was a man among boys," Walker said of the eighth grader. "He lived in the weight room. I used to tell people, 'Hey, look at this kid. He can lift the building.'"

Michel soared up the depth chart and seized control of the starting job for the varsity team, and he had 10 carries for 109 yards and one touchdown in his first game. He finished that season with 1,825 rushing yards and 20 total touchdowns against a schedule that included Florida powerhouses like Glades Central and Bolles.

"From the eighth grade, everybody believed that he would play in the NFL," said Mark Richt, Michel's former coach at Georgia who is now at Miami. "He became bigger than life as a young kid in the world of high school ball and recruiting."

The celebrity status then followed the humble Hollywood kid whose character remained on course.

"Sony is such a quiet guy," Walker said. "The way you see him walking down the hall and people are thronging after him as an eighth grader, he became a local legend almost overnight. Sony was everybody's hero as an eighth grader. He was very mature. He had an aura about him."

Football and life intersected during Michel's freshman year. His parents both lost their jobs around the same time, and the Michels struggled financially, sometimes wondering if they'd have to ration their meals. Michel was noticeably bothered when he told Walker about their strife, so Walker took their issue to the top of the food chain at American Heritage. Shortly thereafter, the school hired Jean as a custodian, and Marie and Lamise took cooking jobs that they still hold to this day.

There at school, Michel learned his gift could yield new levels of wealth for his family. To tie it all together, his parents and sister acquired jobs that kept him and his brother at a private school where they'd earn a top-rate education. Michel even turned his grades around and became a quality student.

"They're what the American dream is all about," Walker said.

*"THEY'RE JUST GOOD, SOLID PEOPLE, AND THEY DID A GREAT JOB OF BRINGING HIM UP. THEY DIDN'T HAVE MUCH. HE DIDN'T COME FROM A WHOLE LOT, BUT HE HAD A BUNCH OF SUPPORT FROM THE SCHOOL, FROM HIS FAMILY. THEY'RE HARD-WORKING PEOPLE." — BRYAN MCCLENDON ON SONY MICHEL'S FAMILY*

Michel's loyalty shined through after his freshman season when another school in the district tried to pry him away, which is commonplace in big-time high school football. Due to the publicized nature of the situation, Michel's father walked into Walker's office, unprompted, to tell him Sony would never transfer due to the family's appreciation for the American Heritage community.

Michel tormented his division for two seasons before unwittingly lighting up his own squad during their first week of practices of his sophomore year. That's when Mike Rumph took over, first as the defensive coordinator before a promotion to head coach.

Rumph, a former star for Miami's 2001 national championship team and a first-round pick of the 49ers in 2002, was briefed on Michel's ability before he started his new job on the sidelines, but he shrugged off the hype until it bowled him over.

"He was already here as a YouTube phenom," said Rumph, who is now the Miami cornerbacks coach. "Everybody was like, 'Go online and watch Sony Michel.' I remember thinking, 'This eighth-grade kid is online and tearing it up. I'm not going to watch it on YouTube. I want to see him in person.' So I never watched him on YouTube, but then I get to practice and am going against this kid every day."

"I was so frustrated my first week because I felt like I wasn't coaching the defense well enough because we couldn't stop him. Then later I learned, OK, this kid is just special. He had that stop-and-start speed. He had the vision to see the cutback lanes. He could get through the cracks and crevices. I stopped coming home so upset because I just had to chalk it up as a Sony thing. That was my introduction to him. My first week, he sent me home pretty upset, and then I learned to just deal with it."

Aside from maybe getting bitten at the bottom of a pile as an eighth grader, the first time Michel endured true on-field adversity occurred when his sophomore season was wiped away with a torn ACL, but his coaches admired his resiliency. Michel's success, before and after the injury, can partly be traced to his commitment to his physique. Walker said Michel was at the door of the weight room every morning it opened. And when teammates took a break to joke around, Rumph said Michel would do some curls or squats to pass the time. And when American Heritage hired Mike Smith to train the football team, Michel made him earn his money with long sessions.

Rumph even recalled a Sunday morning when he stopped by the school to pick up something in his office when he heard the weights clanging around. He checked just to make sure, but Rumph knew there was only one person it could've been. Walker even mentioned a recent trip back to American Heritage when he decided to pop his head into the weight room because he hoped to bump into Michel. Where else would he be, right? Surprisingly, Michel must've been working out somewhere else that day.

Michel isn't just a workout machine, though. Later in his high school career, he got the football team together to make a trip to a local children's hospital. And as American Heritage stomped Clay, 66-8, to win the state title to cap his senior year, Rumph pulled Michel to the sideline so he could be appropriately honored with a standing ovation by the school's fans who made the trip. Michel responded by asking the assistant athletic director to grab an extra pair of gloves from the locker room, and he gave his pair to a younger kid who closely followed the team and loved giving Michel high-fives.

"That child was like in tears," American Heritage athletic director Karen Stearns recalled. "It was such a big thing. That's who Sony is. Kids love him. Everybody loves him. He is just a great young man, and he touches everybody he talks to."

'Just a special guy'

Bryan McClendon fell in love with the Michels, too. How could he not? McClendon wasn't even assigned to the south Florida recruiting circuit when he worked on Georgia's staff under Richt, but he wouldn't walk away from Michel. It also didn't hurt that Marie Michel was eager to cook up a healthy batch of chicken and rice with her Haitian flair every time McClendon was at their apartment.

With the Michels, when you're in, you're in for life. Sony Michel appreciated the loyalty and honesty he received from McClendon and Georgia, which was why he chose the Bulldogs over a myriad of programs that wanted him. McClendon told Michel how hard he'd coach him and work him, and Michel appreciated that because it had been all he knew.

"They're not a good family. They're a great family, really supportive," said McClendon, who is now the offensive coordinator at South Carolina. "Everybody in his family genuinely wants the best for him and nothing in return. They're just good, solid people, and they did a great job of bringing him up. They didn't have much. He didn't come from a whole lot, but he had a bunch of support from the school, from his family. They're hard-working people. He saw people work hard and knew that's what you're supposed to do."

As a freshman at Georgia, Michel worked his way to second on the depth chart behind Todd Gurley, and Richt said he was "wowed" by his new back on his very first day in pads. But Michel's first year on campus was marred by a twice-broken shoulder blade and a sprained knee. He responded with 1,406 yards from scrimmage and 11 touchdowns as a sophomore and wrapped up his career in Athens with 4,234 yards from scrimmage and 39 trips to the end zone.

One final time, Michel recovered from a nightmare scenario in front of 26.8 million people who watched the Rose Bowl against Baker Mayfield's Oklahoma team. Michel almost singlehandedly kept Georgia alive despite falling behind by 17 points, but his fourth-quarter fumble was returned for a touchdown that gave the Sooners a 45-38 lead. On the sideline, running back Nick Chubb pleaded for the coaches to give the ball right back to Michel, who had 21 yards from scrimmage on the game-tying drive and took a wildcat snap for the winner in double overtime.

"That's the guy he is, just a special guy," McClendon said.

Early morning April 26, Michel got in his workout at American Heritage. He had nobody left to impress in the hours before the NFL draft as teams' evaluations were complete and Michel had the makings of a prospect who could sneak into the first round.

Then again, maybe that's also why he never strayed from his roots. Michel didn't need the pomp and circumstance of the cameras or anything else. That night, the Patriots selected him with the 31st pick, and he made a quick trip to Foxboro a day later to meet with Robert Kraft and Bill Belichick and share the stage in an introductory news conference with Georgia offensive lineman Isaiah Wynn, just the way both would like it.

And since? Michel has spent every day at his high school, where his mom was right down the hall, sometimes working out in the morning, meeting with the football team to share some guidance in the afternoon and working out again in the evening.

"He basically spent the majority of their practice out there talking to kids," said Stearns, who noted American Heritage will be honoring Michel at their new athletic facility sometime in the not-so-distant future. "It's a special thing because they all look up to him."

Michel has always been a high-class athlete who wanted his vivacity on the field to create a better life for his family. And if he has provided joy to anyone with his performance, he wants to show that he can do the same for them with his spirit.

Those stadium lights, they don't stay on forever. But if Michel can shine beneath them, he knows his family can comfortably do the same.

That's the Sony Michel brand of football.

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## WR Cordarrelle Patterson

### *The Providence Journal*

#### **Cordarrelle Patterson ” a unique name, a one-of-a-kind success story**

By Mark Daniels  
September 15, 2018

FOXBORO — This story starts in Rock Hill, S.C., with a soap opera and Chuck Norris. It involves fast cars, fancy clothes, flashy jewelry and lots of women — but not like you’re thinking.

To understand Cordarrelle Patterson, it starts with his name.

When Catherine Patterson was pregnant with her third child, her two favorite shows were “One Life to Live” and “Walker, Texas Ranger.” She became enamored with a couple of characters and their names. One was Cordero Roberts, a smooth-talking, tall, dark and handsome cowboy, played by John Loprieno. The other was Cordell Walker, a ranger, former Marine, martial arts expert and all-around tough guy, played by Norris.

That’s how she came up with Cordarrelle.

“Yeah, I used to watch soap operas,” Catherine Patterson said. “Asa Buchanan’s grandson [on “One Life to Live”] was named Cordero. So, I knew my son going to be fast because he was fast, too. That’s where I got the name from. And, Walker, Texas Ranger and his name is Cordell, too.”

With such a unique name, it’s only fitting that Cordarrelle Patterson is truly one of a kind. A 6-foot-2, 228-pound receiver, he plays with the type of speed and athleticism that you don’t see from a player of his size. Off the field, he’s a fan of flashy clothes and jewelry. He used to be a fan of fast cars, but times have changed and it’s hard to fit a car seat into a Camaro.

To understand Patterson, you have to understand where he comes from, the women behind him and the path he’s taken to the NFL.

#### Rough start

Life wasn’t easy in Rock Hill, but Catherine Patterson was the perfect role model for her three children. A single parent, she worked at two restaurants to feed her family. She relied on relatives and friends to watch her children when she couldn’t. Her children — Charles, Crystal and Cordarrelle — relied on their mother and each other during the difficult moments.

“I just had to do what I had to do,” Catherine said. “I had family — my sister — that was my backbone. I worked two jobs to support my kids. I busted my tail raising my kids.”

“She’s just the one. We grew up in a single-parent [home] and she was always there working her [butt] off for us,” Cordarrelle Patterson said. “Me, my sister, my brother, she did everything she could to make sure we were always smiling. She never let us see her down or anything. When we grew up, we knew what it was like to struggle.”

Cordarrelle Patterson’s outlet was sports. His family recognized early that he was “gifted.” He excelled in nearly everything — football, basketball and track. He’d score so much on the gridiron that coaches would ask him to stop.

As a freshman and sophomore at Northwestern High School, Patterson didn’t even play. That was until the team’s quarterback came calling. Will King sat near Patterson, a tall and lanky sophomore, during a class. King wanted another offensive weapon so he asked and asked Patterson to join the team. After rejecting his pleas multiple times, Patterson finally relented and joined the next fall as a junior.

“I kept kind of nagging him and kind of begging him for a lack of better term,” King recalled.

Patterson began to practice, but he wasn’t accustomed to the structured program. King was there for him. He was his friend, showed support and made sure he was approaching things the right way. Throughout that 2008 season, the friends grew close.

"His mom is the salt of the earth. She's the best person I ever met," King said. "She's a hard worker, worked hard and late hours. Put in time to feed Cordarrelle and his sister and brother. She did everything. I remember there were sometimes he'd come and stay with us because mom was working late. They're very, very, very close."

#### Secret talent

His path to a Division I school was not direct. After failing to qualify academically in high school, he, at first, decided to attend Hutchinson Community College in Kansas. But, because it was so far from home, he changed his mind and enrolled at North Carolina Tech Christian Academy in 2009.

That fall, the NCAA announced it would not accept courses or grades from the school. Patterson left and, in 2010, enrolled at Hutchinson.

At that time, he wasn't on anyone's radar. That's when Tennessee's Darin Hinshaw got a tip from the defensive coordinator at Hutchinson. He said they had the most under-the-radar recruit in the country on campus. Hinshaw was handed a VHS tape and he agreed.

"He said, 'This guy is going to be a freak of nature. Get ready. And here's a video on him,'" Hinshaw, now at Kentucky, said.

So Tennessee became the first Division I school to recruit Patterson. After two years at Hutchinson, Patterson went from unknown to the best junior college player in the nation. He accepted that scholarship to Tennessee and Hinshaw became his receivers coach.

"We knew what he could do so we weren't surprised," Crystal Patterson said. "I think it was a good path for him. It takes time where you want to be and he put in enough effort to get there. He had to go the long route, but in the end, it worked out."

Patterson spent six months with Hinshaw before the NFL came calling. In that time, the coach learned a lot about his star receiver. He was different — confident and flashy — but his priorities never wavered.

"Cordarrelle Patterson is the most unique individual you'll meet," Hinshaw said. "The cliché was that he didn't have any tattoos and I asked, 'Why is it you don't have any tattoos?' He goes, 'You don't put a bumper sticker on a Ferrari.'"

"As soon as you get to know Cordarrelle Patterson, you know that his mom and sister are 1A, 1B. They're a very close family. They knew that he had the ability to go play in the NFL."

#### Strong supporters

Patterson always had to be different. That was evident after the Minnesota Vikings drafted him in the first round in 2013. The receiver could be seen in Eden Prairie, Minn., driving around in a red Camaro with his nickname, "Flash" detailed on the back.

Come game time, he'd wear socks with his own picture on them.

"I still have a lot of socks. I stopped wearing them because you get tired of people judging you sometimes," Patterson explained. "I mean, I like to dress flashy. I like jewelry. I like flashy things."

His six years in the NFL have been up and down. He's a two-time Pro Bowl kick returner, but still hasn't broken out as a receiver. After signing with Oakland in 2017, Patterson was traded to the Patriots last March. His bravado could be construed as a negative quality, but those who think he's a problem don't truly know him.

"I love him like a son," said George Stewart, Patterson's former receivers coach in Minnesota, who's now with the Chargers. "He's a hell of a kid. He comes from a loving family [that] cares for him deeply. The thing I love most about him is that he has a huge heart and is a very caring person. I'm thankful for the time I had to coach him."

Even in the NFL, Patterson continues to rely on the women around him. He still calls his "mama" three times a day. He's extremely close to his sister, who helps him out with anything she can — including driving his car up to Foxboro.

"That's a bond you'll never break. They're like my go-to's. If something's going wrong, I know I can call them," Patterson said. "My mom and my sister, that's the only thing I knew growing up. The only girls in my life that really

mattered. Now, I have two daughters, a girlfriend. So it's just like girls coming everywhere. I've got to take care of all the girls. I mean, I wouldn't be here without those two and my brother. They played a big part in my life. There's nothing I can really say to thank them enough."

This group remains his motivation, foundation and inspiration.

"We always tell him to keep his head up and put God first," Crystal Patterson said. "We know what he can do on the field. Even if no one else believes in him, we always believe in him. We know what he can do."

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## WR Matthew Slater



### **The 'heartbeat' of the Patriots plays special teams**

By Mark Cannizzaro

January 25, 2015 | 10:46pm

When the Patriots make their anticipated Arizona arrival for Super Bowl XLIX on Monday, most eyes will be on their Deflategate-embattled coach and quarterback, Bill Belichick and Tom Brady.

The rest of the Patriots players will deplane, exit the team buses and disappear into the team hotel in relative anonymity by comparison — none more so than Matthew Slater.

Slater, with his unassuming, bookish, bespectacled look, easily can be mistaken as someone from the team's non-football support staff — a media relations or community relations official or an IT intern — not the four-year team captain he is.

On Sunday at University of Phoenix Stadium, Slater will be one of the integral forces attempting to lead the Patriots to their fourth Super Bowl title since 2001 and first since 2004. He is a glue that bonds the Patriots.

There is not a player on the Patriots roster who better embodies what his demanding coach seeks in a player. Slater is the quintessential Belichick player: ego-less, versatile and smart.

"There are zero words to properly describe Matt Slater's impact on this team," running back Shane Vereen said. "He's the heartbeat. He is who everyone looks to — other than Tom [Brady]."

Belichick has a phrase he uses with his players, a saying he probably gleaned from his father, Steve, also a lifer football coach: "The more you can do ..."

There isn't a lot Slater doesn't do for the Patriots in his role as their special-teams captain.

Yet if you surf the Internet and look at his statistics you might be led to believe he doesn't do much at all and wonder how it's possible he has been on the Patriots roster for seven years.

Slater was selected in the fifth round of the 2008 NFL Draft as a receiver. Yet he has one career catch for 46 yards. That took place in 2011. He has one career carry for 6 yards. That took place in 2009.

How has an offensive player who has one reception and one carry lasted seven years under Belichick?

"He's like our quarterback on special teams, the player-coach of special teams," running back Brandon Bolden said. "He works harder than anyone — and I'm not talking about just on this team, I'm talking about the whole league," Vereen said. "He's a hard-nosed, doesn't-back-down type of player. He's what this team needs. You can ask any guy in this locker room and they will tell you the same thing I'm telling you about Matthew Slater. I can't say enough about the guy."

Matthew is the 29-year-old son of Jackie Slater, who carved out a Hall of Fame career as an offensive tackle for the Los Angeles Rams and taught his son a thing or two about how to survive in a league that is constantly trying to get younger and cheaper with its revolving personnel grind.

"I always told Matthew that if he was going to play the game of football he has to respect it enough to do the hard things, to do the things that nobody else was going to be willing to do so that you and your role can be part of the overall team success," Jackie Slater said.

"My father taught me that in the NFL, nothing is owed to you, that everything that you get in this league you have to work hard to get it, you have to sacrifice; there's a price to be paid," Matthew said. "His work ethic over the course of his career stands out more to me than anything, because I remember him training in the offseason more than I remember the games."

Matthew made note of the fact his father didn't start until his fourth NFL season. Matthew never has started a game in seven years in New England, yet he's one of the most important players on the team.

"When I came here, we had [receivers] Wes Welker, Randy Moss, Jabar Gaffney — players that were very accomplished in this league," Matthew said. "My mentality was to do whatever I can to make the team, whether that's running down on kicks, giving looks on scout teams, whatever that was. I understood that everybody couldn't be a star player. But there was a need for role players. In order to have a good football team you've got to have good role players."

Those last words: music to any coach's ears.

When I suggested to Jackie Slater his son was the model Belichick player because of his ego-less manner, he said, "Well, that's Matthew. There's never been any other way with him. He was always a guy that worked real hard and wanted to do his part to help the team."

Matthew, with four Pro Bowls, is catching up to Jackie, who was voted into seven. Only the Manning family, with 19 (Archie's two, Peyton's 14 and Eli's three) has combined for more Pro Bowls than the Slaters' 11.

Jackie Slater called his son's four consecutive Pro Bowls "an amazing feat in my opinion, because it's not like they're taking three offensive tackles to the Pro Bowl; they're taking one special-teams guy."

One special, unique player.

"I never would have thought I'd be here seven years, but it's definitely been a fun ride," Matthew said. "I'm thankful for the experiences, the relationships and everything I've been able to do here."

Asked if he feels appreciation from Belichick, Slater said: "I know he appreciates me because he's still got me around here. That's good enough for me. He says everything he needs to say by allowing me to be on this team every year and I'm thankful for it."

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## The Boston Globe

### **Patriots' Matthew Slater got work ethic from his father**

By Shalise Manza Young  
January 6, 2013

FOXBOROUGH — The game is violent, made for large men like him, and carrying his name onto a football field would be a burden.

Or so the father thought.

As Jackie and Annie Slater raised their two sons in the Anaheim, Calif., area, they tried their best to steer them away from football. Jackie coached their older son, Matthew, at the YMCA, introducing him to soccer, baseball, and basketball.

But when they weren't at the Y, young Matthew went with his father to work, at the Los Angeles Rams practice facility. After his father ran, Matthew ran. When his father was in the weight room, Matthew watched, his wrists taped so he looked the part.

While his father was putting in all the hours necessary to stay on the field, to rehab from injuries, to honor the game he loved, Matthew had a front-row seat.

Jackie Slater, a 6-foot-4-inch offensive lineman, was with the Rams for 20 seasons. A third-round pick out of Jackson State in his native Mississippi in 1976, he didn't become the starting right tackle until his fourth season. Once he took over the job, however, it was a long time before he surrendered it.

Matthew was born at the start of the 1985 season, midway through what was a Hall of Fame career for his father.

Jackie never intended that the time Matthew spent with him at the Rams facility would be on-the-job training.

"It was a really hard way for me to go, and it was very physical and very demanding, and I was a big guy, I was always a big guy, and I have always felt football is a big man's game," Jackie said.

"I saw that he was going to be a little man and there was very little I was going to be able to help him with as a smaller player. I didn't know enough about the skill positions to teach him and help him and so I just kind of discouraged him away from it.

"To be perfectly honest with you, I just didn't think that he was going to be cut out to play the sport."

Matthew was smaller than his father — though, of course, most men are. But he was fast. And he loved the game his father played, in spite of Jackie's reluctance. He begged his parents to let him take up football.

"My dad did everything in his power when I was young for me not to play," Matthew said. "I think part of that was he didn't want me to feel the pressure of living up to being 'Jackie Slater's son' and secondly he didn't want me to get injured because he understands this is a dangerous game and he wanted his son to be healthy.

"But what he didn't know is he was the reason I wanted to play. Because even talking to my dad now, you hear him tell the stories of when he played, he still loves the game so much. You can see it in his eyes, and that was kind of contagious for my brother and I — what is this game that's bringing so much joy and passion in my dad?"

Eventually, the Slaters relented.

### **From Bruin to Patriot**

Annie Slater isn't sure when Matthew started excelling at football. He was a stellar student at Servite High, the top-notch all-boys Catholic school he attended, and his college choice came down to two schools: UCLA, not far from home, or Dartmouth, an Ivy League college in the East.

He was a standout track athlete, tying for second in the 100 meters at the California Interscholastic Federation state meet in 10.67 seconds, and was part of a state-champion 4 x 100-meter relay team.

On the football field, though, he had modest numbers: 39 receptions for 707 yards as a senior. But he had enough tools that he was appealing to college programs. He settled on UCLA.

Slater was a versatile performer with the Bruins, playing at receiver, in the secondary, and on special teams. He had the most impact as a kickoff returner, obliterating the school's season record for kickoff-return yards in 2007 with 986 yards on 34 returns (a school-record 29.0 yards per return), with three of those going for touchdowns.

What former UCLA coach Karl Dorrell most remembers, however, is Slater's work ethic.

"His effort and how he did things, it stuck out like a sore thumb, so to speak," said Dorrell, now quarterbacks coach for the Houston Texans. "If you go through practice and scan everybody that was practicing, there was always one guy that was just going so much harder and so much faster than everyone else, and that was Matthew Slater.

"He just kind of stuck out that way."

When his career with the Bruins was over and the draft process began, Slater had no sense of what would happen for him. He had established himself as a special teams player, but he didn't know whether that would be enough to earn him a shot with an NFL team as a free agent, let alone receive a phone call telling him he'd been drafted.

If Dorrell had gotten his way, Slater would have been a Dolphin. After a 6-6 season in 2007, he was fired by his alma mater and wound up in Miami as receivers coach.

"He can do so many different things, and his effort and how he did things was really unmatched compared to what most people would do," Dorrell said. "I was trying to get [the Dolphins] to draft him because I felt that strongly about his ability."

But Miami didn't draft Slater. A surprise team, one that he'd had little to no contact with in the previous weeks, chose him in the fifth round: the New England Patriots.

“When you look back on it, it was a perfect fit because they appreciated guys like me around here and they still do,” Slater said. “They view things a little bit differently in regards to special teams. So it was a perfect fit with the way my college career went for me to end up here.”

His rookie season of 2008 is not one Slater remembers fondly. He struggled on the field, averaging just 14.1 yards on 11 kickoff returns, and off the field, the transition from college student to professional — far from his family and his familiar Southern California surroundings — was difficult as well.

And then came Scott O’Brien, the mustachioed, frenetic special teams coach the Patriots hired after Slater’s rookie year, the yin to Slater’s quiet yang.

O’Brien rebuilt Slater’s confidence, believing in the young speedster, making him believe he could be a great player.

### **Appreciating the grind**

Jackie Slater believed that his son liked the grandeur of the game, that he enjoyed sitting in the stands with his mother and brother and seeing the Rams welcome different teams to Anaheim Stadium.

That was not the case.

“What I much later found out, the thing that had the biggest impact on him was, he’d watch me go through the grind, and I think the biggest thing that happened out of all that to him was he just learned to appreciate the underside of it, the mundane side of it, when nobody’s watching and you just have to go to work and get yourself ready,” said Jackie Slater.

“Those are some unique times, when we actually spent quite a bit of time together, when I was trying to retard the aging process and he saw that. He got up close and personal with the grind of the game, the hard work and everything that goes into it, the respect that you have to pay the game on a daily basis, the practices — that’s the thing that he seemed to have remembered the most.”

Matthew believes “95 percent of what I’ve learned as far as being a professional and how to work as a pro, and how to respect the game of football” came from his father.

“If there’s one thing I remember about my dad, it was his work ethic,” said Matthew. “As a little kid, going to Rams Park with him and watching him work out, and I didn’t understand why he was doing so much and why he put so much time into it, but as I got older, I began to realize why he was doing that and he always — even now — is talking to me about being a professional, what it means to be a pro, what it means to respect this game.

“This game owes none of us anything; we’re very privileged to be playing this game and we have to give it its just due in the way we prepare on the field and off the field so we’ll have no regrets at the end of the day. I got a lot of that from my dad.”

### **‘This is my craft’**

For most players, special teams is a means to an end: It’s a way to get on the field as a young player, with the hope of getting more snaps at your preferred position later in the season.

Though he practiced as a defensive back and receiver in his first years with the Patriots, Matthew Slater, now 6 feet and 198 pounds, at some point realized that special teams was his position, and he set his mind to excelling at his position.

“I can’t tell you how much I love this game of football,” he said. “This game has been really good to me and my family, and once I got on the field and was able to play, I really saw that hey, this is fun. I like doing this.

“I’m very competitive by nature. I want to be great at whatever it is I’m doing, it doesn’t matter if we’re playing tic-tac-toe.

“In college, when I would see guys not take special teams seriously, I would feel like they were slighting the game, like they weren’t respecting the game.

“This is a huge part of the game. It’s not a job, it’s my craft, and I want to be a master at my craft. It’s not just me coming in punching a clock, going from 9 to 5 and doing the bare minimum.

“This is my craft, I want to perfect it.”

Working on his own, working with O'Brien, Slater improved. He draws double-teams when he's on the field, opponents doing whatever they can to keep him from making a tackle on punt coverage or kickoff coverage.

More times than not, he's still the first player to get to the returner.

He has refined his craft to the point that he is considered by some the best special teams player in the NFL; last month, he was named to the Pro Bowl for the second straight year.

“There's something that sets the elite apart from everybody else, at any position, and to me it's really a desire and a passion that you have for what you do,” O'Brien said. “Not only understanding it and wanting to be good at it but wanting to be the best at what you do. And the positions he plays are the hard ones, so that's a credit to Matt.”

“When I talk to my peers, other coaches from different teams across the league, and they come up and say, ‘Did you have Matthew Slater at UCLA?’ I'm excited to talk about him,” Dorrell said.

“I was very proud of what he did at UCLA but I'm even more proud of how he's established himself with such a great reputation, and also to be recognized as really the best special teams player in the league, that says a lot.

“He's a self-made man and he did a lot of that on his own because of how hard he works.”

For the father, who didn't think his son was cut out for the game, who for a long time didn't appreciate the work done by special teams players, seeing his son's success is humbling.

“I always knew [special teams] was an important aspect of winning, it was just, in my heart of hearts, I didn't value it as much as some of the other positions,” Jackie said. “It's been humbling to watch my son go that route.

“This is the opportunity that he was given to get on the field at UCLA, this is the opportunity he was given to get in a training camp in the National Football League, it's the opportunity he's taken advantage of to make one of the best teams in the country, and it's the opportunity he's taken advantage of to distinguish himself as one of the best players in the best league in the world.”

### **Proud of the burden**

When Matthew Slater steps onto the football field, it is with the last name of a Pro Football Hall of Fame player on his back.

He is glad he isn't an offensive lineman, with the burden of playing the same role his father did, with the expectations of playing it at the same level. There was pressure enough when he was younger to be like his father.

But Jackie raised him to be his own man, and on the football field he certainly is.

“It's hard because, no matter what I do, I'll always be the son of Jackie Slater,” said Matthew. “But you know what, I'm OK with that. I'm OK with being the son of Jackie Slater because I am the son of Jackie Slater.

“But what I have to remember is I can't be him, I won't be him, I just have to be Matthew. He told me that at a young age, and even though at times I may struggle with that, I just have to be me and try to represent the name as well as I can.”

On and off the field, he does.

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## OL Joe Thuney

# The Boston Globe

### **A rookie guard is only Patriot to play every down this season**

By Nora Princiotti  
DECEMBER 7, 2016

FOXBOROUGH — The Patriots have changed quarterbacks and game plans, played on different fields and against different defensive schemes, but they've had only one left guard all season.

Joe Thuney has never been subbed out. The rookie has played every snap of every game. Whenever the offense has been on the field, so has Thuney.

Some of his fellow linemen also have been remarkably consistent and have missed only a couple of snaps here and there.

The difference is negligible in terms of football, but not in terms of pride. When a postgame stat sheet initially shorted Thuney a snap against Pittsburgh — claiming he had played 56 snaps instead of all 57 — it mattered.

"It said I missed one," Thuney said. "I had to square that away. I did not."

Thuney has four games left to complete his Iron Man challenge. Whether he does or not, the third-round pick out of North Carolina State has been a model of consistency.

That kind of stability is a change for all parties involved. Thuney played every position on the offensive line for the Wolfpack, and the Patriots were a revolving door along the line last season. Settling down has been good for both of them.

"It produces a feeling of familiarity, and, you know, you get comfortable with the guys around you," said Thuney. "So that's, I think, you know, a benefit. It helps with chemistry. That's important on the offensive line, so yeah, I think it's just that familiarity factor is helpful."

As in any workplace, chemistry on the football field isn't purely a matter of complementary skill sets. Getting to know colleagues and making them feel they know you and trust you is important, especially for linemen who can't play as individuals. The closer a player is to the center of a formation, the more they rely on coordination with the players around them.

Luckily for him, Thuney has a good track record of winning people over.

He's a people person, a jokester, and impeccably mannered. He introduces himself by name and with a firm handshake to anyone who comes over to his locker (which, of course, has his name on it). He mounted a winning campaign for senior class president at Archbishop Alter High School in Kettering, Ohio.

Thuney thinks the campaign video he made sealed the deal because it was funny. He claims he can't remember the jokes, or whether he had a slogan, though the grin on his face said otherwise.

"That helped," Thuney said. "I can't remember specifically, but it was good. I think. I like to think so. It got me elected."

It's obviously not a direct comparison, but can Thuney use those same qualities to fit in with his new team?

"I try to," he said, smiling sheepishly. "I try to be personable."

Whatever he's doing, it's working, as the offensive line has gone from a weakness to a strength for the Patriots. New England is eighth in the NFL in sacks per passing play, and the line has given up only 20 sacks all season. The team

is headed for the postseason trotting out the sixth-ranked run game in the league, having gained 1,407 yards and 14 touchdowns.

They passed a tricky test Sunday against the Rams defense, which didn't register a sack and hit Tom Brady only four times.

The Patriots ran for 133 yards in hefty chunks of 4.9 yards per carry, with 64 yards coming from the interior behind Thuney, David Andrews, and Shaq Mason. LeGarrette Blount's 43-yard run down the right sideline skews the numbers, but the Patriots' bread and butter was up the middle.

Moreover, Los Angeles defensive tackle Aaron Donald didn't have a heavy impact on the game.

"He was a really good player and they have a really good defense," Thuney said. "I've just got to try to learn from that game film and move on for the Ravens."

If the film reveals one teaching point that line coach Dante Scarnecchia probably will harp on, it's that Thuney can be a bit jumpy and a bit handsy. He has cost the Patriots 55 yards with seven penalties (four holding calls and three false starts) this season.

It's one area of Thuney's game where his rookie status shows. In most others, he's shouldering a rare amount of responsibility for a player his age who wasn't an elite draft pick and is enjoying a rare amount of success as a result.

"I'm really glad," he said. "It's great to be 10-2 and in this position. It's a long season but you just focus on what you can control and try to get a little better each day.

"It's a great start and I couldn't be happier where I am.

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## The Boston Globe

### **Day job: Protecting Tom Brady. Side gig: Working toward MBAs.**

By Nora Princiotti  
NOVEMBER 4, 2017

The weekend is a perfect time to catch up on the "Season Ticket" podcast.

FOXBOROUGH — The Patriots famously had to reconstruct space in the south end zone at Gillette Stadium this offseason to make room for the team's fifth Super Bowl banner. Now, thanks to some crane work, there's room for each and then some.

Offensive lineman Ted Karras was a rookie last season, so he's got only one Super Bowl ring. But Karras has his own drive for five going — five college degrees. And he knows exactly where he'll put them.

"I'm just going to have a rainbow above my desk of diplomas," Karras said.

Karras, a backup drafted in the sixth round in 2016, graduated early from Illinois with a bachelor's degree in communication. He completed it in December 2014 but still had eligibility for football, so he enrolled in the recreation, sport, and tourism master's program.

That made two by the time the NFL called. During his rookie season, though, Karras learned that if he wanted to keep studying and go back to school, the NFL Players Association had programs that would help him do so.

"A little-known perk that no one seems to take advantage of is when you get an accredited season in this league you get \$20,000 worth of school a year," Karras said, sounding a bit incredulous that others don't do the same.

"It just seems to be that everyone keeps wanting to pay for my school, so I'm not going to turn it down."

Karras is working on degree No. 3. He enlisted fellow Patriots offensive lineman and 2016 draft classmate Joe Thuney to join him, and the two are pursuing MBAs through Indiana University. The NFLPA has a partnership with IU's Kelley School of Business that's designed to make it easy for players to study around their schedules.

Karras and Thuney started the program two weeks after the Super Bowl and took classes online, Skyping with professors, up until training camp. They're about a third of the way done. They share a guidance counselor, but they said they don't share notes with each other and they study separately.

"I take it pretty seriously," Karras said. "In the offseason I get up there in my room, read my business books."

The Patriots' resident brainiac takes some good-natured teasing from his linemates, some of whom have dubbed him "the most educated man in the 2016 draft."

Fellow lineman Cole Croston, who occupies the locker to the left of Karras, deadpans that there's no living with Karras now, as he's "always condescending" about his superior intellect.

Thuney, a starting left guard the Patriots drafted in the second round in 2016, might hang 'em up (his note-taking pens, that is) after the MBA. Thuney studied accounting and international studies at North Carolina State, and also had a Spanish minor he occasionally shows off in the locker room.

Karras will keep going. Next up, he wants to study anthropology.

"I like the study of human behavior," he said. "I think it's interesting. I like the MBA, it's just a little dry sometimes with the math stuff."

Though it's important to note, Karras said, that he did well in accounting, he prefers learning about the decision-making side of running a business. His favorite assignments were company profiles, where Karras chose to look at the business models of luxury car companies Audi and BMW.

"I learned a lot of aspects of analyzing a business that you wouldn't even think of. There's so much, it's so in-depth," Karras said.

After anthropology, he's thinking literature. That would be five. At that point, why not blitz for six? Karras says he's thinking five would be enough, but if it gets to that point he might change his mind.

"I'm not going to stop until they kick me out of the league and then hopefully by then I can get another one just based on how many years I've accrued," he said.

As long as Karras accrues three NFL seasons, he'll also be entitled to \$60,000 in tuition money after his football career is finished.

Karras isn't sure what he'll do with all the degrees, he'll figure that out later. Right now, he just wants to learn. Besides, Karras had enough business savvy before starting the MBA program to know that when something is free, you take it.

"I'm going to keep going," he said. "Since I've been playing football people have been paying for my school."

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## LB Kyle Van Noy



### **Kyle Van Noy and teammates serve it up for a cause**

By Angelique Fiske

Wednesday, October 25, 2017 6:44 PM EDT

Skipjack's at Patriot Place was bustling with energy on Monday night. Servers with trays of drinks and salads moved swiftly from table to table to the kitchen and back again.

"Hello, welcome to Skipjack's. My name is Matthew, and I'll be taking care of you this evening," one said, as if he's said it a hundred times before.

But in fact, he hadn't because that Matthew was Matthew Slater.

And the waiters who diligently took orders all night? They were James White, Devin McCourty, Dion Lewis, David Harris, Duron Harmon, Eric Rowe, Brandon King and Rob Ninkovich.

While the guys took their jobs seriously, they are not moonlighting as waiters. They donned their aprons in the name of charity and supporting a teammate, as Kyle Van Noy and his wife Marissa hosted their first Van Noy Valor Foundation fundraiser: a celebrity waiter night.

The Van Noy Valor Foundation started when Kyle was still playing in Detroit. The mission is to encourage "personal valor in the lives of adopted children, those in foster care and disadvantaged youth by arming them with success through resources, mentors and opportunities," according to the foundation's website.

For both Kyle and Marissa, the purpose of the Van Noy Valor Foundation is deeply personal. Kyle is adopted, and Marissa's father and brother were adopted as well. In turn, they work with kids and families to make sure they have what they need, particularly around the holidays.

In years past, they have hosted Christmas tree giveaways, and that is something they will continue in New England. They are planning to giveaway 200 trees at event later this year, and Kyle said it's a night he looks forward to.

"It's priceless. It's such a cool experience since we've done it. It really hits home for you to see how grateful they are for having a real Christmas tree at home," Kyle said. "It's an awesome experience and I'm happy to be able to help."

The money raised at Kyle's celebrity waiter night will help pay for those trees, gifts and meals for families around the holidays, and he said after having hosted this event in Utah, his home state, and Detroit, he is looking forward to bringing it to New England.

And his teammates were all too eager to step up and help.

The Patriots were enthusiastic in their order taking, and despite it being a five-course meal, there were zero plate fumbles, only plate pass completions.

Before the night was over, there was even a special surprise guest. Robert Kraft swung by the event at Patriot Place and said how nice it was to see players making a positive impact, even when they are new to the community.

"The key to life is to hang with good people, and we are blessed to have so many," Mr. Kraft said. "When new ones come in like this, we're pretty proud."

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## RB James White



### **There's Always This Year**

By James White  
September 29, 2017

As I stood there, I remember not being able to feel a single thing. Well, nerves. I felt the nerves. That's kind of unavoidable when you have that many people focusing on you.

That's never been what I'm about — getting attention. I'm someone who prides himself on just keeping his head down and putting in the work. But on a stage like this, with that many people watching, you can't just blend in.

I remember that it was really loud, but that the crowd's cheers were kind of muffled — all I could hear were my own racing thoughts, the biggest one being, Don't screw this up, man.

I looked to my right, searching for the only person whose strength could get me through the next few minutes. A guy who has been at the top of this business for years — decades even. A guy who's been on this stage so many times before and always handled it with ease.

Conan O'Brien.

So, the first thing you need to know about Conan is that he's absolutely huge. Like not just a huge celebrity or huge personality — like the guy is a really big human. And that's coming from me, an NFL player.

The other thing you should know about him is that he's just as funny — maybe even funnier — off camera as he is on it. After winning the Super Bowl in Houston last February, I was flown out to L.A. to appear on his show. I was kind of nervous — like I said, I'm not someone who really seeks out attention. But Conan loosened me up by cracking jokes backstage, and once we actually got started, it all felt pretty natural.

It was a pretty unbelievable way to cap off what was probably the best week of my life. Not just because I won a Super Bowl and appeared on a talk show and all that, but also because, for the first time since I started playing football, I had the spotlight solely on me.

That's something that had never happened before.

If you're reading this, you've probably heard the term running back by committee before.

I've been a member of crowded backfields for as long as I've been playing football. It began in eighth grade, when I was on the same team with this kid named Gareef Glashen. He must have run like a 4.2 or 4.3 forty-yard-dash. Well, probably not, but at that age it felt like it. Just the fastest kid alive. I thought I was pretty good, but I couldn't say I was better than him.

I started at St. Thomas Aquinas in Fort Lauderdale at the same time as another kid on the football team who ended up becoming one of my best friends. He also happened to play running back and his name was Gio.

Yeah, the one who plays for the Bengals, that Gio. Giovani Bernard.

He's still one of my best friends to this day, and in high school I think we were almost like brothers who pushed each other constantly to not be outdone by the other. We would line up in the backfield at the same time and both got a lot of experience catching passes back then. I don't think at the time we ever dreamed we'd both end up in the NFL doing the same thing. I mean, you don't really think that far ahead when you aren't even the clear-cut starter on your own team. But I think playing with someone as talented as Gio helped me learn how to put my ego aside. If I got down because Gio had a better game or got more carries, I probably would never have become the player I am today. I learned right away that you can't be envious of a teammate's success, because that's unproductive. I let Gio's success inspire me to do better, and, eventually, we both ended up getting where we needed to be.

That mentality of putting the team ahead of myself became very useful for me at Wisconsin, where there was no shortage of great running backs to share the backfield with. I don't know if I attract talent or what, but while I was in Madison I played with Montee Ball, John Clay and Melvin Gordon. It's not often that that many guys at the same position at the same school all end up in the NFL. But that's where the bar was set for us. I was surrounded by a lot of talent. Even though I was named the Big Ten freshman of the year, I ended up getting fewer carries my sophomore year because Montee was so electric that season. I'll admit it was a little discouraging, but, instead of quitting, I pushed myself to get on the field in other ways, even trying to block punts on special teams. I just wanted to help us win.

What I never fully realized back then was how great all of those experiences would be for me later on in my career. College players who don't get playing time early on can sometimes get discouraged and either quit or transfer. But I'm glad I had the experience I had at Wisconsin because I ended being drafted by an organization that not only discourages selfishness, it absolutely will not tolerate it. When you play for the Patriots, there's never any second-guessing what the goal is. There's no questioning your role or how you're used. You take direction, you practice and you execute.

That's how you win Super Bowls.

My first training camp as a rookie with New England, we were doing practice drills with the full team and I broke through for a long run.

The crowd watching started cheering, and I was feeling pretty good because it was one of the best plays I'd made all camp. I was a little winded, but I didn't want to miss any reps so I lined up for the next play. When the ball snapped, I started going right, then cut the ball back to my left and boom. I ran directly into a brick wall named Brandon Browner.

I could tell it was a big hit not just because of how it felt, but because immediately the crowd went from cheering to saying, Ooooooooooooooh.

Yeah, that sound usually means the defense won the play.

When I finally got back to my feet, I saw Coach Belichick walking towards me. I kind of figured he was going to tell me whatever I'd messed up. But when he got to me, he said kind of casually, in his voice that never really changes tone, "So one thing you'll learn: The bigger they are, the harder they hit." And then he walked away.

I still laugh about that.

What I learned pretty quickly after joining the Patriots was that the games are almost like a reward. During the actual games we're all just flying around and having fun. We go into every game knowing that the team we're playing against is going to try to give us their best shot. And there's no doubt that they practiced extra hard the week before to make sure they do. But as a team we never go into a game believing that the other team had a tougher week of practice than we did. That's because Coach Belichick demands the best out of you, and challenges you to give your best. It's honestly not for everyone. But if you want to be great, that's pretty much all you can ask for from a coach.

Both from a mental and physical standpoint, the way we prepare is so challenging that there's really nothing that can happen during the itself game that will make us panic. Even a 25-point deficit in the Super Bowl.

Like I said, in the past few months I've been asked about that game a lot. People want to know whether there was some sort of dramatic moment or speech that inspired our comeback. The truth is, during the course of the game itself, there weren't a lot of moments when I was really thinking about the fact that I was playing in the Super Bowl. Nobody on the team really had wide eyes. There was just focus.

There was no magic behind why we ended up coming back. Definitely some great plays from great players, but nothing we hadn't practiced or prepared for. Even when we were down, we all knew we had the opportunity to win the football game. Not because of luck, but because we felt like we were in control of the game based on our time of possession, even though we were behind on points. We knew the turnovers were killing us, but we aren't a team that usually turns the ball over, so that would be easy to fix. Also, we knew we had Tom Brady and having Tom Brady on your team means that you're always in the game.

We knew we had Tom Brady and having Tom Brady on your team means that you're always in the game.

When we went into overtime and won the coin flip, I think that's when we all knew we had this thing. All the tough practices, the intense meetings, the crushing hits — all of those little moments added up to this big one. I don't think a single person who'd been through it all doubted we were ready for it.

Going into that game, based on our preparations, I had the sense I might have a big role, but obviously I didn't think that meant 14 catches or anything. I didn't get to play in the game when we went to the Super Bowl my rookie year, so this time around all I really hoped for was to make a meaningful contribution to the game.

That entire final drive, there was no pep talk or anything from Tom in the huddle. We didn't need that. The entire offense knew we just needed to follow his lead and we were going to take it down the field. From a player perspective, everything we do comes from Tom. When I first began with the Patriots, it was honestly almost weird being in the same locker room as him. You're accustomed to looking at him as an icon rather than a teammate. But he has a way of moving past that with everyone really quickly. He takes the time to really get to know all of us, especially the guys on the offense. That disarms you in a way, and when you see how selfless he is and how much he's focused on winning, of course you're inspired to operate the same way.

That entire drive in overtime, even though it was this humongous moment, there was never a time when it didn't seem like we were in control. And when our offense is in the zone like that, it's so fun being on the field with him because everything just clicks so seamlessly. The ball is there when it needs to get there, not before or after. If you're in the right spot and stick out your hands, that's a catch. I know there are a number of ways we could have won that game, but I'm always going to feel very humbled that I got the honor of putting us across the goal line for the last time to make us champions.

I think the most interesting thing is that when we finally did win, even though it was the sole focus of all of our preparation that year, for me it felt kind of... fake. Like I was in another dimension or something. I had all of these reporters circling around wanting to interview me. That's not something that's ever really happened before. That's not how it works when you're part of a committee. But on that day, after that game, the attention was on me and it felt weird as much as anything else.

In the days immediately following the Super Bowl, I got more attention than I'd ever received in my entire career combined up until that moment. It wasn't just going on Conan, but also talking to reporters, going on radio shows, even just walking on the street in Boston and having people recognize me and freak out. It was all very different. Not in a bad way. I guess it just really hit me that my performance in that one game — one of hundreds of football games I've played in my life — is going to be something some people will remember me by.

I can see how those who aren't prepared for the spotlight can get overwhelmed by it. I guess that's why I'm glad my entire life had prepared me for my moment.

No matter who you are, it's tough to win games in this league. But that's especially true when you're the defending champs and everybody is trying to take you down.

Coach Belichick tends to have a short memory when it comes to victories, but he always remembers the stuff we can improve. That's really the goal that pushes the organization forward, even more than playoff victories and Super Bowls. We want to try to achieve perfection every time we take the field, no matter who we're playing — even if it's against our own team in practice. And when that's your goal, the work never ends.

Still, it's pretty sweet to win a Super Bowl.

You know it's kind of funny, after we won last year, I had so many people mobbing me to get interviews that by the time I actually made it back to the locker room all my teammates had left the stadium to go celebrate somewhere else. It was honestly kind of a bummer to walk in there expecting a party and not see anyone. I think that's the only thing about the whole experience I might have changed. I really wish I could have celebrated right there with my teammates in the locker room after we won that game we worked so hard together to get to.

Well, I guess there's always this year.

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## DL Deatrich Wise, Jr.



### **Patriots rookie Deatrich Wise Jr. proving early to rise in NFL**

Adam Kurkjian

Sunday, September 24, 2017

FOXBORO — With the evidence in hand, Brian Brazil made his case to the referees.

The coach of Hebron High in Carrollton, Texas, Brazil had just watched his team lose to Allen, 28-21, in 2011. What had Brazil up in arms was how his defensive end, Deatrich Wise Jr., fell victim to one hold after another without a single yellow flag thrown.

The explanation he received made it even worse.

"The game was over and I took (Wise's) jersey over to the official, and the jersey was completely ripped. It was torn to shreds. I took it to the officials after the game and said, 'Not one holding call. Did not call holding once, and I told you before the game (he would be held),' " Brazil recalled. "And they said, 'Coach, he's on the backside of the play.' And I said, 'Exactly. He runs everything down from the backside.' "

That didn't matter. The officials, despite acknowledging the fouls, believed Wise wasn't in position to make the plays and, thus, didn't see it as a violation.

"I guess (the holding) worked," Brazil said. "I had to get his jersey replaced because I couldn't use it after that game. It was totally shredded."

Wise said Thursday that game taught him a valuable lesson.

"High school is when I learned that refs never call a holding call," Wise said, "and I've kind of got to get used to it."

As Wise enters his third career NFL game this afternoon with the Houston Texans coming to Gillette Stadium, opposing offensive linemen have yet to keep him out of the backfield. Already with two sacks in two games, Wise has drawn an illegal hands to the face call, but no holding penalties yet.

#### **He can see it, do it**

All one must do to get a sense of how Wise can dominate at the point of attack is shake his hand. Not only does Wise have fingers that stretch out seemingly to the size of a catcher's mitt, but his grip can have a crushing effect. Those big, strong hands, combined with 35-plus-inch arm length, make for a daunting physical specimen. Brazil even theorized that the 6-foot-5, 270-pound Wise could have grown into an offensive tackle.

Wise's coach at the University of Arkansas, Bret Bielema, knows a thing or two about developing defensive linemen, having also coached fellow Pats defensive end Trey Flowers. Bielema said that while Wise's arm length is a strength, it's his skill that sets him apart.

"He's got tremendous eye-hand coordination, which allows him to make really quick decisions with his hands and it follows through on the field," Bielema said. "Some people can think all the right things, but they really can't do them. Deatrich has a unique ability to be able to see it and be able to do it."

Wise said he did not develop those techniques until his redshirt sophomore and junior years at Arkansas. However, at the beginning of his senior season, he broke his hand and had to deal with an AC joint injury in his shoulder. His production dropped significantly, as he made eight sacks and 10.5 tackles for loss in 2015 and just 3.5 and 5.5 his final year.

Bielema said that was "100 percent" due to injury.

It did not scare off the Patriots, as they drafted Wise in the fourth round with the 131st overall pick. But Wise's injury woes were not over.

### **Focus firmly on field**

While success in training camp practices can be taken with a grain of salt, Wise had plenty of it in early individual and team drills. But against the Jacksonville Jaguars in the first preseason game, Wise suffered a concussion. He went through the protocol and did not again play until the season opener against the Kansas City Chiefs.

Another injury might bring a "here we go again" feeling to some, but Wise said that was not the case.

"I actually didn't have that thought," Wise said. "I'd been through so much in college, I just remained positive saying that this too shall pass. I was going to keep studying film every week. I was studying O-line tape with the guys . . . and keeping my mind in the game even though my body wasn't in the game. I've been down before, but I wasn't out. So I knew I was going to come back."

When he did, he made an immediate impact. Wise had a sack and five quarterback hits in the team's 36-20 win over the New Orleans Saints last week. He looked basically like the player observers raved about in camp.

And Bielema thinks better days lie ahead.

"The thing about (Wise) is he's just really long," said Bielema, who deems Wise as strong a pass rusher as he's ever coached. "He's got a long torso. . . . Those guys take some time to develop. . . . I don't think he's even scratching the surface of what he can be."

Wise, too, knows he can get better.

"Everybody's giving me praise right now," Wise said, "but I'm staying focused because I have a long way to go."

But, as Brazil noted, the present isn't too shabby, either.

"I mean, two games, two sacks, I think that's a pretty good start to his career."

Maybe when opponents are forced to hold Wise so much they rip his jersey off, people — and officials — will know he's hit that next level.

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