

# FORGE

A silhouette of a blacksmith in a hard hat, holding a hammer and forging a sword, positioned behind the letter 'O' in the word 'FORGE'.

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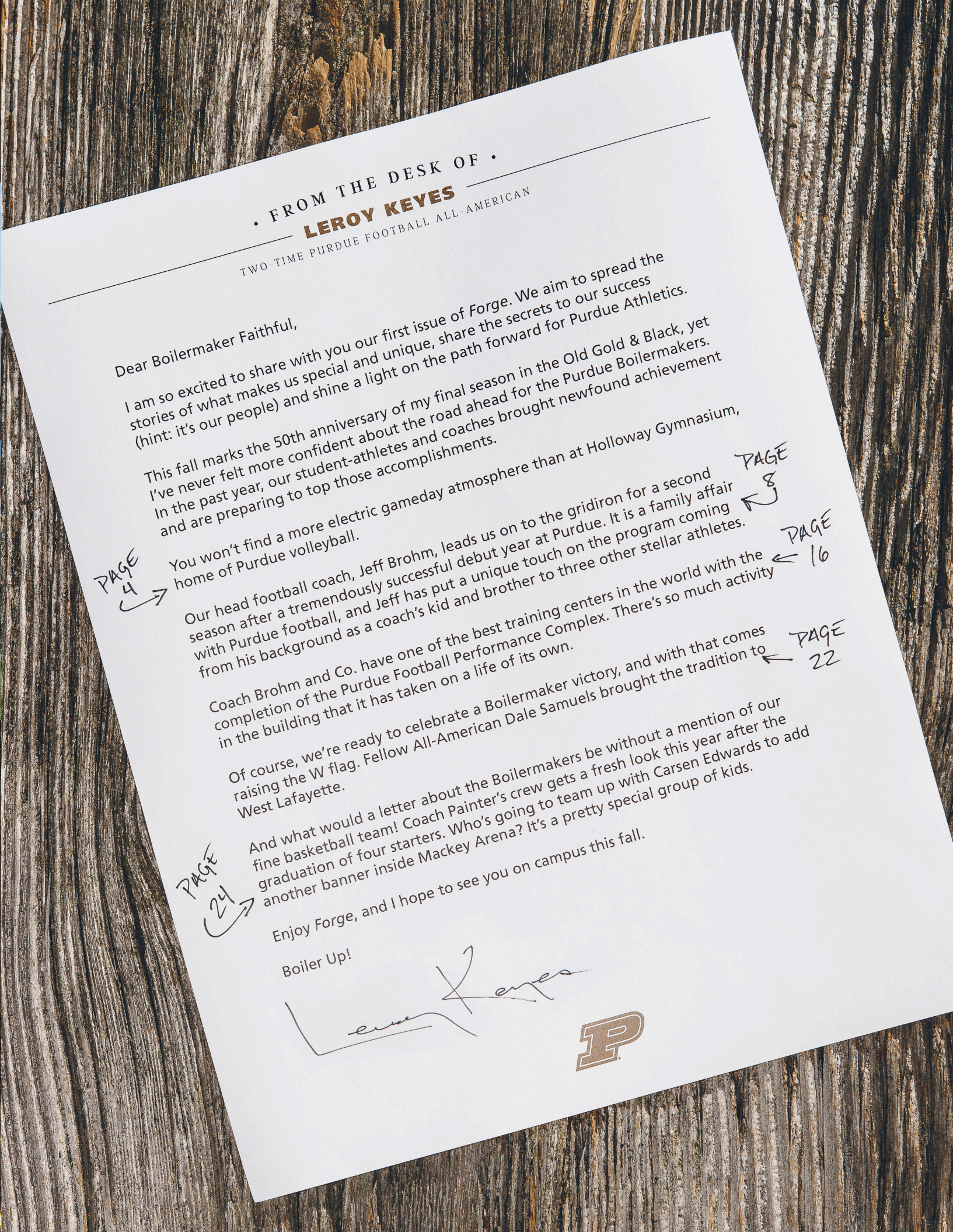
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A hand holding a key in front of a volleyball court. The background is a blurred volleyball court with spectators and bright overhead lights. The text 'SOME LIKE IT' is in white serif font, and 'HOT' is in a very large white sans-serif font, with the hand and key acting as the letter 'O'.

# SOME LIKE IT HOT

*By Tim Newton*

It's less than 10 minutes before the match begins, and the Purdue women's volleyball team enters its home court for a final warmup. The AC/DC classic "Thunderstruck" blares from speakers as fans continue to file into Holloway Gymnasium's Belin Court. Blake Mohler spots her parents and grandparents in their usual place behind the Boilermaker bench. Sherridan Atkinson begins to breathe harder as the national anthem plays.

Public-address announcer Carson Tucker belts out the starting lineups, and the Block Party student section starts a non-stop evening of noise and intimidation. The first serve is on the way, and so begins another night in one of the nation's best volleyball environments.



It wasn’t that way when Dave Shondell took over as head coach in 2003. After a great run in the late 1970s and early ’80s, the Boilermaker volleyball program had hit hard times, failing to reach the NCAA Tournament for 12 straight years. Shondell came to West Lafayette after a successful high school coaching career, winning four state championships at Muncie Central, and he understood what was needed to turn around the dormant Purdue program.

“I knew we could attract players here if the environment was better,” Shondell says. “Even though the program hadn’t had success, people were still showing up for matches. If we could win, we knew the rest would return.”

From the start, a big part of the plan involved getting students involved. With the help of promotions director Sara Fetzer, Shondell reached out to Tarkington Hall and recruited 15 male students, who became known as the Tark Sharks.

“We wanted to start small, and as a coaching staff we embraced those guys,” says Shondell, who has had his brother, John, and Kathy Jewell as his assistants since the first season. “John was a Faculty Fellow at Tarkington, so he had dinner there every week. Those guys traveled to several road matches, including our win at Indiana, and they made a big difference. I can still see their faces.”

ORGANIZED CHAOS

Over time, the student section has grown to its current level of 300 males and females, with as many as 500 students at some matches, and has been renamed the Block Party. Shondell has welcomed the group, as many as two busloads at a time, to his home. Section members have scheduled events with the team and special tailgate parties.

They work for those perks. Located next to the Boiler Box Band on the north end of the gym, the Block Party creates a wall of sound, leading organized cheers after every point and specialized chants for each player. There are limits – the group’s bylaws state that “immature/inappropriate activities at games” are grounds for removal – but that doesn’t keep the fanatics from doing their job.

“I can’t imagine what it’s like to be an opponent on that end of the court and have all those fingers pointing at you,” says Mohler, a junior management major from Mississippi whose Block Party chant is “shake-n-bake.” “It’s really hard for us to hear on the court during a big match, so I can’t imagine what it’s like the first time you would play in here.”

That may be one reason why Iowa coach Bond Shymansky likes to redshirt some of his players and bring them on the road.

“He wants them to see the atmosphere at places like Purdue so they won’t be intimidated when it’s their time to play,” Shondell says. “We think our student section is one of the top three or four in the country, and we want to make sure it stays at a top-tier level.”

BRING IN THE LOCALS

In addition to the student support at home matches, Shondell has seen a change in audience demographics over the past few seasons.

“I think our community support has really grown,” he says. “They’ve bought in to the program, and it gives you more stability. We sell out the majority of our Big Ten matches, and we don’t think we’re that far away from selling out every match.”

Two community members, Art and Connie Euler, became so enamored with the program that they decided to endow the head coaching position, making Shondell’s official title the Art and Connie Euler Head Volleyball Coach. Shondell met Art Euler at a John Purdue Club golf outing, and the coach invited the Eulers to attend some matches. Since then, the Eulers have become among the biggest supporters of the program.

The Eulers and all other fans have been rewarded for their support. Purdue has played in Holloway Gymnasium since 1982 and has won 66 percent of its home matches. Since Shondell took over in 2003, that number goes up to 72 percent and includes 34 wins over top 25 opponents and 11 wins over top 10 teams. Most recently, the team scored back-to-back wins over No. 5 Minnesota and No. 10 Wisconsin last November, both in front of capacity crowds.

“We’re hard to beat when we’re on, and our crowd makes a big difference,” says Atkinson, who earned American Volleyball Coaches Association third-team All-American honors last season. “We huddled after the first point in the Wisconsin match, and we knew we were winning that night.”

Atkinson transferred to Purdue from Long Beach State in California – her Block Park chant is “LBC, yeah you know me” – and she notices a big difference between the crowds at both places.

“The fans get here so much earlier than they do in California,” she says. “The gym at Long Beach is the same place they played basketball, so it is much larger. Here the fans are interactive and know when to clap and cheer, and you really feel everyone’s energy.”

FEEL THE HEAT

Holloway Gymnasium has had several renovations since its opening, with the largest coming in 2006. With a lead gift from the Belin family, a new floor was installed along with new bleachers, increasing the seating capacity from 1,696 to 2,288. New banners and scoreboards were installed, and the playing surface was renamed Belin Court.

The gym’s nickname, the Boiler Box, emanated from its intimate size ... and from its temperature. Holloway was not air conditioned until 2017, when a system was installed to bring some relief to the often-sweltering conditions.

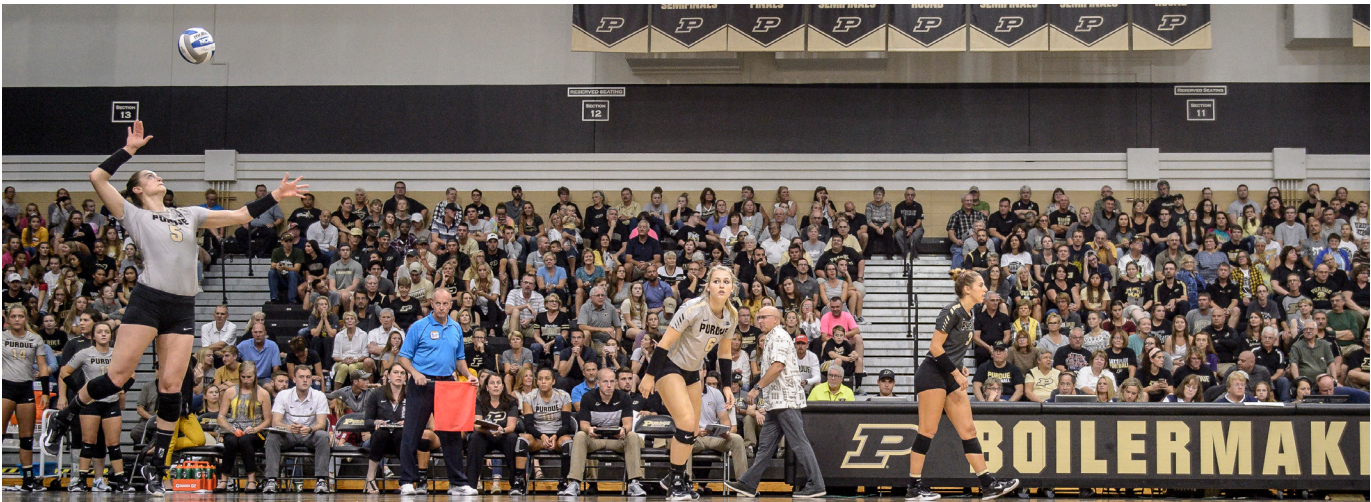
“The first year I was here, I was a mess,” Atkinson says. “We practiced on Cardinal Court, which had air conditioning, and then we came in here and it was really difficult. But after that, I had a pretty good idea what to expect.”

Coming from Mississippi, Mohler was accustomed to the heat.

“I always felt it was an advantage for us, especially early in the season,” she says. “The only downside is during practices we would have to change our jerseys about every 30 minutes.”

With or without air conditioning, Holloway has proven to be one of the best home-court advantages in college volleyball, and has helped propel the Boilermakers into becoming one of the nation’s elite programs. Since Shondell took the reins in 2003, his teams have qualified for the NCAA Tournament 12 times in 15 seasons, advancing to the Sweet 16 seven times and the Elite Eight twice.

Purdue has enjoyed particular home success versus its in-state conference rival, going 14-1 against Indiana with six straight sweeps.



This year the Hoosiers come to Belin Court on November 3, following the home football game against Iowa. It is one of a record 18 home matches this season. The season opener August 24 will be Shondell’s 500th match as head coach at Purdue. Defending national champion Nebraska pays a visit November 16.

BACK HOME

One of Shondell’s first players at Purdue was Stephanie (Lynch) Harpenau. An honorable mention All-American as a sophomore and junior, she earned AVCA first-team All-American honors in 2008. Her picture is featured on one of the banners hanging in Holloway Gymnasium.

After playing professionally in Switzerland and returning to the United States to teach and coach high school volleyball, Harpenau came back to campus in 2016 to become supervisor of volleyball operations. She was inducted into the Purdue Intercollegiate Athletics Hall of Fame earlier this year.

“Belin Court is one of the most exciting places to play and watch a match,” Harpenau says. “The atmosphere has only gotten better since I played here, and we continue to draw great crowds that love Purdue volleyball.”

Shondell has seen an evolution in the Big Ten since he arrived.

“When I got here, it was the fourth- or fifth-best volleyball conference in the country,” he says. “Now, it is hands down the best. This is where the top players in the country want to play. Our conference outdrew the other top two conferences in the country by 300,000 fans last year.

“It’s important for us to know we can walk into our gym on any given night and beat anybody else in the conference. So we’re going to continue to do everything we can to make this a tough environment and a great place for elite players to compete.”

As another match point is put home, the Boiler Box Band strikes up a chorus of “Hail Purdue” while the team huddles at mid-court. They break the circle to take a victory lap, sharing high-fives with the Block Party and other fans before heading to the locker room for some post-match revelry.

The celebration will be quick. Another Big Ten team awaits ... and so does another night of high-intensity excitement in the Boiler Box. ✂

# BROHM'S SQUAD

By Tom Dienhart

Jeff Brohm is watching.

He sits at the head of a long table on the third floor of Purdue's new glistening Football Performance Complex. Assistant coaches ring the table of Room 3056. On this Thursday morning, Brohm has video of the Los Angeles Rams vs. Philadelphia Eagles flashing before his eyes. He flips his left thumb back and forth, back and forth, back and forth over the remote.

"I like this bunch set," Brohm says. "I think we can do something with this."

Wearing a gold P hat, white Purdue golf shirt, black shorts and running shoes, Brohm takes copious notes with a multi-colored pen.

Brohm is looking for ideas. He always wants to be learning, gathering knowledge to make him and his team better. He is never satisfied. Why should he be? Brohm is in just his second season in West Lafayette, trying to flip the script of a program that had sunken into irrelevance. Purdue is the ultimate work-in-progress for this rising star coach who gave a sneak peek at what's possible last season during his maiden voyage on campus.

Despite forecasts of gloom and doom, Brohm coaxed a 7-6 record (4-5 Big Ten) and bowl win from a program that had not had a winning record or bowl victory since 2011. And he had to alter offensive philosophies along the way while juggling two quarterbacks. It was impressive.

How bad had things gotten at Purdue before Brohm was thrown the keys? The four seasons preceding his arrival from Western Kentucky, Purdue went 9-39 overall and 3-30 in the Big Ten. But all of that is in the rear-view mirror. Brohm isn't looking over his shoulder. All eyes are forward. And, things look good.

Watching video is a big part of the process. Brohm loves it. College, NFL ... it doesn't matter. Heck, if he thought he could learn something from a high school program, he would cue the video and get out his notebook and fancy pen.

"The Eagles are one of the NFL teams that runs an offense that is similar to a college offense," Brohm says. "So, you never know when you'll see something you could use. Even during the season, if I hear about a team that is playing well and has a good offense, I'll watch their tape."

Brohm cranes his neck to look at the clock behind him: 8:23 a.m.

"OK, let's take a break in five minutes," he says.

Brohm already is a few hours deep into the day. On one corner wall in this conference room is a depth chart of the current team, with each player represented by a magnet. On another is a pecking order of recruits the Boilermakers are chasing in the class of 2019. There also are plays scribbled on the walls.

Brohm is renown for offensive acumen. Name a situation, and Brohm has a play for it. Time and again in 2017, Brohm showed his offensive wit, playing to the strengths of his roster while also searching to exploit mismatches. It is this simple: Find what your players can do well ... and accentuate it.

But there is more to Brohm than a four-inch thick playbook, a head full of X's and O's and stacks of notebooks with ideas jotted on the inside. Yes, he's a coach – and a darn good one, at that, who has Purdue poised for big things. But Jeff Brohm also is a husband, father, brother, son and mentor.





## THE FATHER

Jeff Brohm is laughing.

He is standing next to son, Brady, who soon is off and away down the halls of the football complex. Brady is here, there and everywhere. He is ubiquitous, helping in the recruiting office, stuffing envelopes, organizing papers – essentially doing whatever else is needed to make Purdue football great. And he loves every minute of it.

Brady will be an eighth-grader this year at Central Catholic. But he enjoys the company of adults. And, he's even a bit of a celebrity. Heck, he may be the most popular Brohm of them all. His gregarious personality and social media profile have made him a bit of a big shot. Is there a more popular teenage son of a college coach in America? Nope.

Brady has more than 4,000 followers. And, you have to love his Twitter handle: @CoachBradyBrohm. His unofficial title: Get Back Coach. What's that? It's Brady's job to make sure players "get back" onto the sideline during games, so as not to encroach on the field and incur a penalty. But Brady almost broke his own rule last season during the Ohio University game at Ross-Ade Stadium when Purdue was penalized for a sideline violation.

"Some people thought it was me," Brady says. "But it actually was (running backs coach) Chris Barclay."

Good thing. How embarrassing would it have been if the Get Back Coach was penalized for not getting back? Brady shakes his head. He would rather talk about the friendships he has sparked with Big Ten coaches like Northwestern's Pat Fitzgerald and Minnesota's P.J. Fleck.

"P.J. and I communicate through Facebook messenger," Brady says.

And Brady is always at midfield after games to shake the hand of the opposing coach. He also relishes his role on road games helping set up the locker room.

"When we were at Western Kentucky, I even helped to check on if players were in class," Brady says. "Some of the professors loved it. They would let me stand in front of class and say: Is so-and-so here? Once it got out that I was on campus checking on class attendance, word spread on Twitter among the players. "I love being around the team and doing what I can to help."

If you want to see Jeff Brohm smile, ask him about his daughter, Brooke.

"She is a pistol," he says.

Brohm has made the short drive from the football complex to Purdue's tennis facility on McCormick Road in a Toyota Tundra pickup truck. Time to watch Brooke take tennis lessons. Brohm would have taken his famous 2004 Honda Accord with the dented front end and passenger door that only opens from the inside. But there is no room for his passenger.

"I have too much junk in there," Brohm confesses.

Greg Brohm, the oldest of the Brohm brothers, loves to tell how the police once called to say they were going to tow "this clunker" from the head coach's parking spot only to inform authorities: "Don't do that! It's the head coach's car." Really. The 14-year-old vehicle is the perfect metaphor for a coach and his school. Substance matters. Sizzle? Not so much.

"Hey, why get rid of a car that still runs well?" Brohm says.

So, the blue beater sits in a parking spot in front of a sign that reads "RESERVED PARKING/HEAD FOOTBALL COACH/ENFORCED 24 HOURS" adjacent to the practice field.

Brohm looks at the time.

"Let's go," he says. "We already are late."

Brohm's wife, Jennifer, already is at the Schwartz Tennis Center. Brooke is a second-grader this fall. She bounds around the court, hair flopping as she dutifully follows instructions. You can see some of the athletic ability in her that made her father an all-time great at Louisville and an NFL quarterback.

"Nice hit, Brooke!" Jeff says.

Brohm does all he can to incorporate family into his job. It helps that he lives close to the football complex, just north of Ross-Ade off Northwestern Avenue not far from the Kampen Golf Course. How close? Brohm could walk to work if he wanted.

"I am glad I am able to do this," Brohm says. "Brooke is fun to be around. She enjoys being active and taking part in sports."

Brooke could end up being one of the best athletes in the Brohm family. And, that is saying a lot. Jeff Brohm is the second oldest of four kids. And each Brohm kid built a strong resume while growing up in Louisville as the children of Oscar and Donna Brohm. In fact, the best athlete in the Brohm family may be sister Kim, a three-sport star who played softball at Spalding University in Louisville.

"She was good," Jeff says. "She could do it all. She was just an inch short and a step slow from being able to play at a higher level."

Later in the day, Brooke has volleyball camp. And Brohm is there.

"You look good out there, Brooke," Jeff says. "Keep it up."

## THE HUSBAND

Jeff Brohm is sweating.

It's time for a workout with his wife, Jennifer, in the spacious Purdue weight room. It's a routine Brohm likes to keep. And if you know Brohm, you know he likes routine. The workout sessions afford him a chance to spend time with Jennifer – and stay in shape. But for now, Brohm is limited to how much he can do after having a foot operated on to remove a neuroma.

"Man, it was painful," Brohm says. "It's something I dealt with back in college, too. I had it taken care of then, but it developed again. I am feeling better."

Brohm still looks in game shape. Check him out. He has broad shoulders and a tapered waist, sporting an athletic V-cut even at age 47. In many ways, Brohm still looks like the same XFL quarterback who was asked by a TV announcer prior to a game in 2001 how he would be able to start just six days after a big hit had left him unconscious. Brohm famously said: "Let me answer that question by asking you two questions: One, is this or is this not the XFL? Yes, it is. Two, do I or do I not currently have a pulse? Yes, I do. Let's play football."

The "Let's Play Football" quote has become a mantra for Purdue football. And it's a perfect summation of the no-nonsense/get-the-job done mentality that has come to define Brohm throughout his playing

and coaching career. Jennifer Brohm knows all about that authentic personality. It's one of the many reasons why she fell in love with Jeff when both were students at Louisville. The two met during their freshman year.

"It was in biology class," Jennifer says.

That was way back in 1989, after Brohm had arrived on campus to play for Howard Schnellenberger following a glorious run at Trinity High School in Louisville. Each grew up in strong Catholic families. Religion is important to the Brohms and is why they have their children in Lafayette-area Catholic schools, with Brooke at St. Lawrence and Brady at C.C.

"The bus for the West Lafayette school comes right by our house," Jennifer says. "But I take the kids across town to school."

But school's out now, so the kids are around the campus and football complex. That makes Jennifer Brohm smile. She does that a lot.

"The kids are important to us," Jennifer says. "And Jeff does all he can with them. They are the center of our lives. We enjoy going on trips. We have done a few Disney cruises. And we like to go to Holiday World."

Jeff and Jennifer also have concert plans. A trip to see Keith Urban is looming. If it's country music, they love it.

With the workout over, it's time to go to lunch. Today, it's Jeff, Greg, Jennifer and Brooke. Brady has plans with the recruiting staff. The choice today: Chipotle. Jeff Brohm weaves through side streets of West Lafayette to the Purdue Village and finds a parking spot in the Chauncey Hill Mall lot. As he enters Chipotle just off State Street, it becomes apparent to the packed restaurant: The Purdue football coach is here. People look up from their burritos and stare.

"How are you doing today?" a worker from behind the register asks.

"I am good," Jeff says.

Most of the workers know him, as the Brohms are regulars.

"It's Brady's favorite place," Jeff says. "We try to go out when we can. Lots of places we like to eat in the area. Bruno's, Arni's, T.C.'s in Battle Ground. My family likes it here. It has been easy to fit in."



THE SON

Jeff Brohm is thinking.

“How often do I talk with my father?” he asks. “Almost every day.”

Brohm’s father is Oscar Brohm, an iconic figure in the Louisville area who played football at U of L. Jeff Brohm learned at the knee of Oscar, who often coached his youth teams growing up. The Brohm name is royalty in Louisville. And it all begins with Oscar and wife Donna.

“I was with him as a coach up until he got to high school,” Oscar says. “Jeff always was one of the best. He was very competitive and didn’t like to lose. He is like that today as a coach. He coaches like he is playing. He’s very intense.

“And Jeff knows how to treat people. He may get after a player on the field. But he doesn’t carry that over off the field. He treats people well.”

Just watch Jeff Brohm coach. You can see what Oscar is talking about. Let’s just say he isn’t afraid to, ahem, get after it. He demands the best. It’s all about being tough and accountable while also playing smart.

Brohm learned those traits playing backyard football with friends. He threw the passes and older brother Greg caught them. They went on to be a strong tandem at Louisville.

“We had some good family games,” Oscar says. “We used to play an annual Turkey Bowl on Thanksgiving. It was tackle. And, it was tough.”

Donna Brohm – a top athlete herself back in the day – was there for it all. The family meals of macaroni and cheese and meat loaf were favorites. And then there were the summer trips.

“They usually were scheduled around one of the kid’s sporting events,” Donna says. “We went to Kings Island a lot. In fact, one year, we ended up on the cover of the park brochure. They used a photo of us coming down a roller coaster. We couldn’t believe it.”

The Brohm household was a whirl of activity for most the 1970s and ‘80s with four growing kids. Greg the oldest followed by Jeff, Kim and Brian, the baby of the bunch.

“It was mostly peaceful,” Donna says. “No holes in the walls from wrestling. No family is perfect, but the kids got along well, for the most part. Jeff was a good brother.

“He could be a bit of a jokester. He liked to have fun with people.”

“Jeff was great at walking and then acting like he ran into something,” Oscar says.

The influence of Oscar and Donna extends to the Catholic church.

“That’s important to us,” Donna says.



BRIAN BROHM



GREG BROHM



St. Bernard parish in Louisville is the family’s anchor. Donna is teacher’s aide there to this day. The influence of mom and dad remains.

“The church is a good foundation,” Oscar says. “It keeps the family connected.

“I will text or talk almost daily with Jeff and my sons. Jeff values what I have to say. I appreciate that. I will offer my opinion on things. But Jeff is the one who will ultimately make the decision. I am on the sideline at home games. I offer advice before and afterward.” One piece of advice Oscar gave Jeff: Take the Purdue job.

“I remembered when the school was the Cradle of Quarterbacks,” Oscar says. “I knew what Purdue could be. I told that to Jeff. But, again, the decision was up to him.”

THE BROTHER

Jeff Brohm is talking.

He and brother Greg are discussing a player. It’s a scene played out on most days in the football complex. Greg is the program’s executive director of administration and operations/chief of staff. Go ahead and call him “Jeff’s right-hand man.”

Greg’s office is just around the corner from Jeff’s. And the office next to Greg? It is occupied by Brian Brohm, the team’s co-offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach. Get the picture? This is a family affair for the Brohms in West Lafayette. The Brohm brothers are close, but Greg and Jeff have a very tight bond based on the fact they are close in age and over 14 years older than Brian.

“For us, it’s all about family,” Greg says.

Jeff appreciates that and enjoys having confidants on his staff with the same blood. He knows he doesn’t have all of the answers. And he isn’t afraid to ask for help. It’s a sign of strength, not weakness.

“I can tell him what I think,” Greg says. “Sometimes, he’s just looking for affirmation. There have been times when I have given him my opinion, and I think it just freed him up and put him at ease to do what he thought was right all along. I think he likes that I can serve as a sounding board for him as he works through ideas and options. Being able to talk things through with someone he trusts can often give him a comfort level to make those tough decisions.”

Greg saw the leadership qualities in Jeff back in college when he was catching his passes as a wideout at Louisville from 1988 to 1992.

“Jeff is a fiery guy,” Greg says. “There was a time in college once where he threw the center out of the huddle because he was talking and not paying attention.

“Jeff always wanted to be good. He was driven. As a senior, he came to the coaches with a playbook he had made.”

Pretty bold.

“That’s Jeff,” Greg says.

Brian Brohm knows all about Jeff’s take-charge attitude. The two always talk football. They are the brains behind a Purdue offense that has quickly become the face of the program.

“I help put together the game plan,” Brian says. “And I make suggestions on gamedays. But in the end, it’s up to Jeff to make the calls.”

Jeff Brohm has played a big role in shaping Brian, who enjoyed a decorated career at Louisville and may have been the best football-playing Brohm of them all. The 14-year age difference (Jeff was born in 1971; Brian in 1985) often saw Jeff playing the role of coach and de facto father to Brian. In fact, when Brian was slinging passes for the Cardinals from 2004 to 2007 Jeff was his quarterbacks coach.

“The maddest Jeff ever has gotten at me?” Brian asks. “I was in college and we were playing Oregon State. I threw a bad interception. I was frustrated so I took off after the guy to make a tackle. That’s when I got leveled by a player. Jeff wasn’t mad about the interception. He was mad about me going after the guy and getting drilled.”

Even when Brian was a kid, Jeff was coaching him up. Brian really had no choice in the matter. It’s what big brothers do.

“He always coached me after games,” Brian says. “One time in basketball as a kid, I scored 33 of our team’s 39 points. I thought I had done pretty well. But when we got home, all Jeff did was harp on the things he thought I didn’t do well.”

And then there was the time when Brian was an overweight eighth-grader who was too heavy to play quarterback per league rules. Jeff was back home after a stint in the NFL and put Brian through the paces to get him in shape and also drilled him on the Bill Walsh offense he had learned while playing for the San Francisco 49ers.

“Jeff coached me hard,” says Brian, who was a second-round pick of Green Bay in 2008 and played three years in the NFL before bouncing around other pro leagues. “He is competitive and tough. He expected a lot because he was a good athlete.

“Baseball may have been his best sport. I still remember being a kid and watching him play. When he came to bat, all of the kids would run behind the left-field fence to catch his home run balls.”

Jeff Brohm was drafted twice by Major League Baseball teams and ultimately played in the minors in 1990 and 1991 in rookie league and Class-A ball. He was a power hitter who could play about anywhere on the field.

“He was fast, too,” Brian says. “He is a guy who always wants the best for you. He always wanted to be good. He craved information. I was lucky to have him push me.”

## THE COACH

Jeff Brohm is observing.

He is checking out some of his players as they are put through the rigors of offseason conditioning. Brohm cups his hands around his eyes to block the sun on this hot day.

“Keep working,” he yells from across the field.

One of those players working out is burly running back D.J. Knox. The diminutive senior already is in game-shape. He looks like a sawed-off comic book character, sporting muscles in places where most people don’t have places.

“This is when the work gets done,” Knox says. “Coach Brohm knows that. It’s one of the reasons I love playing for him. It’s about the grind. And he grinds.”

Knox also likes the personal approach Brohm has brought to Boilermaker football. He experienced the human side of his coach last fall, when Knox’s father suffered a stroke during the season.

“It was tough,” Knox says. “It was a scary time. I wanted my dad to be OK, and we were in the middle of our season.”

Brohm understood and had Knox return to his Georgia home to visit his father, who battled back and is OK today. It was the right thing to do.

“He takes care of his guys,” Knox says. “He also is big on accountability. You either get the job done, or you don’t. And in the end, he makes sure you get things done.

“Coach Brohm cares about you as a player. And, more importantly, he cares about you as a person. I can’t stress that enough. It’s great having him as a coach.” ✂

## INSIDE PURDUE ATHLETICS STAFF SPOTLIGHT

# Lee De Leon

### NEW JOHN PURDUE CLUB LEADER IS READY TO MAKE HIS MARK

By Alan Karpick

Lee De Leon couldn’t be more excited to be a Boilermaker. In late June, De Leon came on board as executive senior associate athletics director and assistant vice president for development with his primary duty handling the day-to-day duties of the John Purdue Club. Prior to Purdue, he served four years as athletics director at Abilene Christian, and was the youngest athletics director in Division I at the age of 33 when hired in 2014. De Leon also had stops in athletics administration and fundraising at New Mexico, Arizona, Houston and LSU.

A native of Houston, De Leon (pronounced DAY LEE ON) earned a bachelor’s degree in marketing from Notre Dame in 2004 and a master’s degree in sport management from Texas A&M in 2005. He and his wife, Lacey, have two sons, Landon and Luke.

De Leon has hit the ground running in his short time in West Lafayette, but here is what he had to say when we caught up with him:

**FORGE: What was the best part of being a Division I athletics director?**  
DE LEON: “Being involved with all aspects of the athletics department and having the opportunity to significantly impact the student-athlete experience.”

**FORGE: Why give that up to come to Purdue?**  
DE LEON: “To learn and to grow as an athletics administrator. There’s an expression that says ‘The more you know, the more you realize how much you don’t know.’ I feel like I have so much more to learn about the business of college athletics, especially at this level, and Mike Bobinski is definitely someone who can teach me a lot about being a successful athletics director.”

**FORGE: The hardest part of that job?**  
DE LEON: “Without a doubt, dismissing head coaches. I had to make four changes, and it never gets easier.”

**FORGE: Have you discovered any commonalities among the many Purdue fans you have met in your first weeks here?**  
DE LEON: “Absolutely! Everyone is passionate about Purdue and all the things that make it so unique. Purdue fans love the uniqueness of our school and believe that we can be successful.”

**FORGE: What would your wife Lacey say is your single-best characteristic?**  
DE LEON: “I’m consistent. I’m always the same, and I treat people the same no matter what.”

**FORGE: As a Notre Dame graduate, do you think the two schools should play every year in football?**  
DE LEON: “No doubt! I have so many great memories from that rivalry, and I miss it. I personally attended four of those games in the early 2000s and can’t wait until the matchup in 2021.”

**FORGE: You are from Texas and have worked in Texas, where everything is big. What is big at Purdue?**  
DE LEON: “The commitment of people here to doing things right and operating with integrity. I’ve heard so many people say that they take pride in playing by the rules.”

**FORGE: What was your favorite moment on an athletic field as a participant?**  
DE LEON: “Winning the national championship while on the club soccer team at Texas A&M in 2004. I wasn’t good enough to play as an undergrad at Notre Dame, but had so much fun playing in my one year of grad school at A&M.”

**FORGE: What is the best sporting event you have ever attended?**  
DE LEON: “The (2016) Final Four in Houston when Villanova hit the buzzer beater to defeat North Carolina. It was an amazing game, and it was in my hometown!”

**FORGE: What is your favorite vacation spot?**  
DE LEON: “Cabo (in Mexico’s Baja Peninsula). Lacey and I went there for our ‘babymoon’ – our last vacation before having kids – and our 10-year anniversary last summer. Love that place!”

**FORGE: How long do you think it will take your two boys to become die-hard Purdue fans?**  
DE LEON: “They already are! They love coming to campus and rocking their Purdue gear.”

**FORGE: In a year, what do you think you will say is the best part of being a Boilermaker?**  
DE LEON: “Being here during an extremely exciting time for Purdue Athletics and being a part of some historic wins.”

**FORGE: As the new director of the John Purdue Club, how will you introduce yourself to nearly 8,000 of your new best friends?**  
DE LEON: “As quickly as possible! I love people and can’t wait to meet everyone in the JPC. I have lunch meetings with different donors almost every day, and will be at every single football game, home and away. I hope many of our members will stop by the office in Mackey Arena to say hi. If anyone wants to meet, just contact me directly at [lddeleon@prf.org](mailto:lddeleon@prf.org).” ✂



Build it.

And they will come.

*One year after opening, the investments in Purdue's Football  
Performance Complex are paying dividends.*

*By Jared Thompson*



### 3:45 A.M.

The sun is always late to work at the Football Performance Complex.

Justin Lovett flips on the lights, illuminating a 20,900-square foot weight room ruled by the rank-and-file of nearly three dozen pristine Sorinex power racks.

This is the domain of the director of football strength & conditioning. Lovett briefly tidies the locker room before starting his personal workout at 4 a.m.

"I know no one will bother me," Lovett says about the timing of his daily respite. "There are no emergencies that happen that early."

Lovett hopped to Purdue when Jeff Brohm took over as head coach after performing a similar role at Western Kentucky when Brohm was head coach there. Before his time with the Hilltoppers, he did stints at the University of Georgia and with the NFL's Denver Broncos.

Lovett bucked the stereotype of foul-mouthed tyrants in his role by earning a reputation of being safety-conscious, keeping players healthy by developing a truly personalized program.

"What's the point of making big gains if it makes you prone to injury and you can't compete?" Lovett asks. "That's not being a good teammate. That's not progress."

The rest of Lovett's staff — Dominic Reno, Dennis Love, Jeff Eaton, Mitch Meador and a handful of graduate assistants — arrive by 5 a.m. to set up the first group lift and running workout. Then the music comes on, blaring from the speaker array that resembles a (somewhat) scale-downed version of what entertains crowds at Mackey Arena.

In the summer, football's upperclassmen get the choice of lifting at 6 a.m., 8 a.m. or noon. Most freshmen work out at 2 p.m.

By 5:30 a.m., the training room is open. The first group of players are either there or in the player development room finishing breakfast burritos and sandwiches provided by Purdue's team of dieticians. Both locations are just steps away from the weight room and locker room.



The benefits of the proximity are evident. Previously, players were spread out between three different buildings. The athletic training room was in the Mackey Arena Complex, the locker room in the Brees Center and the weight room in the Mollenkopf Athletic Center.

"The kids aren't losing 45 minutes a day to transition time," Lovett says. "They have time for breakfast, or to power up before lifts. We're very efficient, and the players seem less stressed and less taxed."

Players used to pocket energy gummies from their training table and chew them between sets in the weight room. Now, they have a fueling station in their flow from training room to locker room to weight room, and vice-versa.

The flow of the workout is improved, as well. There's plenty of equipment, and plenty of space to move around.

"We're not just more efficient, but more effective in structure," Lovett says. "Even our transitions, you kind of see them flow bang, bang, bang. Quicker to the bar, and we can do more during the lift. There's more corrective exercises; it's not just bare bones bench, squat and clean."

What used to be a 20- to 25-minute warmup, now takes 12 minutes.

In just under an hour, the first lift group wraps. Players dive to the fueling station for a few snacks and drinks to rehydrate before heading to the locker room and then carrying on with their days.

### 7:03 A.M.

Kyle Gergely opens the door to one of six front-loading industrial washers capable of loads of up to 65 pounds. The washing cycles began an hour earlier, pre-programmed from the prior evening to start spinning a 6 a.m.

Gergely is the associate equipment manager for football, the newest member of the staff, starting August 14 after spending the previous eight years at the University of Minnesota. It is Gergely's second stint at Purdue after arriving as a freshman student manager in 2000, the season Drew Brees led the Boilermakers to the Rose Bowl.

The past summer was the first that football experienced in the new facility: Everyone under one roof with plenty of space. Before the Football Performance Complex, the equipment room was on the first floor of Brees, while their offices were in Mackey, the weight room was on the first floor of Mollenkopf, the coaches were on the second floor in Mollenkopf and the training room was in Mackey.

"So nobody was interacting, everyone was on an island," says Gergely, who replaced Barry Boyd when he took over at the University of Arizona as the assistant athletics director for equipment. "In the old building, if Barry had to use the restroom, he had to shut the place down. No one was around for the players."

Now, the equipment room stays open. There's a 24-hour laundry chute. There is no backup or delay. Before, there were two washers and two dryers. It took all night to turn around laundry.

Today, Gergely can finish laundry for 120 players plus the coaching staff in under two hours, by himself. The aesthetics are more pleasing, too.

"You can bring a group of recruits and parents," Gergely says, "give a presentation and still have room to service your players that are still in their daily routine."

### 11:58 A.M.

The third lift group readies in the locker room. It is an exquisite and comfortable space. Not the starship-like vestibule that some other Football Bowl Subdivision teams tout. Purdue's quarters are more opera hall than nightclub, and more useful. An 11,600 square-foot open-floor

room nicely fits the 120-person roster and lets you visibly see — and directly speak to — an individual at any locker.

Lovett and crew keep a watchful eye over the behaviors of their players.

This is an inherent advantage from past, when players would just show up to the door of the weight room after traversing from the old locker room in Brees. The strength & conditioning staff can assess the mindsets and health of each individual.

"It's a big day for these guys. This is max day," Lovett announces. "If you're acting a little bit goofy, we're not letting you go after big weight. If you're locked in, we'll let you chase."

Earlier this day, freshman wide receiver Rondale Moore, a 5-foot-9, 175-pound budding phenom from New Albany, Indiana, raised a 600-pound squat. The video quickly went viral on Twitter.

The video of that massive lift failed to capture the process. As expected, Purdue is next level when it comes to technology. Every rep in Moore's workout in analyzed by both man and machine.

"With the iPads on the racks, it tracks bar speed," Lovett says. "It's smart because we're not putting stupid numbers of weights on kids and killing them. If his bar speed is slow, there's no reason to go up."

### 1:59 P.M.

Lauren Link, director of sports nutrition, stands on the turf in front of more than a dozen freshmen football players inside the team's indoor field. Just one door separates Link's office from the team's warmup location.

Link informs the day's final lift group about a new item being phased into the fueling station rotation: cherry juice.

"It's tart," Link explains, "but the taste will grow on you. This drink battles inflammation. Why is that important? If you decrease



inflammation, you fight soreness, and you are less likely to have an injury or break down.”

The football fueling station used to be a table tucked in the corner of the old Mollenkopf weight room. The nutrition staff would load a cart with products and haul it from Mackey.

“And we did that multiple times per day,” Link says. “It’s got to save at least an hour a day.”

That’s nearly a workweek each month.

In the new complex, the station is a permanent snack bar complete with storage rooms, refrigeration units, a prep area, a Gatorade fountain and an office for Link and anyone else from her staff that might be on assignment. It’s a much more functional and sterile environment.

“I try to meet them in their path,” Link says.

Players have to pass the fueling station at some point in their routine, whether headed to the weight room, locker room or training room. On the bar rests a storage cabinet, a bin labeled with each player’s name. Inside are vitamins assorted to the needs of each player. Next to the bin are bowls of fruit, nuts, beef jerky and other snacks. Around the bend sits a commercial refrigerator that holds the products that need to stay chilled, such as cheeses and protein shakes.

“It’s quick grab and go type stuff,” Link says. “From a nutrition standpoint, we want to make sure we have lots of carb-rich things available, lots of protein-rich things available, lots of anti-inflammatories. When preseason rolls around, salty things are important so they are getting electrolytes.”

Link uses this area to experiment, as well. For instance, one day she introduced snack bags of chickpeas among the available items.

“We try to find a balance of things they like and are familiar with but also where they can try new things they aren’t going to go buy,” Link says.

There also are monitors behind the bar that Link controls. These rotate a display of nutrition tips and her nutrition MVP of the week – players who are recognized for their eating habits or body-scan results. The challenge with football player nutrition is more likely to be keeping on weight than losing it.

“If we notice any big drops, it’s probably indicative of poor hydration,” Link says. “If they are consistently dropping weight, it’s probably a sign that they are not keeping up with the strain of the season, and if you do that for a few weeks, you are more likely at risk for injury.”

A linebacker sneaks in to Link’s office. He wants to know the results of his latest body scan.

“You lost weight, but it was mostly fat. Lean muscle stayed the same,” Link says.

“So that’s good, right?” the player asks.

“Yeah. Small progress, but the right direction,” Link states.

Link exits to visit the training room and discuss another player’s return-to-play plan. As she strolls down the hall, the special teams group crosses her path.

Senior punter Joe Schopper yaps: “Those – what are they called – chickpeas? Those are great. Taste like chicken.”

#### 5:25 P.M.

The remaining members of the team step off the practice field following a throwing and running session. These have been occurring in the offseason three days per week. Players no longer must trek across a parking lot to reach their next destination. They step off the grass, down a flight of stairs and through a mud room (it’s important to keep this place pristine) and players are in their locker room.

Lovett heads back to his office to download the latest reports for the players equipped with GPS monitors.

“That will show me, in terms of work capacity, who worked the hardest and who protected themselves,” Lovett says.

“Rondale Moore, Mr. Viral, who squatted 600 pounds today,” Lovett quips, “look how his field work matches his weight room. He’s the one topping out highest miles per hour, even though we weren’t max velocity.”

Lovett keeps another motivational trick up his sleeve. There are several televisions throughout the complex – nearly a dozen in the weight room, more in the locker room and, of course, the two by the fueling station – on which he can show his “loaf loop.”

“We’ll have yesterday’s run looped on the screens,” Lovett explains. “Just so they can see the run, see who was pushing themselves; see who was loafing. It’s instant accountability to your teammates.”

Lovett taps his thumb on the light switch as he leaves his office for the evening. This is unnecessary. Every room is equipped with a motion sensor that shuts off the lights when it’s unoccupied. It must just be a habit from a time gone by. ✕

## Q&A with Leroy Keyes

*Forge* host and two-time football All-American Leroy Keyes recently sat down with Dannah Williams, a senior captain and defender for the soccer team. A native of Naperville, Illinois, Williams graduated from Purdue in three years and is doing graduate work in the Krannert School of Management.

#### KEYES: Let’s talk about your family.

WILLIAMS: “I come from a big family, with my mom and my dad, two older brothers and one older sister. My oldest brother is 10 years older than me and the others are three to five years older than me.”

#### KEYES: Purdue soccer, last year you made it back to the Big Ten Tournament after several years of being away. What are your hopes this season?

WILLIAMS: “I started at Purdue with the new coaching staff and the biggest thing was to keep growing every single year. We want to make the Big Ten Tournament again this year to continue growing as a team and as a program.

“The second goal is to make it to the NCAA Tournament. I can’t remember the last time the team has made it to the NCAA (2009).”

#### KEYES: So, what does this team have to do to accomplish that?

WILLIAMS: “We are going to be a young team, but we need to stick with the team core values: Make it happen THIS year. Don’t be scared. Do things in those big moments. Don’t look to anyone but yourself to make things happen.”

#### KEYES: I hear you had three jobs in addition to your leadership role on the team.

WILLIAMS: “In the spring, I had two internships and I had a part-time job. In the summer, I had another part-time job, an internship and I started grad school.”

#### KEYES: Three jobs! That would scare me to death.

WILLIAMS: “I study management, I am good at organizing and knowing what priorities are.”

#### KEYES: You represented Purdue Athletics at the Black Student-Athlete Summit in January. What was your takeaway?

WILLIAMS: “It was an incredible experience. To be around that many people of color who are either in higher administrative positions or student-athletes was really impactful for me.

“I learned that people tend to stereotype certain type of athletes that may not behave the same way that most students do, but it’s usually because they’re from a place no one else can understand. There are mental health issues (that I learned more about), so being able to understand and share that perspective is really important.”

#### KEYES: You have the reputation of being an emotional warrior of the team.

WILLIAMS: “I am very energetic, and I don’t want to say I’m loud necessarily, but I have a lot of energy. I have extreme passion about everything, I talk all the time and I like to motivate people. I’m very emotionally invested in everything.”

#### KEYES: I feel that passion and emotion coming from you right now. What sport other than soccer do you like the most at Purdue?

WILLIAMS: “Volleyball! If I were a foot taller, that would have been my sport. They’re so powerful and so strong and so confident. I love volleyball!”

#### KEYES: OK!

WILLIAMS: “And our volleyball team is incredible!”

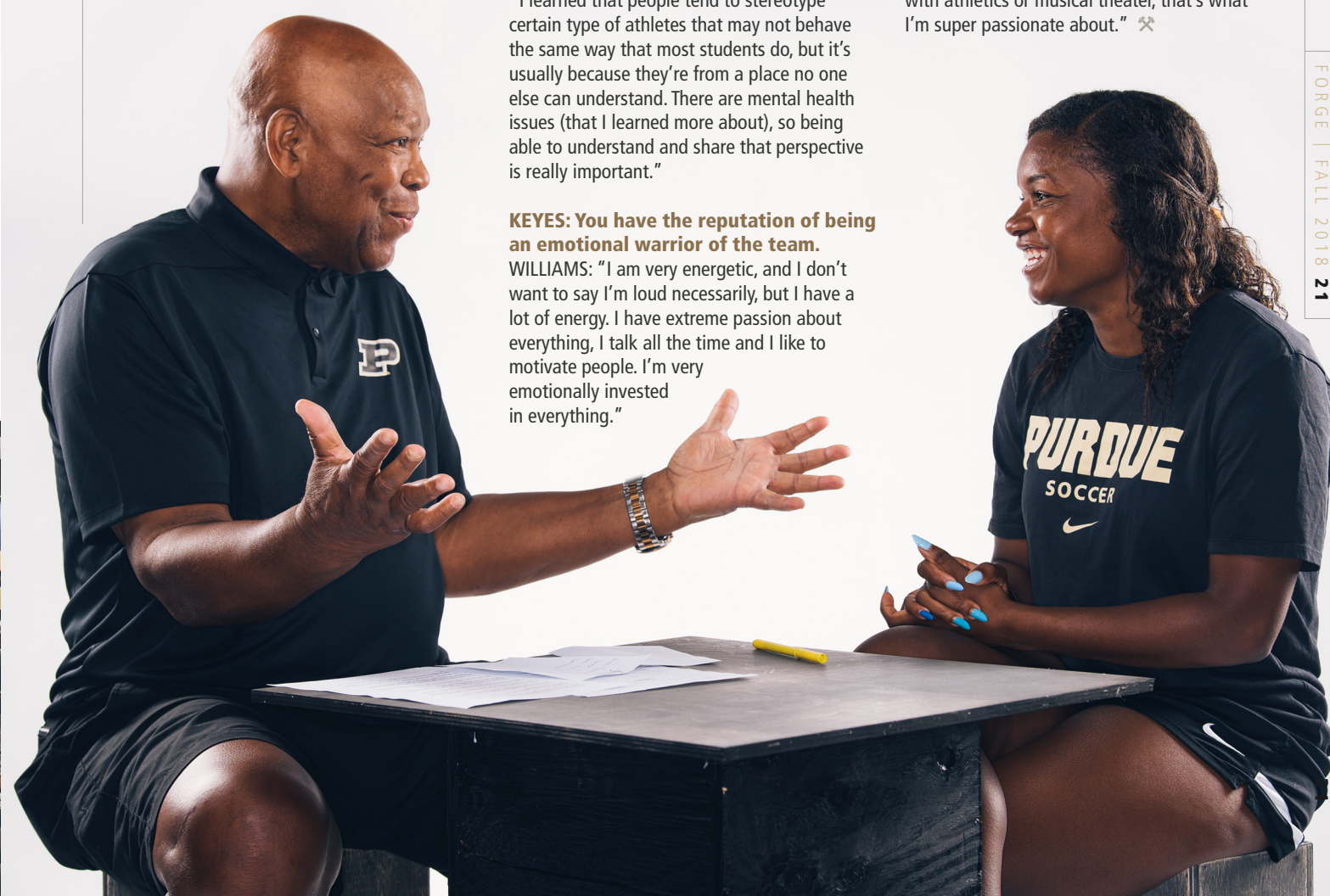
#### KEYES: Who are your role models? And you can’t say LeBron James, or Leroy Keyes (laughter),

WILLIAMS: “My mom (Deanna Newsom), because she has taught me to be my true self. I admire everything that she’s done. She dealt with lots of things growing up and has taught me everything I know.”

#### KEYES: You are a young woman who is going places. Where do you see yourself 10 years from now?

WILLIAMS: “Well, 31 is still young, so I would like to be doing a lot of traveling. My youngest brother said his goal is to travel 30 countries in his 30th year. That’s nuts! But he’s doing it, and I would love to do something like that, too.

“It’s not my personality to relax but I want to go into event management and that could be with athletics or musical theater, that’s what I’m super passionate about.” ✕



# ALL ABOUT THE W

By Tom Schott

Like all Purdue football fans, Dale Samuels smiles every time the W flag is hoisted at Ross-Ade Stadium to signify another Boilermaker win.

However, Samuels' grin – a trademark since the first day he walked on campus in 1949 – always is broader than the others.

Samuels understandably boasts a keen interest in the football program, having been part of the Purdue Athletics scene for 33 years as a student-athlete, assistant coach, administrator and broadcaster. Along the way, in 1992, he presented the notion of the W flag.

Here is how it came to be:

Samuels is a lifelong Chicago Cubs fan, despite growing up on the city's South Side, where residents tend to favor the White Sox. Since the late 1930s, the Cubs have flown a W flag at their home ballpark, Wrigley Field, following victorious games. In 1989, as the Cubs were closing in on the National League Eastern Division championship, Samuels took notice of how their fans responded to the flag raising and figured Purdue rooters would react in a similar manner.

"The flag went up, the crowd went berserk, and I thought that would be a great idea at Purdue to generate some enthusiasm," Samuels says. "I took the idea to Jim Colletto (the Boilermakers' head coach from 1991 to 1996), and he agreed to it. We opened the 1992 season with a big victory over nationally ranked California, the flag went up atop the scoreboard and the fans liked it. I am very appreciative that the tradition has continued over the years."

Samuels admits to being a bandwagon jumper when it comes to his Cubs fandom.

"In 1945, the Cubs played in the World Series, I was an impressionable 14 year old and I wanted to be a fan of a winner," Samuels says. "That's what got me started. There was something about the Cubs back then, an aura about them, and I have followed them ever since."

To the tune of nearly 75 years. Among his favorite Cubs, Samuels lists Hall of Famers Ernie Banks, Ferguson Jenkins, Ryne Sandberg and Ron Santo, along with two members of the 1945 team, first baseman Phil Cavarretta and third baseman Stan Hack.

Samuels' faithfulness was rewarded two years ago, when the Cubs returned to the World Series for the first time since 1945 and won it for the first time since 1908 – a seven-game thriller over the Cleveland Indians – to end the longest championship drought in North American professional sports history.

"The whole 2016 season was unbelievable," says Samuels, who threw out a ceremonial first pitch before a game at Wrigley in 1993. "The Cubs were expecting to have a good year, make the playoffs and win the World Series. They were down three games to one, came back to force a seventh game, squandered a lead late and ultimately won it in extra innings after a rain delay. Wow. You could not have written a better ending to an unforgettable season."

Samuels authored his own treasured tale as Purdue's quarterback on October 7, 1950. The Boilermakers defeated No. 1-ranked Notre Dame 28-14 in South Bend, snapping the Fighting Irish's 39-game unbeaten streak. The victory marked Purdue's first-ever over a top-ranked team and led to the nickname "Spoilermakers." Samuels, a sophomore starting his second game, had a coming-out party with 151 yards passing and two touchdowns, a 35-yarder to senior halfback Neil Schmidt just before halftime that gave Purdue a 21-0 advantage and a 56-yarder to senior halfback Mike Maccioli in the fourth quarter. The diminutive 5-foot-9 Samuels benefited from a new scheme implemented by head coach Stu Holcomb and backfield coach Hank Stram in which he rolled out of the pocket after getting the ball from the center rather than simply dropping back and having his vision blocked by tall linemen.

When the Boilermakers returned home, they were greeted at the Big Four Train Station in downtown Lafayette with a crowd so large that the mile-long-plus bus trip back to campus consisted of a sea of humanity. Those who witnessed the event say the only bigger celebration the city has seen was after the Japanese surrendered to end World War II.

Samuels became the first player in school history to pass for 1,000 yards and throw 10 touchdown passes in a season. Modest numbers by today's standards but lofty ones for that era.

"When I played, we threw the ball 18 to 20 times a game, which was out of the ordinary because most of the time teams were running the ball and relying on good defense and even punting on third down," says Samuels, forever a part of Purdue's Cradle of Quarterback lineage. "What I did in a season, (current Purdue quarterbacks) David Blough and Elijah Sindelar do in a couple, three weeks."

In 1952, Samuels led the Boilermakers to a Big Ten Conference co-championship (with Wisconsin). His career totals of 259 completions, 3,161 passing yards and 27 passing touchdowns still rank in the top 20 on the Purdue career lists. Samuels was a perfect 3-for-3 in games against intrastate rival Indiana.

Selected in the third round of the 1953 National Football League Draft by his hometown Chicago Cardinals, Samuels had a brief professional stint before going to work for the Chicago Northwestern Railroad as a freight traffic sales representative, calling on businesses to transport their product via flatcars rather than trucks. He stayed in that job until 1955, when he began his coaching career as an assistant at the University of Missouri. Samuels then moved to Northwestern University from 1956 to 1959 and subsequently from 1964 to 1967.

Samuels had two coaching stints at Purdue, from 1960 to 1963 under Jack Mollenkopf and from 1970 to 1972 under Bob DeMoss. Samuels served as associate director of the Purdue Alumni Association in 1968 and 1969; administrative assistant to head football coaches Alex Agase, Jim Young and Leon Burtnett from 1973 to 1979 and 1981 to 1982; and associate athletics director from 1983 until his retirement in 1995. He also provided football color commentary on WASK radio in Lafayette for five seasons (1977-81). Samuels was inducted into the Purdue Athletics Hall of Fame in 2001.

One of Samuels' most-significant accomplishments as an administrator was overseeing the development and construction of the Mollenkopf Athletic Center, which opened in 1990 featuring the largest indoor practice facility of its kind in the nation. Nearly three decades later, it continues to be a focal point for player development and recruiting and ties in niftily with the new Football Performance Complex.

"I can't imagine there is a football program in the country with better facilities than what we have at Purdue," Samuels says. "When I think back to my freshman year in 1949 and then walk through the facilities now, it's just amazing what has been done. Having said that, bricks and mortar are one thing, but it is the people that make the difference, and Purdue is special because of the people. Always has been, always will be."

Now 87 years old and in excellent health, the amiable Samuels lives in Waukesha, Wisconsin, with his wife, Dawn, who he met in high school and has been married to for 66 years. Their four children are Purdue graduates: Douglas, Darrell, Donna (Rogers) and Dean – as are two grandchildren, Brookley Rogers and Brandt Rogers. Samuels returns to campus for a handful of games each season and watches the others on television. He could not be more delighted with the current state of the Boilermakers under second-year head coach Jeff Brohm.

"From what I have heard and read, Jeff is all business, and his players really like playing for him," says Samuels, who was in West Lafayette in June for his induction into the Indiana Football Hall of Fame. "That is the perfect formula for success. What he did in his first year was remarkable. Football at Purdue is fun again."

"The W flag is going up more and more, and I love it." ❧

# COMMITTED

*True freshmen Trevion Williams and Eric Hunter Jr. join a cast of characters hell bent on unfurling banners from the Mackey Arena rafters and, in the process, winning you over off the court.*

*By Jared Thompson*

The two compare as easily as they contrast. Wide smiles take shape on vastly different frames. Soft voices emanate from the stocks of divergent roots. Ingenuity pours from the wits of a duo with unabashedly dissimilar career pursuits.

Eric Hunter Jr. and Trevion Williams arrive at Purdue as touted newcomers. However, they bear little resemblance to stereotypical blue-chip recruits that are hyped in newspaper headlines or fawned over in today's world of television talk show hot takes.

Hunter is slim. He stands 6-foot-3 and 165 pounds, a portion of that new lean muscle added since his arrival at Purdue in May. He never really stops moving, even while resting. His feet tap, his hands crawl up and down his arms, his eyes dart about as if he is attempting to look at everything and nothing in the same moment. He claims the constant fidgeting is why he has trouble maintaining weight.

Williams towers in reminiscence of Caleb Swanigan and is actually an inch taller at 6-9 and measures nearly 300 pounds. He likes to bake cheesecakes and cookies, but knows he has to put away those recipes for the time being. His aim is to trim weight before official practices begin in October – a scary proposition for any opposition in the paint. Searching his name on YouTube returns a library of skills, dunks and steps that players of any size have difficulty performing.

Neither lacks for words to speak in conversation, yet they are each quiet, solemn and humble.

The two first met as high school sophomores. They both stood out in a game played against one another and a reporter interviewed both afterwards. It was an encounter that forged a friendship.

The two kept meeting as their basketball careers flourished, in games, at camps and all-star events. Their otherwise divergent paths led straight to West Lafayette.

## A FRESH START

At Purdue, they are now roommates in tandem with fellow newcomers Evan Boudreaux and Kyle King.

Still, one needs to look no further than the team's roster to find the first clue in how different these players are from everyone else.

Tindley Preparatory Academy in Indianapolis and Henry Ford Academy in Dearborn, Michigan, are the high schools, respectively, for Hunter and Williams. They aren't "basketball" schools, at least they weren't until Hunter and Williams turned them into championship teams. Tindley, a National Blue Ribbon School known for its rigorous academics, and Henry Ford, always among the *U.S. News and World Report* Top High Schools rankings, were the unlikely environments in which two future Division I basketball players fashioned their values and a friendship that unites them at Purdue.

"When it comes to the academic part of it," Hunter says, "I think I have that pretty much under control. There's a lot of support with advisors and tutors that complement my background academically."

Hunter's idealism as a future business mogul derives as fluidly as his crossover dribble.

"I've always wanted to be the reason why something is jumping," Hunter says. "Not necessarily to be a trendsetter, but for people to know that I was behind building something. I wanted to get a marketing degree. Selling and sales management is almost the same thing, but you get a little bit of everything – more than just marketing."

Hunter has a head start on his dream, too. He knocked out most of his college prerequisites in high school, entering Purdue with 21 credit hours.

Williams is invigorated by the instant celebrity status. He's a gentle giant whose move to Henry Ford, an all-ages campus, fueled his passion towards working with children.

"I would take care of my cousins and kids in the neighborhood," Williams says. "I learned how to bake and play games. I just want to be able to help people achieve their goals. It is important to start young with that."

"In high school, I was looked up to because of my size and play but also because of how I acted off the court. I loved it."

Hunter's parents, Eric Sr. and Bridgett, are both college graduates and moved to Indianapolis more than two decades ago. Eric Sr. became friends with an uncle of recent Boilermaker team captain Rapheal Davis, who then mentored the younger Eric.

"He's like a cousin to me," Hunter says of Davis.

However, as Davis was on his way to becoming a Boilermaker, Hunter was unsure he would follow his friend's example.

By the time Hunter was on Purdue's recruiting radar, he was a master in playing coy with the coaches.

"I came to an elite camp in 2014 and at that time I wasn't really good, so I didn't make the all-star game," Hunter says. "So I was like, 'I don't like Purdue. It's funny because my dad felt the same way.'"

Williams' track to Purdue transformed from tragedy.

Williams grew up in Chicago's South Side as the only child in single-parent household. But his mother, Shawndra Lewis, had support from a close extended family. Williams attended church every Sunday with his grandmother and built father figures out of his mother's siblings.

He stood out as a 6-2, 280-pound eighth grader, who found a model in Swanigan. As a freshman at Chicago Mount Carmel, he helped his varsity squad to a 26-0 season.

On September 20, 2015, his uncle, Tyjuan Lewis, 43, was shot and killed near his home shortly after dark. A beloved postal worker with 20 years of service in a nearby branch, his murder remains unsolved.

"I would call him at night and just ask him about life, girls, anything," Williams wrote as part of a heartfelt post on Twitter while announcing his commitment to play basketball at Purdue. "He was someone really special in my life, and it hurts to know I don't have him anymore."

Williams' uncle was among Chicago's eight gun homicides that weekend and 488 total that year. In order to escape the violence, Williams moved to Detroit to live with another uncle and enrolled at Henry Ford.

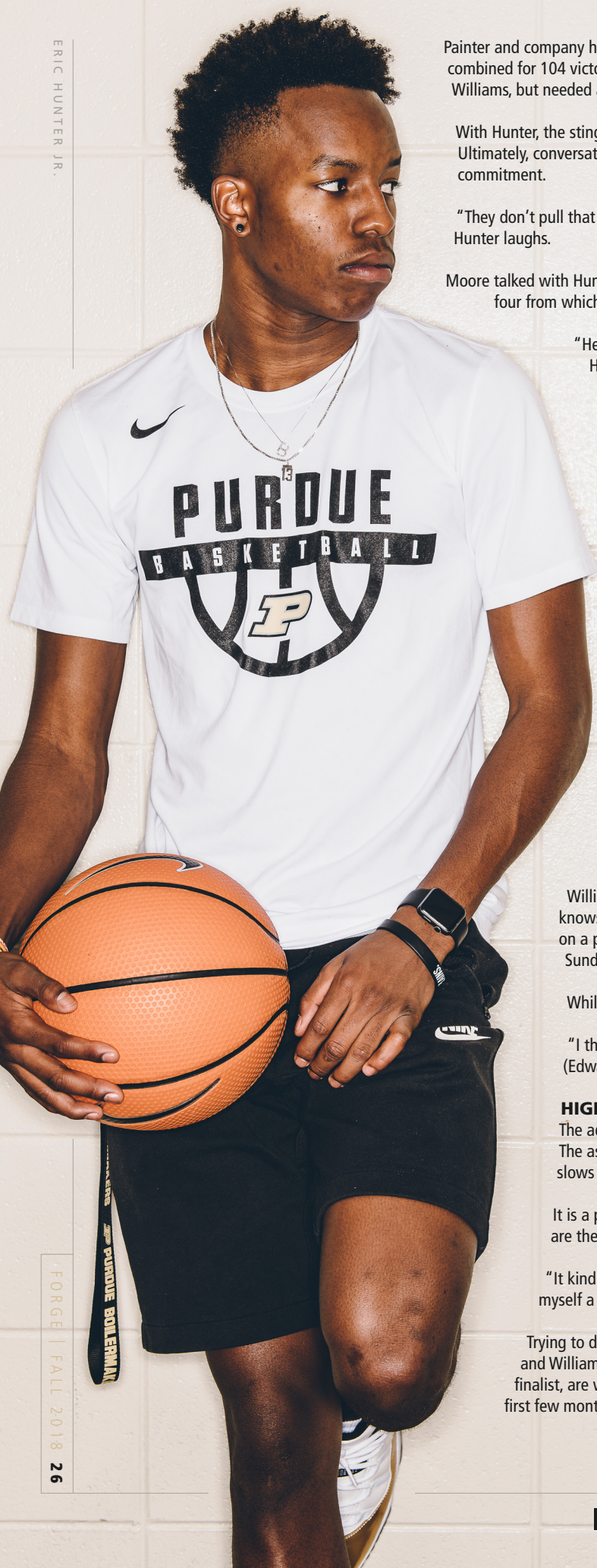
Williams persevered and flourished at Henry Ford, where he averaged 22 points and 25 rebounds as a junior, getting offers from DePaul, Illinois, Michigan State and Xavier. Williams fractured his foot in the first game of the state tournament his junior year, and the recruiting noise quieted.

"It was surprising," Williams says. "I got hurt, and Purdue stuck with me when other coaches quit calling as much."

## SOLD ON PURDUE

Enter Matt Painter.

"What separates him from other coaches is that he wants you not just be a good player, but be a good student and a good man," Williams says. "He wants the best for all his players."



Painter and company had a tall task in order, replacing four starters – all graduating seniors – who combined for 104 victories, three shy of the program class record. Now, Painter had his big man in Williams, but needed a playmaker who could handle the ball.

With Hunter, the sting of exclusion from eighth-grade camp was still waging a war in his mind. Ultimately, conversations with Purdue star E'Twaun Moore solidified his interest and eventually his commitment.

"They don't pull that card (of bringing in Moore) unless they really feel they're going to get you," Hunter laughs.

Moore talked with Hunter about the pros and cons of each of his offers, eventually settling on a final four from which to choose.

"He was like, 'It doesn't matter if you pick Purdue or not. I'm here to help,'" Hunter remembers. "I think at that point when I talked to him I was down to six (schools). But I was sold on Purdue after that."

While Moore and Hunter chatted, Painter did his due diligence.

"He took a really long time to offer me," Hunter says. "But once I talked to coach Paint a few times, I realized he was just really trying to pick my brain, see what type of person I was."

Painter's strategy, not surprisingly, was for Hunter and Williams to share the same weekend for their official visits to Purdue.

#### TALENT BEYOND BASKETBALL

Forget point guard and power forward. With Hunter and Williams, Purdue basketball landed a painter and a vocalist, respectively.

Hunter has a history of finding success with things he's not sure he wants to do. Williams has a history of making the best of the situation. The traits engineered creative identities in both.

As a freshman at Tindley, Hunter was required to enroll in an art history class. Despite his reluctance, he progressed from doodling on homework to developing a love of acrylic painting. He paints mostly portraits of celebrities and rappers.

Williams claims to be shy about his secret talent, but nearly everyone close to him knows that he loves to sing. He joined the Mustang Vocalists at Henry Ford, carrying on a passion derived from years of singing hymns alongside his grandmother on Sunday mornings.

While painting and singing may not mesh, their talents are combined in one area.

"I think we are the best dancers on the team," Williams declares, "but if Carsen (Edwards) hears this, he's going to flip."

#### HIGHER EXPECTATIONS

The adjustments to college life sometimes bring out frustration. It is a new landscape. The assignments are challenging. Time is limited. Neither wants to be the one who slows the group.

It is a positive thing that the people who put the most pressure on Hunter and Williams are themselves.

"It kind of hurts me sometimes," Hunter says of having high expectations. "I get on myself a lot. I have to realize I'm in a space now where I don't have to do everything."

Trying to do everything is the adjustment Hunter, the Indianapolis City Player of the Year, and Williams, the Michigan Metro Athletic Conference Player of the Year and Mr. Basketball finalist, are working to exorcise from their routine. It's been a tough habit to break in their first few months as freshmen on the men's basketball squad.

Preseason all-everything junior Carsen Edwards is the face of the program, perhaps even the sport of college basketball for the 2018-19 season. For Hunter and Williams, their role is to surround Edwards and accentuate his playmaking ability. The hope is that will help translate to wins and to playing a slate of games in late March.

"It's really what I was looking forward to (helping Edwards)," Hunter says. "When I try to do everything, it can end up not being what we need."

Hunter leans on teammate Sasha Stefanovic and graduate assistant Joey Brooks for advice. At least for things like traversing campus, knowing where to eat or pick up books.

For on-the-court matters, Hunter has smartly chosen his primary source: Edwards. No one was more excited when the Purdue star announced his intentions to withdraw from the NBA Draft and return to college for his junior season.

"That was a big reason why I wanted to come here," Hunter says of the opportunity to play with Edwards. "He's just a hard-nosed dude who plays the same type of way I want to play. I'm definitely glad he came back."

Williams relies on Edwards, as well as Nojel Eastern, to navigate through the challenges, especially the intensity of rapidly paced workouts.

"They've helped me break in and get out of my shell," Williams says. "It's hard coming in as a freshman because there are a lot of things coming at you left and right."

#### THE UNEXPECTED

Hunter posed a question to Edwards following an early offseason workout when the two were the last ones in the locker room.

"At what point do you see how good we're going to be?" the rookie asked the veteran.

Edwards replied that there's not much to worry about. He likes where the team is headed.

"He's just a winner," Hunter says of Edwards. "Everybody in here is a winner, if you ask me. As people, there are no bad dudes around here. I think that goes to show the recruiting of coach Paint."

Within any group, there's the dynamic of personal relationships that can enhance or destroy team chemistry. Hunter and Williams say that the Boilermakers' immediate family bond was an unforeseen benefit.

"You have guys on the team that hang out with each other all the time," Hunter says. "But everybody's cool with each other. We all want the same thing for each other and ourselves. I didn't expect that."

Leadership will come from seniors Ryan Cline and Grady Eifert. Star guard Edwards will get the attention. Matt Haarms will fist pump like crazy. Overall, it will be a young team. Everyone will have a key role.

"Being a freshman, hearing that," Hunter says, "you kind of get excited. You just feel the opportunity that's coming. I'm just ready to step into whatever I'm needed to do."

The duo is aware it is a thrill to watch a game inside Mackey Arena. It's another level to wear the Purdue jersey. The coaching staff has built its program on a foundation of character. Hunter and Williams are excited to expand on it.

"When coach Painter recruits," Williams says, "he recruits for your personality, you academic success. That's left a great impression on me. I know when we have games, whatever time I get to play, I'm going to play hard, not just for myself but for the school." ✖



# All in the Family

## MARTINS HONOR FAMILY IN THEIR SUPPORT OF BOILERMAKER FOOTBALL

By Alan Karpick

For Bob and Amy Martin, their love of Purdue Athletics is all tied to one thing: Family.

Bob was a Boilermaker offensive lineman for coaches Fred Akers and Jim Colletto from 1988 to 1991. Amy attended Butler on a swimming scholarship, and after starting a family in 1997, the pair purchased a small motor home and began attending Purdue games with their two children. It didn't take Amy long to become a Boilermaker die-hard.

"We eventually found our way to purchase season tickets and raise our children in West Lafayette on fall weekends," Amy says. "There is nothing quite like Big Ten football, and my appreciation for the program has only grown as our kids have gotten older."

So much so, that daughter Mackenzie is a senior at Purdue this fall, giving Bob and Amy all the more reason to visit campus. Son Will is a high school senior, but has been a fixture at Ross-Ade Stadium during his childhood. Two of Bob's three sisters graduated from Purdue, as well.

While the strong connection continues with the Martin's children and extended family, the Boilermaker bond began when Bob's father, Bill, was recruited to play football for Purdue in the 1950s. He earned a scholarship along with high school classmate and future Boilermaker Hall of Famer and NFL standout Erich Barnes. In racially turbulent times, the elder Martin and Barnes, an African-American, were close friends in high school and continued that relationship when making the decision to attend Purdue.

Yet, Bill had other challenges. He survived polio at his fifth birthday, but was left with his right leg a quarter the size of his left. He overcame that to be a standout middle guard in high school, but when he got to Purdue it was difficult competing against the "monsters" he faced on the offensive line. He left the program after one year.

"I think he got a little homesick, too," Bob Martin says. "But he was an inspiration to me. He returned home to marry my mom (Alice) and have a 43-year career in the railroad industry. He told me when I was at Purdue that I could come home when things got tough, but he also encouraged me to stick with it, and see it through."

Son followed father's advice. And he had to persevere to prove himself to two coaching staffs.

"The coaching change was tough on me," Bob says. "Yet, I feel like I fulfilled part of his dream by going to Purdue and sticking it through and getting a business degree. That, along with my football experience, really launched my professional career, and I am grateful for that every day. Purdue is a prestigious place, and I see that as I travel around the world."

Bob is the president/chief executive officer of Thor Industries, a producer of recreational vehicles and traded on the New York Stock Exchange. He has been a huge part of a very successful growth period, stemming from the early days when he started attending Purdue games in that small RV.

Bob and Amy have supported their beloved Boilermakers with time and treasure, in good and difficult times. They have served on the National Leadership Circle, an organization headed by Drew Brees, with the primary charge of supporting Purdue football's master plan.

"Drew has served as a good example of giving back no matter the won-loss record," Bob says. "I think that is an important message for my fellow donors. It is easier to support things when you win, but the program needs support in good times and bad."

Most recently, Bob and Amy have been major donors to the Football Performance Complex, naming the team meeting room, a commitment made before coach Jeff Brohm's program began to take off.

"They wanted us to donate to the weight room, but that would have been a bit of a stretch because all my teammates knew that I didn't like to lift weights," Bob says with a laugh. "I said it would be more fitting for us to support the snack bar."

"All kidding aside, we enthusiastically decided on the large meeting room as the place for our family's name and support."

And for the Martins, it's all in the family. And it is all Purdue. ✂

# The Archives



Fred Rogers debuted his famous cardigan 50 years ago on his children's program "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood." At the same time, Leroy Keyes wrapped up his Boilermaker football career as a two-time Heisman Trophy finalist and consensus All-American, proudly wearing this letter sweater as the pied piper of Purdue.





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## MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

The Team Behind the Teams has an exciting semester coming up!  
Don't miss out on the great events scheduled for your membership level!

SEPT 14: ATHLETICS DIRECTOR DINNER #1\*\*

SEPT 21: ATHLETICS DIRECTOR DINNER #2\*\*

SEPT 28: MBB/WBB MINI PLANS AND  
SINGLE-GAME TICKET WINDOW BEGINS

SEPT 28: CROSSROADS CLASSIC TICKET DEADLINE

OCT 10: MBB/WBB MINI PLANS AND SINGLE-GAME  
TICKET WINDOW ENDS

NOV 3: PURDUE VS. IOWA POSTGAME RECEPTION\*

NOV 15-18: MBB CHARLESTON CLASSIC JPC TOUR\*\*\*

FEB 15: MOLLENKOPF-KEYES CLASSIC\*\*\*

\*ALL-AMERICAN & ABOVE, \*\*OLYMPIAN & ABOVE, \*\*\*ALL LEVELS



To find out more about John Purdue Club events and to register,  
please visit our events section on [JohnPurdueClub.com](http://JohnPurdueClub.com) or call 765.494.3248