

# FORGE









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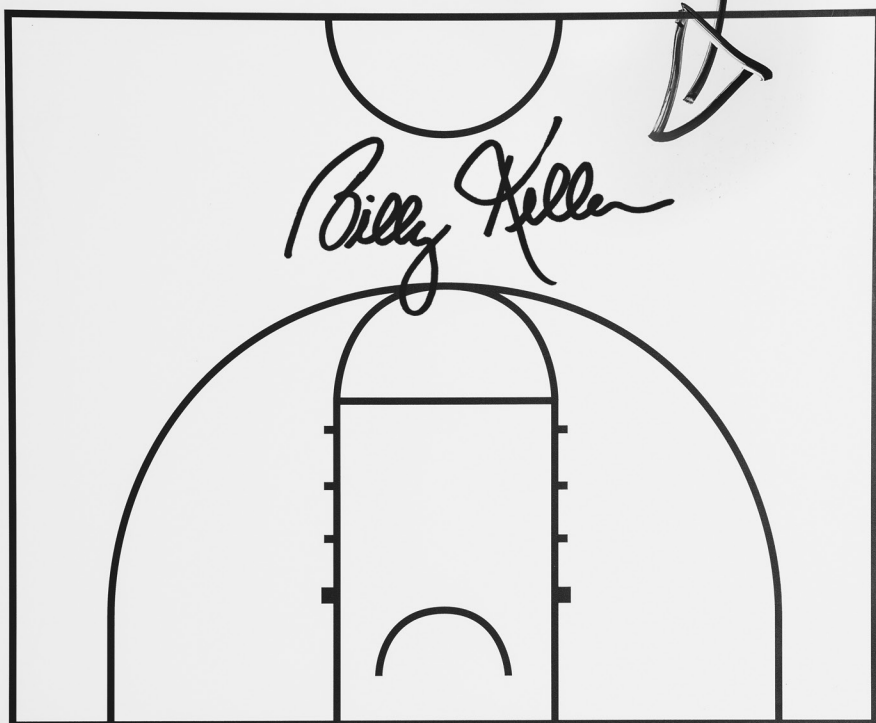
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# BUILT FOR SUCCESS

## ERSLAND HAS WRESTLING PROGRAM PRIMED

*By Cory Palm*

If you don't know what you are observing, a wrestling room can appear to be pure chaos. Thirty or more guys crammed into a room slightly larger than an Olympic-sized swimming pool going to war with each other.

The calm amidst the chaos is the head coach, walking from man to man, group to group, voice barely above a whisper. A very intense whisper.

For Purdue head coach Tony Ersland, he lives for these one-on-one moments. Teaching the intricacies of the sport he loves. Sharing the knowledge he has spent a lifetime gathering. And he knows that in early-season practice, the foundation is built for late-season success.

Ersland knows about foundations. His own career is built on very solid ground. In high school, he won two individual state championships and a team title for Humboldt (Iowa) High School. From there it was on to the University of Iowa to compete on the vaunted Hawkeyes program run by the incomparable Dan Gable.

Ersland was a part of four straight Big Ten titles and three straight NCAA team championships, including the 1997 crown in Gable's final season at the helm.

For his entire competitive career, Ersland was surrounded by success, though he wasn't always able to be a part of it. He didn't crack the starting lineup until his senior year, though he was a four-time Academic All-Big Ten honoree. He qualified for the NCAA Championships, but that trip ended one match short of earning All-America honors.





“Honestly, it’s still gut wrenching,” Ersland says with a grimace on his face when describing falling just short of a personal goal. “That’s a lot of pain. Maybe in some ways it has put a chip on my shoulder, which has helped. It still drives me.”

And there it is. We are better for every experience we have, good and bad, because it can teach us a lesson that will come in handy down the road. At Iowa, Ersland got to live the experience of a medium-sized fish in a very large pond full of sharks.

“I do hope it gives me perspective on things,” he says. “I’ve had to struggle as an athlete, but I’ve also been in a program surrounded by people who knew what it took. I saw what it took.”

Ersland knew he wanted to be a collegiate coach. It made sense to him. So, he embarked on that odyssey. Ersland spent time at Central Michigan, Northern Illinois, Northwestern and Iowa State before landing at Nebraska for eight years as the top assistant. While at Nebraska, he coached 2012 Olympic gold medalist Jordan Burroughs, one of the biggest figures in the sport over the last decade.

“I was an assistant for 17 years,” Ersland says. “That’s a long time. You see the good and the bad. You see where something doesn’t work out the way you thought it would so the next time you encounter it, you have the wisdom to go in another direction. I took a lot from every stop I made.”

When the opportunity arose at Purdue prior to the 2014-15 season, Ersland was ready. And that foundation of knowledge was stronger than ever. It left him uniquely equipped to be offered the job and proceed with the challenge of transforming the program.

“I felt really comfortable with my point of view and my coaching philosophy,” Ersland says. “Those aren’t things that you can just fake. It takes time to understand who you are and what you really believe in. I took pieces from lots of people on my way to here. I learned a lot from coach Gable, Tom Borrelli (Central Michigan head coach) and Mark Manning (Nebraska head coach). But I’m Tony Ersland. I know who I am. I feel comfortable with what we are going to do here and how we are going to do it.”

Ersland needed that self-awareness taking over a program mired in the bottom third of the toughest

conference in the country. Ersland had a plan and went to work.

“I came here and presented a five-year plan,” he says. “This is what it’s going to take to be good, and this is my timeline. Honestly, I thought we would have a few All-Americans by now. You always want to win more, but we’re close.”

The foundation of that five-year plan was making certain there was support in place for the long haul because Ersland knew it would not be a quick fix.

“Knowing that workout partners sharpen each other, we needed to put several ranked recruiting classes together,” Ersland says. “Guys have to be pushed every day in the room. And we have to create the expectation that they are going to win. You look for confident kids who also have something to prove. Recruiting the right kids, creating roster depth and fostering that attitude takes time.”

Ersland’s first season, the Boilermakers qualified a school-record eight individuals for the NCAA Championships. In years two and three, Ersland and his staff put together recruiting classes ranked among the top 15 in the nation. In year four, Purdue advanced seven to the NCAA



Championships with two falling a win away from reaching All-American.

Now, it's year five.

"It's hard to express how excited I am," Ersland says. "When I look at the room as a whole, it is so much deeper than it was previously. When you have a room that is truly deep, there is nowhere to run and hide. And I see guys responding. We've had a good amount of time with this team, and we've recruited them under our set of expectations. I'm just more comfortable with where we are and what I'm seeing."

Ersland also points to the university's commitment to the program in terms of a robust travel budget for competition and recruiting, facility

renovation, and staff salaries as being keys to the commitment required for success.

For all of the experience in the lineup, for the second year in a row it will feature just two seniors. Five projected starters were NCAA qualifiers last season. And when the preseason polls were released, it was obvious that the respect is starting to come on a national level.

As the season began, five Boilermakers are ranked in the top 20 of their respective weight classes, with junior Dylan Lydy leading the way with a top-10 ranking at 174 pounds. Junior Christian Brunner was chosen by USA Wrestling to take part in the Under-23 Team World Championships in November in Romania.

No doubt, as the season unfolds, there will be unexpected obstacles and adversity to overcome. But based on past experiences, there won't be anything Ersland can't handle. He knows the program is on a rock-solid foundation that has been decades in the building.

## 'NEW' BLAKE WRESTLING CENTER

"It is awesome."

With those three words, Tony Ersland lights up as he starts to describe the renovated Blake Wrestling Center, his team's training facility.

In a turn that is almost too surreal, the man who is metaphorically transforming the program has also taken on the challenge of revamping the training facility.

An elevated platform at one end of the room gets the new compliment of cardio equipment and free weights off the main practice floor. With the additional space, new practice mats on the floor and the walls

open up the square footage where daily training takes place. "From a safety standpoint, we have a lot more wrestling space to fly around and beat each other up," Ersland says with a smile. "And it brightened up the room to help create the atmosphere you want both for the guys on the team and for recruits who tour the facility."

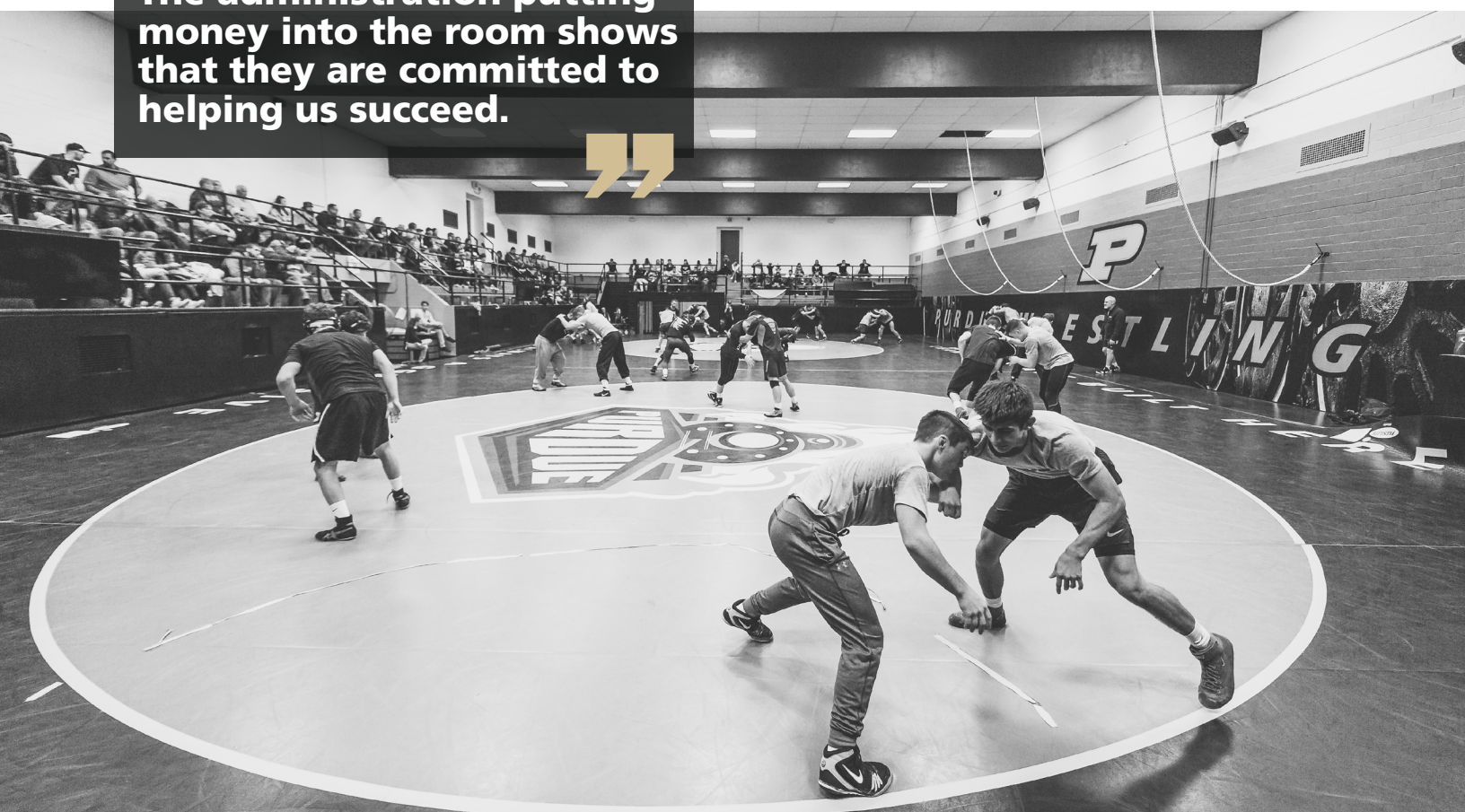
A new branded paint job and updated wall graphics complete the facelift for the room that amazingly used to house Purdue's swimming pool.

Ersland says the makeover is a fantastic sign for his program as it continues moving forward, though not merely for its ascetics and functionality.

"You don't need the best room to get better," he says. "But you want to see the commitment to your sport. That's what this shows. The administration putting money into the room shows that they are committed to helping us succeed. And that means a lot to your current athletes and to recruits." ✕



**You want to see the commitment to your sport. That's what this shows. The administration putting money into the room shows that they are committed to helping us succeed.**





# POWER COUPLE

— DANIELS FIND STRENGTH IN PURDUE FOUNDATION —

*By Tom Dienhart*





# A GAME TO REMEMBER

10.16.99

PURDUE DEFEATED  
#5 MICHIGAN STATE  
52-28

CHRIS DANIELS  
TORCHED THE  
NICK SABAN-LED  
SPARTANS WITH:

► 21

RECEPTIONS

► 301

YARDS

► 3

TOUCHDOWNS

You never know where career inspiration will originate. For former Purdue wide receiver Chris Daniels, it happened at a team meal in 1997.

"I was sitting there, and in walks a teammate, Jody Goatley, who is from Paducah, Kentucky," Daniels says. "And he was wearing camo. I asked him why. And he said he had been hunting. I thought that sounded kind of cool and asked if he would take me. We eventually went. And I was hooked."

The rest, as they say, is history. Now, Daniels and his wife, Kristy, also a Purdue graduate, own Briarwood Sporting Club in Bellefontaine, Ohio. It is a destination for sportsmen who want to hunt or fish. It features 16 lakes and open-range deer and turkey hunts along with guided tours and accommodations. Chris will even pick you up in his plane if you book a visit to the central Ohio club he and Kristy purchased in 2008.

"I wasn't exposed to hunting growing up in Tampa," says Daniels, an aviation administration technology major. "But I like being in nature. It has become a passion."

Chris and Kristy Daniels are the ultimate outdoor power couple. But they never would have met if not for former Purdue basketball star Brian Cardinal, who was Chris' roommate. Cardinal's girlfriend – and now wife – Danielle Bird, who played on the women's basketball team, set up Chris and Kristy. The first few dates were simply trips to the library to study. Romance blossomed from there.

"Those four and a half years went by so fast but were some of the most meaningful years of my life," says Kristy, who grew up in Floyds Knobs, Indiana. "I was able to do the sport I love, cheerleading. I have a great degree from Krannert;

I was a Kappa Alpha Theta. It was great. And I met my best friend and husband.

"Everything we have built and created goes back to Purdue. Every time we come back to a football game, I tell Chris I want to buy a house here. I love coming back. The person you start with your parenting and the environment in which you were raised. But I feel we learned a lot and became who we were, especially from a business standpoint, at Purdue."

Chris Daniels also learned a lot on the football field while playing for the Boilermakers from 1996 to 1999, redshirting in 1995 after signing with head coach Jim Colletto. After making just four total catches his first two seasons, Daniels became a key cog for the "basketball on grass" offense of Joe Tiller, catching passes from Drew Brees. In 1998 as a junior, Daniels caught 45 passes for 473 yards and seven touchdowns. In 1999, Daniels enjoyed a season for the ages when he amassed a Big Ten season record of 121 receptions for 1,236 yards and seven touchdowns.

Daniels was at his best during a 52-28 win against fifth-ranked Michigan State on October 16, 1999. That afternoon, he caught 21 passes for 301 yards, both Big Ten game standards, to help the Boilermakers dump an unbeaten Spartan team coached by Nick Saban. Daniels also had three touchdown grabs. His game receiving yards record has fallen, but his game and season receptions marks still stand nearly two decades later.

"I was on the Homecoming court that day," Kristy Daniels recalls. "I remember being in the stands with Chris' uncle, who was wearing a headset and listening to the game. He kept saying, 'He has 15 catches, 16, 17 ... he has 200 yards ...' He was keeping us abreast. It was an exciting thing to be a part

of, although I had no idea of the significance until later."

Today, things are plenty exciting for the 41-year-old couple. In addition to managing Briarwood, they are raising five children. When they can, they sneak back to West Lafayette for a football game.

"When you play a sport, it teaches you a lot," says Chris, who was part of three bowl teams for Purdue that was the genesis for major success under Tiller. "You don't realize it in the thick of things. But how we parent our children, run our business, handle our own relationship – the foundation was set at Purdue. Learning how to communicate with people, learning time management, learning to deal with pressure, and dealing with risk are all attributes you need to get through life. A lot has to do with that short duration we were there.

"You often forget the tough times, but the things that stick out are all of the best times. There was a lot of work to get you to that point and be successful. We are forever grateful to Purdue." ✕





The background of the entire page is a dark blue, textured surface that resembles a close-up of a stone or metal surface, with various shades of blue and grey creating a complex, organic pattern.

# A rhythm of his own.

*By Tom Dienhart*









## BMOC

At 6-foot-1, he blends in among the hurly-burly on this day. That's OK with Carsen Edwards. He likes it that way. But some students recognize the biggest celebrity on campus.

"I am fortunate to be at Purdue," he says, walking past Heavilon Hall and offering a head nod to a basketball manager cruising by on a bike. "I don't take any of this for granted. I have great coaches and teammates. I don't get caught up in all of that stuff. If we win, everything will take care of itself."

"Hey, good luck this year, man," says a skinny kid wearing a "Boiler Brigade" T-shirt, smiling and offering a fist to bump. Edwards reciprocates. The guy's day is made, and he has a story to tell for weeks.

Edwards' pedal-to-the-metal style on the court is a stark contrast to his humbleness off it. Whether its driving to the hoop or draining an impossibly long 3-pointer, Edwards does it with a style and swagger rarely seen at Mackey Arena. He is electricity in a tank top, and the Boilermakers will go as far as he takes them ... with hopes for a pretty deep run in March for a program that hasn't been beyond the NCAA Tournament Sweet 16 since 2000.

"No doubt, he's a special player," sophomore backcourt mate Nojel Eastern says. "We all expect big things from him. But Carsen is humble. He wants what's best for this team."

Need a big bucket in a big moment in a big game? Edwards is the man. He has to be the man. Could he average 30 points like Glenn Robinson did during his national player of the year season in 1993-94, when the Big Dog led Purdue to a Big Ten Conference championship and an NCAA Elite Eight berth while leading America in scoring? Why not? For Edwards, anything seems possible.

"We will see," Edwards says. "But it's not just me. We have a lot of good players on this team."

There he goes again, ducking the spotlight with the same swift aplomb he dekes a defender. For Edwards, it's about action — often at 110 mph — not words.

"It's a great place to start when you have an All-American returning," head coach Matt Painter says. "Usually, they don't come back. He's a dynamic scorer, the best scorer in college basketball."

And maybe the best player, too.



## HOME AWAY FROM HOME

The Fuse Apartment building is just a couple of quick Carsen Edwards' crossover dribbles across Northwestern Avenue from Mackey Arena. Perfect, right? This is where Purdue's BMOC lives. He shares the digs with teammates Emmanuel Dowuona, Nojel Eastern and Aaron Wheeler.

One of the first things you notice is an empty pizza box on the counter. What college apartment doesn't have one of those laying around?

The refrigerator is stocked better than you would think: plenty of milk, eggs, yogurt, a leftover Smoothie King and two squeeze bottles of grape jelly. The freezer is jammed with various pastas in a bag. And pizzas. Of course.

"The only one who cooks much is Manny," says Edwards, referring to freshman Dowuona from Ghana via Miami. "He makes something about every night. He likes rice."

Edwards' room in Fuse is remarkably typical. A couple of music posters, some Polaroids of he and his friends goofing scattered on a MacBook camouflaged in stickers, clothes on the floor. A piece of the net the Boilermakers

cut down to celebrate the 2017 Big Ten title is tied to a ball cap commemorating the feat. But amongst the snippets of Edwards' life scattered around the room, the thing that stands out are the notes he writes himself in dry erase, on the sliding mirror that cloaks his closet. "First impression EVERYDAY," important upcoming dates and, most importantly, "Want Mom and Dad to live stress free."

"So, this is it: home," he says.

West Lafayette didn't feel like that when he arrived back in the summer of 2016. Edwards is a homebody who loves his family. He is No. 3 among four siblings. Mom Carla, dad James, along with sisters Taj and Aspen and brother Jai piled in a car to move Carsen from Atascocita, Texas — a Houston suburb — over two years ago.

"Fifteen hours and 37 minutes," Edwards says. "A long drive."

After being dropped off, Edwards immediately went to an open gym to play some hoops, thinking staying busy would take his mind off the move. Hugs and kisses were exchanged on the court. But a while later, Edwards noticed something: His mother was still standing there.

"I couldn't go," Carla says. "We started down the road, and I had my husband turn around and come back for one last good-bye."

Good-byes are difficult for the close-knit Edwards' family. While the family buzzed with activities and mom worked as a marriage and family counselor and dad worked in the insurance industry, the Edwards still always made sure they ate dinner together.

"Every night," Carla says, matter-of-factly. "It is the one time we all could be together to talk about what's going on."

Edwards' favorite dish?

"I like pasta," he says. "And my mom makes this great one that has sausage and spinach. I wish I knew how to make it."

"No way am I giving anyone the recipe," Carla says. "If I do that, then Carsen won't need me anymore."

Not a chance of that ever happening. You see, Edwards is a mamma's boy. And he isn't ashamed to admit it. Heck, his middle name is Cade, which is an acronym of his mom's initials: Carla Ann Desmuke-Edwards. Mom







# EDWARDS EATS

## CARSEN ON BURRITOS

**"I get a burrito at Chipotle with half chorizo and half chicken, sour cream, cheese and lettuce. My mom always wants to know if I am eating vegetables, so the lettuce counts."**

## CARSEN ON SUBS

**"I always get the No. 9 at Jimmy John's without tomatoes or onions and with extra mayo. I don't even know what it's called. I just know it's the No. 9."**

## CARSEN ON CHICKEN

**"If I were president, Chick-fil-a would be open on Sundays."**

## CARSEN ON TRADITIONS

**"If I were to have my own meal named for me at Triple X, it would be something simple like waffles with peanut butter on them."**

and son text daily and talk more often than that. Really.

"When Carsen was 2 years old, I lost a baby during child birth," Carla says. "It was a very difficult time, as you could imagine. I think because of that, I made Carsen my baby for too long. I tried to keep him as my baby for as long as I could. We did everything together for a long time. I was a stay-at-home mother for a long time. That bond is strong. Still is."

And that led to some homesick moments for Purdue's BMOC.

"The most homesick I got was my freshman year when I had to walk to class in the snow," he says, shaking his head. "Where I'm from in Texas, it's hot most of the time. I didn't have boots. I had on about four shirts, just layers, under my jacket. It was impossible to stay warm."

The 20-year-old Edwards still isn't used to it. Eastern gets a kick out of Edwards' disdain for the cold.

"It's funny," Eastern says. "I am from Evanston (Illinois), and we get lots of snow. Feet of it. I am used to it. But Carsen can't stand it. I laugh. This is nothing, I tell him."

## 'I'M CHILL'

If you hang around Carsen Edwards long enough, you will hear him say this. It's an apt summation of him. He has a deliberate purpose, a calmness, a coolness as he moves about a room. Yes, Edwards is in a rush on the court. But off it, he moves with an ease and pace that is, well, "chill." But his chill melts into excitement when talking about playing in a state that is obsessed with basketball.

"It's the best," he says. "They love their basketball here."

But it wasn't always about just hoops for Edwards, whose Texas roots made him a football fan early on.

"I wanted to play with my brother," says Edwards, a big fan of Carolina Panthers quarterback Cam Newton. "He was a senior when I was a sophomore. I played that year."

Edwards was his high school's version of Rondale Moore, a lightning-quick wideout who returned kickoffs. But basketball tugged at Edwards, who grew up with a Tracy McGrady poster on his bedroom wall and dreamed of being a Texas Longhorn.

"I even had Longhorn pajamas," he says.

Mom wanted to see how good her son could be if he focused on basketball, so she made him give up football after his sophomore year.

"He was very upset when I made him stop playing," Carla says. "Never went to another high school football game after that. We had him work out for basketball on Friday nights to keep him busy."

The focus on hoops made Edwards better, but he wasn't a mega recruit. And it irked him. His first offer: Lamar. None of the big state schools in Texas wanted him. It basically came down to Purdue, Vanderbilt and Kansas State.

"Coach Painter called my house and offered me during dinner," Edwards says. "I didn't even know where Purdue was."



That changed quickly. Now, Edwards is poised to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the likes of John Wooden, Jewell Young, Terry Dischinger, Dave Schellhase, Rick Mount, Joe Barry Carroll, Glenn Robinson and Caleb Swanigan as all-time Boilermaker greats.

"I have heard of most of those guys," Edwards says. "But it's not about me. It's about my team. I want to lead us to the Big Ten title."

To that end, you will find Edwards grinding. On this day, he's lifting weights, squatting over 400 pounds under the watch of basketball strength & conditioning director Gavin Roberts in the weight room at Mackey Arena. Edwards looks like he still could play football.

Edwards puts in the work on court, too, making 600 shots each day. He is a blur of feet, hands, hair and ball, a dervish of motion who moves at a gear most mortals don't possess. You can feel the rhythm of his game just watching. It's a rhythm Edwards has possessed since he was a child and his father nicknamed him "Boogie" because of his love of dancing.

"He was just always dancing when he heard music," Carla says. "Even when we put him in his car seat. And as he got older, we would put music on when he and his brother and sisters went to bed. He was always around it."

Music moves Edwards. He's a big fan of Drake, the Canadian rapper. But Edwards also has earned an appreciation for old-school music. Credit his grandfather, who made little Carsen a CD with hits from iconic Sam Cooke and the Temptations, among other old-schoolers. And credit dad, too.

"My dad was a big influence on my music," Edwards says. "He listened to Tupac (Shakur) and Mary J. Blige."

And then there are the clothes. Oh,



let's talk about the clothes. On this day, you would not know Edwards was fashion conscious. He is casual, sporting a black P shirt, shorts and a colorful pair of Nikes. And you also are likely often to find him in Birkenstocks. It's true. But when he needs to and wants to, Edwards dresses to kill. Ask Nojel Eastern.

"Let me just put it this way: He has a mall in his closet, OK?" Eastern says. "He is very into his clothes and likes to look good. And some of his stuff is pretty nice, pretty pricey. It's unique, too. Looking good is important to him."

And no part of Edwards' wardrobe may be more expansive than his collection of sneakers.

"I love them," he says. "How many pairs do I have? I am not even sure. The next pair I want to get is Nike

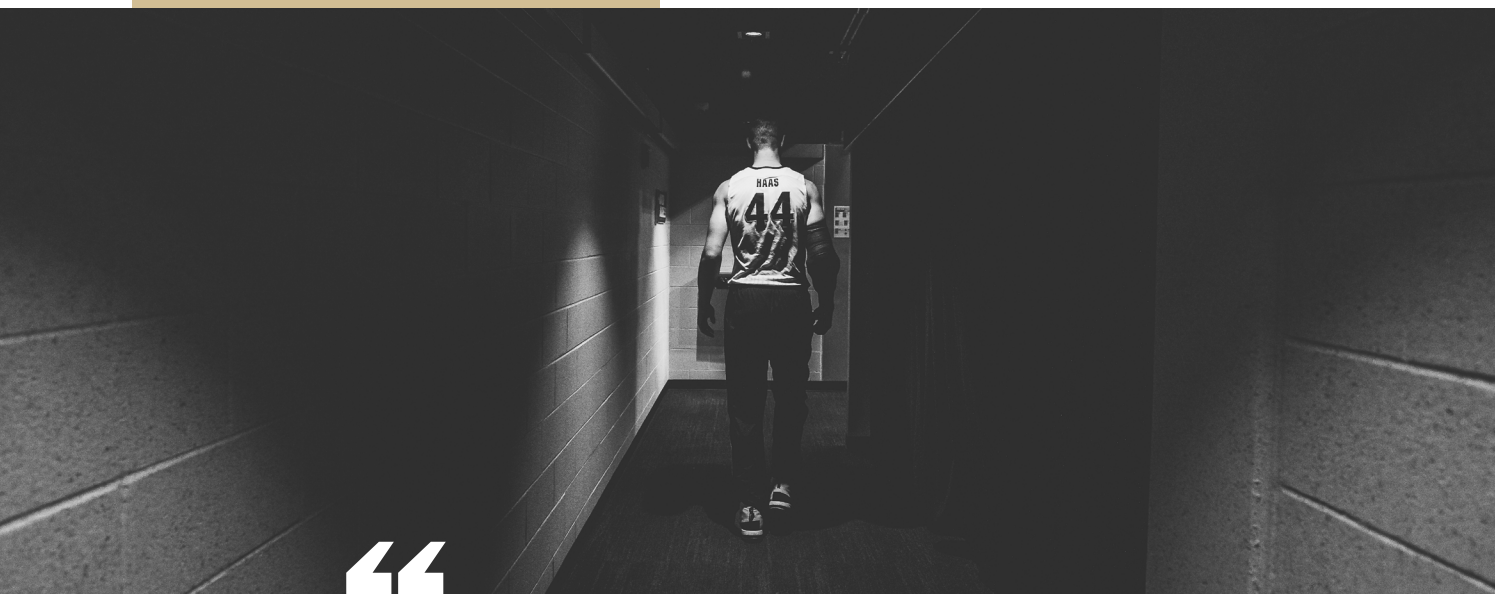
off-white Air VaporMax. But they aren't cheap."

Edwards blew up social media last year when it looked like he was wearing Timberlands. Of course, he wasn't burning by defenders while wearing clunky hiking boots. (But, honestly, he probably still could be All-Big Ten wearing Timbs.) The shoes actually were Nike LeBron Soldier 11 Wheats.

"My Timberlands?" Edwards says, laughing. "I never even thought they looked like that. I liked them because they were close to the school colors and they were comfortable. Coach Painter doesn't care what we wear, as long as we do our job, play hard and defend."

Then there is the hair, which is difficult to describe but very unique, just like the guy who sports





NCAA Tournament pressure reveals not only who can rise to the moment athletically, but the character of the participants. For me, the most lasting memory of the Boilermakers' historic 2017-18 season didn't happen in front of 20,000 people or a television audience.

As his teammates took the court for a shoot-around two hours before their second-round battle with Butler, Isaac Haas was struggling. Struggling to figure out how the next 24 hours would play out, struggling to put a makeshift brace on his broken elbow, struggling with the prospect that his playing time in a Purdue jersey could already have come to an end even though his teammates continued their postseason quest.

In a small hallway leading to the locker room, the ailing big man and three sports medicine staffers quietly worked in vain to piece things together. Carsen Edwards walked past and didn't see national championship hopes being dashed or a year of effort cast on the rocks; he saw his friend, Isaac, struggling. Putting his arm around Isaac's waist, Carsen offered a simple and unexpected, "I love you."

Sometimes basketball is more than basketball.

—  
*Charles Jischke*

it. Tiny tufts shoot from his scalp, giving it a spiky look. He often twists a strand while talking. Call it a nervous habit. And Edwards' look also is defined by his tattoos. It's difficult not to notice the one on his left wrist:  $G > ^\wedge V$ .

"That means God is Greater Than All Highs and All Lows," he says, pointing at it with his right index finger.

On his lower right leg is a Rolling Stones mouth, lips with a tongue sticking out. On the same leg, there is a street sign showing Sean Ct. and Barry Lane. That's the corner Edwards grew up on in the only house he has known. On the outside of a knee, he has a cross.

"I am a firm believer in Jesus," Edwards says. "He is the main reason I am where I am."

To pay more homage, a cross earring dangles from his left ear lobe. He also sports a gold necklace with a Jesus face.

"Church is important to our family," Carla says. "We go to St. John's United Methodist. When we couldn't go and were away at a basketball tourney, we would have our kids watch a sermon on TV. Then, we would ask them questions to see what they learned."

The lessons didn't end there for Edwards. In his house, it was dog-eat-dog when it came to competition.

"We never just let him win at anything," Carla says. "We all tried to win, whatever it was we were doing. We played a lot of board games. Trouble was a favorite, and it was pretty cutthroat."

## THE FUTURE

The NBA is looking at Carsen Edwards. He considered turning pro after last season, going through the NBA Combine last May and getting evaluated during workouts for nine teams. But, he opted to return to West Lafayette. Could Edwards develop into a lottery pick? That's the hope. That's the dream. But it's also his hope and dream to make Purdue great this season.

"It was a good experience," he says. "I am glad I went through it. I learned a lot."

Edwards checks the time. He has to go. The organizational leadership major is taking a full load of classes. He pushes in his ear buds, adjusts the volume on his phone and is off. Time to hit the books. And later, a little hoops is on the schedule.

"Always have to work on my game," he says, closing his apartment door behind him. "I love it ... just love basketball."

There goes Purdue's Biggest Man on Campus. ✂















# REVENGE OF THE NERD

*By Tim Newton*

Dominique Oden is OK with being called a cool nerd.

“It’s an accurate description, and also a compliment,” says Oden, a junior preseason All-Big Ten basketball selection and civil engineering major at Purdue. “I don’t feel like being a nerd is a bad thing. A nerd means I do well in my classes. That’s a good thing in my book.

“I’m smart enough to know what’s going on and to understand the world around me ... the basketball, the school, the social.”

It’s an education that was shaped through some tough early times. Oden was born prematurely and had to wear a heart monitor for her first 10 months. The condition created a constant concern for her mother, Trudy.

“Mom told me that when I was younger she used to have to put me against her chest when she was sleeping because I would stop breathing in my sleep,” says Oden, who developed asthma as a result of her early entry into the world. “I always stayed in her room and actually slept on top of her for a while so she could tell if I was breathing or not.”





## TRAGEDY STRIKES

Dominique's father, Marquis, was a school teacher in New Orleans. As a 4-year-old, she sat in the backseat of the family car when her dad was confronted by a man he had tried to help. The man pulled a gun and killed Marquis just feet away from Dominique and her older sister, Diamond.

Oden doesn't recall much of the incident and prefers not to discuss it. The only thing she can remember about her father, she says, was "a feeling of warmth and comfort."

The family was tested again three years later, in 2005. With Hurricane Katrina bearing down on the city, Trudy packed the car with Diamond, Dominique and younger sisters Diarra and Divine, and headed for safer ground. The family stayed in Florida for a couple of weeks before traveling north to Georgia.

They left just in time. The Oden house was flooded with 11 feet of water. "Everything was ruined by the hurricane," Dominique says. "We lost a lot of pictures and keepsakes."

Once settled in their new surroundings, Trudy had to work several jobs to keep the family afloat. It wasn't an easy situation for her four young daughters.

"Mom said, 'I don't want you to grow up so fast, but I need you to because we're dealing with a lot right now,'" Oden says. "The responsibility that my mom gave us is awe-inspiring because she trusted us. That was how I grew up, and I didn't know any other way."

Those early hard-life lessons helped shape Oden's personality, and it's noticeable to her coach.

"All of those traumatic issues made her mentally tough," Sharon Versyp says. "She's not one that makes excuses, and she's probably the most responsible kid we have on the team. She had to grow up quickly."

## BREAKING THE SHELL

Oden admits to being a natural introvert. She still loves to read and spend time alone, and rarely spoke to others before she entered Marist School in Atlanta, the same school that produced former Boilermaker standout Drey Mingo.

That started to change after her freshman English teacher, Mrs. Langston, penned a note in Dominique's grade book that she still vividly remembers. "She wrote, 'It was wonderful to have you as a student. If you keep on the route that you are the sky is the limit, and I'm looking forward to seeing how you do.' It was a great comment for a 14-year-old from one of my teachers," Oden says.

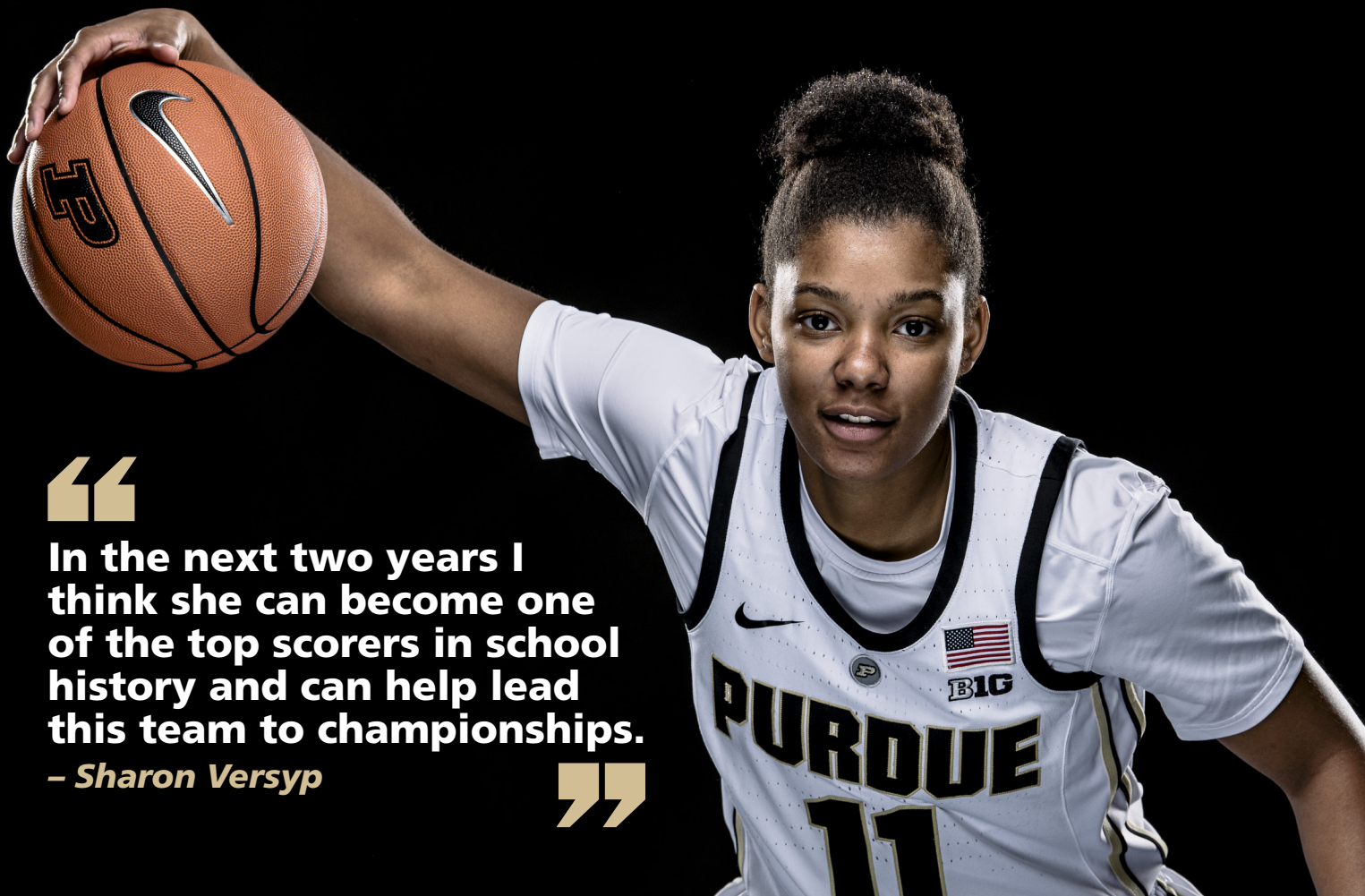
That progression carried over to the basketball court. Oden had picked up the game at the age of 7, and she became a varsity starter as a freshman. She scored more than 2,000 points in high school and was named a second-team all-state selection as a junior and first-team all-state as a senior.

The sharp-shooting guard came to the Purdue basketball camp her sophomore season. The following season, she was drawing interest and phone calls from colleges across the country, which she admits became overwhelming at times.

Oden was interested in becoming an architect, like her uncle. Purdue doesn't offer architecture as a major, but she says the coaching staff went out of its way to work with her and find a similar match in engineering.

"They were the school that actively searched for another major when I told them I want my academics to come first," Oden says. "They were the school that actively searched for something they thought I would like, and they presented it to me. Other schools, I feel it was more basketball."





“

**In the next two years I think she can become one of the top scorers in school history and can help lead this team to championships.**

**– Sharon Versyp**

”

## MAKING A LIST

Oden committed to Purdue around Christmas of her junior season. When she arrived, she met with Versyp and was surprised by an early conversation.

“Coach V made a list of everything I needed to do, from breakfast to when I go to class to when I need to study to when I need to get in extra shooting,” says Oden, known as ‘Nique by her teammates. “Then she asked me, ‘What do you need from me?’ That question really showed me the kind of people I was going to be working with for the next four years.”

Oden enjoyed a solid freshman season, making the All-Big Ten Tournament team and helping to lead her squad to an NCAA Tournament second-round finish. She set the Purdue freshman record for 3-pointers with 61 and twice was named Big Ten Freshman of the Week.

She also learned to adapt to cold Indiana winters. “I wore five layers to class every day. It was a big adjustment, but I really liked the snow. It was really beautiful ... if I was inside,” she laughs.

Oden continued her growth as a sophomore, leading the team in scoring at more than 14 points per game and earning second-team All-Big Ten honors. She also became the first player in program history to make at least 50 3-pointers in each of her first two seasons.

Her coach believes there’s plenty more to come.

“In the next two years I think she can become one of the top scorers in school history and can help lead this team to championships,” Versyp says. “She’s extremely confident, and she’s really opened up to her teammates. I think she wants to be a great role model

for her siblings, and we’re proud of the player and person she has become.”

Oden would like to continue to play basketball after college before putting her engineering degree to use. She also has learned to embrace that “cool nerd” moniker.

“I enjoy school, which is not something everybody says. I enjoy the learning and gaining new knowledge about things that I find interesting,” Oden says. “I love basketball. It’s a stress relief. It’s something that’s fun and that I have a great time doing.

“As a person, I’ve grown in talking to other people and getting out. I wouldn’t say that I’m not sociable, but I would still say that I’m an introvert. I’ve become more of who I want to be.” ✨

**868**

**CAREER POINTS**  
#3 in school history in  
first two seasons

**125**

**3PT FGS**  
#1 in school history in  
first two seasons

**37.1**

**CAREER 3PT%**  
#9 in school history  
entering 2018-19





# Leaving a Positive Mark on Student-Athletes

CATHY WRIGHT-EGER // LEADERSHIP ADVISOR

## STAFF SPOTLIGHT

INSIDE PURDUE ATHLETICS

By Alan Karpick

Cathy Wright-Eger is a difference maker in words and action. She has dutifully served Purdue Athletics for 31 years, first for 21 years as a successful women's swimming coach and the last decade as leadership advisor for the department.

Possessing an unequaled positive spirit and energy, she created the John R. Wooden Leadership Institute as a vehicle to help young people grow and develop the tools to become tomorrow's leaders. We caught up with Cathy to get her thoughts on her demanding, yet rewarding, role with Purdue's student-athletes.

**FORGE: You are one of the most positive people I know. How do you keep your positive attitude?**

WRIGHT-EGER: "I am a glass half-full person. We weren't allowed to complain at home growing up. Every morning I start my day by making a gratitude list and looking at motivating emails or Twitter feeds that I follow so that I make sure I start the day with a positive message.

"I've been working with the student-athletes about knowing and learning what their 'why' is. If you can stay true to your own 'why,' that keeps you going forward towards a positive direction. My 'why' is to be the one who assists in the growth process for our student-athletes and sometimes for the coaches, too. Every morning I think I have to get in there and help someone."

**FORGE: Visualization is key to kids today. How have you used vision boards to work with Purdue's student-athletes?**

WRIGHT-EGER: "I love to have the student-athletes create some type of visual aid. We utilize pictures, quotes, stickers or whatever to show what their vision for themselves is. It's kind of like a poster. The guys typically don't want a big board, they are often happy with something with one word on it. Sometimes it is as simple picture of their family. But if you are struggling to get out of bed one day, feeling overwhelmed or something else has you down, a vision board can have a motivating calming, therapeutic effect."

**FORGE: How do you encourage the student-athletes to communicate in the team dynamic?**

WRIGHT-EGER: "The team culture part of communication has changed so much. Nobody seems to really want to talk to one another, and yet when we get them to unplug and really open up, I am shocked at how much they like it and how good they feel afterwards.

"This generation is so tolerant of differences, which is a great characteristic to have, and yet they don't like to call each other out. They think it is too judgmental. So we call it 'calling people up' instead of calling out. If they can develop a real relationship with one another, then they know when they are calling each other up, it is something that is best for the team."

**FORGE: What is the biggest change you have seen in student-athletes?**

WRIGHT-EGER: "Technology and social media has been a huge factor because it can cause some to compare themselves to one another. And that isn't always healthy."

**FORGE: How does the life of John Wooden resonate with current student-athletes since they were in grade school when he passed?**

WRIGHT-EGER: "Our student-athletes are aware that as a society we have gotten away from values, and his teachings and messages are a reminder of how important it is as a person and a team to have core values. We go around the room to try to figure out and share with one another their core values. That was what coach Wooden is all about."

**FORGE: How have you worked with coaches on the Wooden message?**

WRIGHT-EGER: "I gave all the coaches the Kareem Abdul-Jabbar book *John Wooden and Me* because Kareem had to walk through all the social upheaval of his time with John Wooden. Wooden and Kareem had very different backgrounds, but they had to walk through the challenges of the late 1960s and '70s side by side. It is relevant today with all that is going on in the world." ✖





# REMEMBERING 1969

WITH BILLY KELLER



Guard Billy Keller had a lot to say about the success of Purdue's first Final Four team, which is celebrating 50 years since its magical NCAA Tournament run and Big Ten Conference championship. He also weighed in on Mackey Arena and Forge cover boy Carsen Edwards.

***"Rick Mount was one of the best at using screens, and he could shoot it like no other. Rick's focus was shooting it, and my role was passing it to Rick (laughter). Rick was a phenomenal shooter, no question about that."***

***"On Senior Day, I remember I scored 31 points. Heck, it was my last game in Mackey (a 120-76 win over Indiana no less), so I decided what the heck, I am going to crank it. Rick still had 40, but that 31 felt good."***

***"I couldn't jump as high and wasn't as strong, but like Carsen, all my shots came off the dribble. We are similar in size (Keller was listed as 5-foot-10), but I am not near the athlete as Carsen. Who is? He is amazing."***

***"Of all the guys we had, Herman Gilliam was the one that sacrificed the most. He could have done a lot of things offensively that he didn't always get the chance to do."***

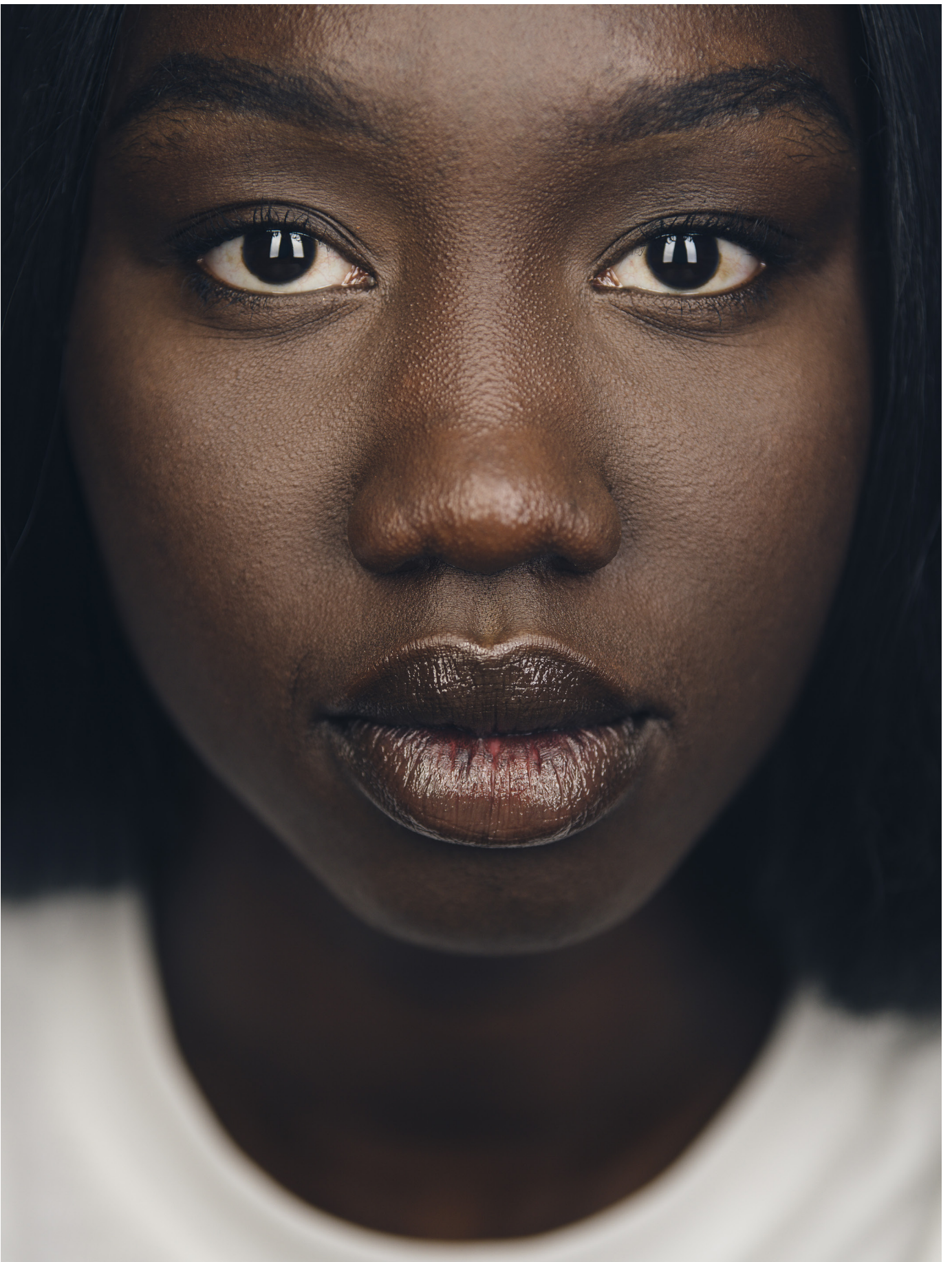
***"It was fun to play for (head coach) George King. It was fun to play with Rick and Herman. I can't say that guys didn't care who scored the points, because they did, but somehow George convinced us that filling our roles would help us win and win big. I credit George for that. We had a lot of fun. Man, we had a lot of fun."***

***"Mackey is louder now, more excitement, more media, more advertising. People were in awe when they saw Mackey back then, and they are now. That hasn't changed."***

***"How exciting it was for our team to be honored at Mackey last year. It felt the same, but everything was different, too. To be part of the first team to practice and play in the arena, to watch all the greats that have played there over the years, it leaves you with a feeling that is almost unexplainable."***

***"Just having the opportunity to be a Purdue Boilermaker, there is nothing better. We had fun as a team and as a player. There was nothing better."***













## DONOR SPOTLIGHT

THE TEAM BEHIND THE TEAMS

*By Molly McGuigan*

# Sparks of Passion



Glenn Sparks did not attend Purdue University. Nor did he grow up among Purdue fans.

However, in the decades since he joined the Purdue faculty, Sparks has become one of the most-enthusiastic members of the Boilermaker family. Sparks is a part of the 24 percent of John Purdue Club members who, although not Purdue graduates, nonetheless are drawn to Purdue Athletics. Some are parents or children of alumni. Others, like Sparks, are faculty or staff members.

A professor in the Brian Lamb School of Communication, Sparks first encountered this family while pursuing a doctoral degree at the University of Wisconsin. Sparks' classmate, John Greene, a 1976 Purdue graduate, would travel back to West Lafayette for every home football game. Although Sparks did not immediately understand his friend's passion, he never forgot it.

After graduation, the pair went their separate ways. Several years later, Greene reached out to let Sparks know

*Photos by Larissa Leck*



he had been offered his dream job teaching at his alma mater. Even better, there was a position opening up in the communications department for Sparks, as well.

“I was struck by his intense loyalty and in awe of the fandom that Purdue had produced in John,” Sparks says. So, in 1986, Sparks decided to leave his job at Cleveland State and has been a Boilermaker ever since.

From the moment he experienced Hello Walk, the walkway between the main entrance and University Hall in which pedestrians are encouraged to wave and say hello to passersby, Sparks knew he had made the right career choice. Students were friendly, colleagues were welcoming and the warmth was palpable. The amicable environment made it easy for Sparks to see what his colleague found so appealing.

Making it even easier, Cleveland State beat Indiana in 1986 in one of the greatest upsets in NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament history. That game sparked (literally) his interest in college athletics. As a result, Sparks already had been committed to cheering against legendary former Indiana coach Bobby Knight at all costs, making the transition to Purdue even more seamless.

Since joining the Boilermaker bandwagon over 30 years ago, Sparks rarely has missed a basketball or football game.

As both a faculty member and a fan, Sparks has a unique relationship with Boilermaker student-athletes. “I’m a cheerleader inside of the classroom and out,” Sparks says. He always makes sure all of his classes know when the next big game is being played.

He is especially impressed to see student-athletes work so diligently on their academics. “Watching someone I’ve seen work so hard in the classroom succeed on the field adds a whole new level of pride for me as a fan,” Sparks says.

At games, Sparks roots for two things: Winning plays and students he has taught performing well. “That’s my student!” is a phrase Sparks never tires of cheering, although, he is not sure his family has the same stamina when it comes to hearing him exclaim it.



Sparks has been fortunate to share that passion for athletics and academics with his own family. Two of his three children, Erin and David, now work alongside him, and since moving here his in-laws followed, making it four generations of Purdue fans now living in the area.

His third child, Jordan, does not work at Purdue, but still carries the pride of the Boilermakers with her. When she moved into a house in Indianapolis with a large IU logo painted on the basement floor, her father calmly assured her that he would pay to have the blemish removed.

The support of Sparks’ family has always been strong, and three years ago, those ties became even more intense.

In July of 2015, Sparks received a grim diagnosis. A glioblastoma, a particularly aggressive form of brain tumor, was discovered, and his doctors estimated he had 12 to 15 months to live. It was recommended Sparks spend what time he had left relaxing.

However, Sparks had no intention of following this advice. “I couldn’t just retire and go sit on a beach somewhere,” he says, “I had found my passion – teaching and interacting with Purdue students in the classroom.”

So Sparks saw little choice other than to push forward.

A month later, he underwent a risky surgical procedure to have the tumor removed. There was always a chance that he wouldn’t survive the surgery and, if he did, the high probability of glioblastoma returning would be an ongoing threat to long-term survival.

When he woke up from surgery, on his birthday no less, he found he had lost

significant movement on the left half of his body, including all use of his left arm.

But Sparks was grateful merely to be awake.

He immediately dedicated himself to his recovery with the hope of returning to the classroom and the stands. After tremendous effort, including both physical and speech therapies, he has been able to do both.

“I’ve done so well because of the support of my family and those around me,” Sparks says. “There were people I’ve never met, in churches I’ve never stepped foot in praying for me.”

Knowing this support fueled Sparks’ motivation to return to his passion and has made him even more grateful for the relationships he has built.

Sparks has cheered on the Boilermaker football and basketball teams through thick and thin. No matter how bleak a game or season may seem, he maintains hope for his team.

Throughout his time as a Purdue fan and supporter, Sparks has developed many relationships and gained worthwhile experiences because of being a John Purdue Club member. It’s because of this he has made it his mission to share his passion with others and become someone else’s “John Greene.”

“I never would have been a Boilermaker had it not been for a friend sharing his passion with me,” Sparks says. “I want to make sure others don’t miss out on having a similar experience.”

Time is precious to Sparks, and he is glad the Purdue experience has made his life in the classroom and in the stands complete. ✖



# Honoring the Greats

## NEW DISPLAY GRACES HALLS OF MACKEY

Thanks to the generosity of Drew Brees, Purdue Athletics now proudly displays an authentic John Wooden basketball jersey at Mackey Arena. Complementing the jersey is a Wooden letter sweater, donated by his family in 2010, and the two marquee pieces are flanked by jerseys and trophies of Purdue's two other basketball National Players of the Year – Glenn Robinson (1994) and Stephanie White (1999).





# The Archives



## **John Wooden Basketball Jersey**

With the help of memorabilia guru Orlando Itin, Drew Brees purchased the jersey in an auction last May for \$264,000 and subsequently loaned it to his alma mater. “This jersey clearly belongs at Purdue, and I am excited we have it for fans to see,” Brees said. A standout player with the Boilermakers from 1930 to 1932, Wooden was a three-time All-American and the 1932 National Player of the Year.

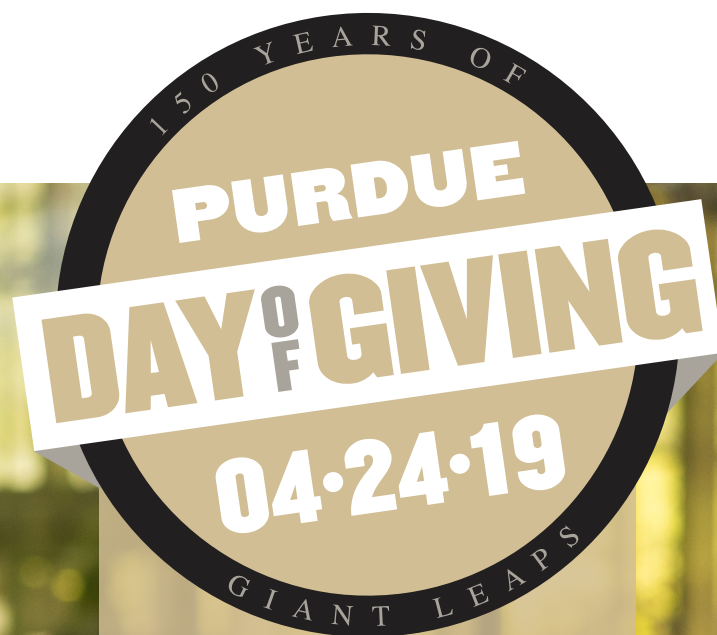






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