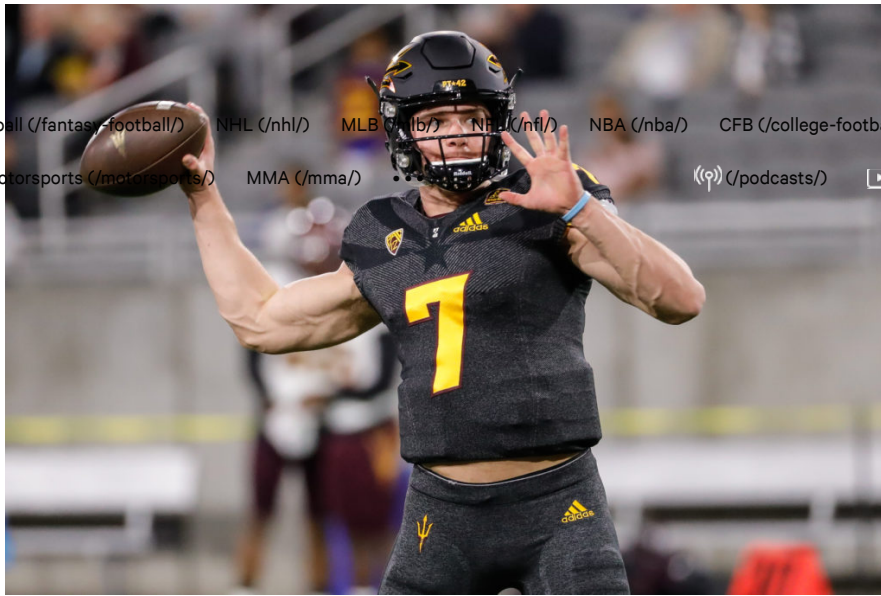


# The story behind Arizona State's first Captain America (and a Colorado family's second)



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By Doug Haller (/author/doug-haller/) Aug 19, 2019

12

One day this summer, as the Arizona State football team gathered to start conditioning drills in the Verde Dickey Dome, senior linebacker Khaylan Kears-Thomas did a standing backflip. It's something he likes to do. Sophomore safety Aashari Crosswell can do one. Freshman linebacker Case Hatch can as well.

Up walked Ethan Long. Thomas was well aware of the freshman quarterback. Even before Long had joined the Sun Devils during spring practice, he had watched his highlight tape. Initial impression: The 6-foot-2, 225-pound quarterback ran with the ball like a running back.

But watching Long do a backflip that day — that was stunning. “Yo! It’s Captain America!” shouted Kears-Thomas, using Long’s nickname. “Yo! What *can’t* you do?”

Since arriving on campus in January, Long has established himself as one of ASU’s better athletes. Although he remains listed as a quarterback, Long lines up at slot receiver in practice. At times, he motions back to the quarterback

position and takes a shotgun snap. In addition, Long participates on nearly every special-teams unit.

Perhaps more impressive, the 19-year-old has become a lead-by-example presence in the locker room. In February, Long represented the football team at a university Black History Month event. In conversations with support staffers, he has volunteered to help iron out potential problems with his freshman teammates.

This has not gone unnoticed. In July, ASU shot a promotional video featuring the football team. Of the 10 players involved, Long was the only freshman. In addition, Long already has secured a spot on coach Herm Edwards' leadership council and it would not surprise if he were named a team captain, rare territory for someone his age.

All of which begs a simple question, the same one you find in all superhero stories: Where did this guy come from?



Not long ago, Bryon Long received a text from Ethan.

“Hey, Dad. The guys have a nickname for me.”

“Oh, yeah,” Bryon Long responded. “What is it?”

“Take a wild guess.”

“Captain America.”

"Probably Captain America."

"Yep."

To the Long family, this is funny. Why? Because their oldest son, Seth, also plays football. He is a redshirt-sophomore at Northern Arizona University. A defensive lineman. And within the NAU program, Seth Long also is known as Captain America.

"Isn't that hilarious?" Bryon Long said.

Ethan Long got the nickname from Edwards. Seth Long got it from teammates.

"To be honest, and this is going to sound bad, but I got it the first time I took my shirt off," Seth Long said. "Usually in the weight room, I'm a pretty strong guy so out of everyone I was lifting the most. They were like, 'Hey, Captain America.'"

Although Ethan Long played high school football in Oregon, starring at West Linn High, he actually grew up on a farm in Colorado. Not long after they were married, Bryon and Suzanne Long moved into a farmhouse on 120 acres in Dolores, Colo., a small town in the Four Corners Area, the point at which Colorado, Arizona, Utah and New Mexico meet.

Bryon and Suzanne Long both were athletes. Bryon had football scholarship offers but chose a different path. Suzanne — who grew up in Scottsdale and attended Arcadia High — played volleyball at the University of San Diego. Together, they had three children, Seth, Ethan and Makayla, and encouraged them to give their best in whatever they tried. All three chose sports.

Bryon coached Seth in baseball and basketball, and added Ethan to the team, even though he was 19 months younger. The crazy thing: No one could tell. Ethan was just as good, if not better, than a lot of those he competed against. Through middle school, Ethan excelled in nearly every sport he tried — as an eighth-grader he won a state championship in wrestling — mostly because he had a physical advantage.

All the Long children were disciplined with their farm chores, but they also had help in other areas. From the time they were 6, Bryon had his children working on their bodies. Nothing crazy. Just push-ups, sit-ups and chin-ups to start. When they got stronger, they moved on to weights, working out in the garage. The Longs had dumbbells from 15 to 85 pounds. They had a bench and leg-press machine. As the years passed, Bryon Long added a Smith Machine for squatting and a stair stepper for cardio.

The brothers worked out to '80s music — to Journey, Styx, Def Leppard

The brothers worked out to 80s music — to Journey, Styx, Don McLean, Foreigner and Bryan Adams. Full-body work one day, running the next. Abs every day. At times, the brothers would take it outside, slap a 45-pound weight on a sled and pull it 100 yards up a hill. Not even Colorado's winter chill could stop them. The Longs had a space heater to warm the garage.

"I remember (my dad) got a new one and we were all excited but the igniter wouldn't work all the time," Seth Long said. "The propane would build up and when we'd go to ignite, it'd blow flames everywhere and burn all the hair off our arms. It'd smell like smoke in there for a day."

This wasn't just fitness, it was a lifestyle. Since the Longs were a hunting family, nearly everything they ate was all natural. Their weekly meal rotation included spaghetti, stew and tacos, all cooked with deer or elk meat. And soda? As a teenager, Seth had read that former Heisman Trophy winner Tim Tebow avoided it, so he decided to ditch it as well. Ethan followed suit.

"We started a bet back in sixth grade," Ethan said. "I was 12 and he was 14. I haven't had one since, and he hasn't either."

On July 28, 2018, the Long boys and their dad were riding all-terrain vehicles in the mountains. At one point, Bryon asked his sons if they could jump into the back of his Chevrolet pick-up — not into the bed with the back down but over the side, a length of 54 inches. Ethan, who first dunked a basketball as an eighth-grader, wasn't dressed for such a jump. He wore hiking boots. And yet:

"He was doing a little dance," said Bryon Long, who works for the federal government. "Maybe Jethro or Uncle Jed, he was kind of doing a little dance, talking like a hillbilly, having fun. Then he kind of just trotted over and went — hop — up into the back of the truck. Of course, then him and Seth had to start competing with it."







Throughout his life, Ethan Long has connected with people. Suzanne Long remembers taking her son to the playground and he'd be like a magnet. "All of a sudden, he'd have two or three little kids right next to him, hanging out," she said.

During one winter, Ethan shot hoops at a recreation center in nearby Cortez. When Bryon and Suzanne went to pick him up, they realized nearly everybody in the place seemed to know their son — from the boys playing basketball to the 70-year old shouting down from the second level: “Hey, Ethan! How ya doing?”

“People are just kind of attracted to Ethan,” said Makayla Long, the younger sister and a junior at Gilbert Perry High, where she will compete in volleyball and track. “He’s always comfortable in his own skin. He’s always himself. He isn’t afraid of whether people like him or not — he’s just going to be him.”

After his eighth-grade year, the Longs moved to West Linn, a suburb of Portland, to try to find their children better athletic exposure. In a way, Ethan had to start over, making new friends. It hardly fazed him. The first week, Suzanne drove to school to drop off something and Ethan introduced her to his new friends. *“Mom, this is J.J. from baseball and this is ...”*

“It had been like three days,” said Suzanne, a teacher.

Both Bryon and Suzanne say Ethan’s faith contributes to this. They raised their children in the church, and after each Sunday service, the Longs would talk with nearly everyone, young and old. And then, Ethan genuinely cares for people, his father said. He’s interested in not just saying hello, but getting to know them. That foundation helped Ethan adapt in Oregon. And it’s helped him in Tempe.

In some ways, it’s hard to recall a freshman who has made such an immediate impact on the program. Some of that’s because of Long’s work ethic. And some of it’s because of his attitude. After all, he came to ASU to play quarterback, but when it became clear he wouldn’t win the job, he expressed a willingness to help in other areas.

“He was just so open — open to play anything,” junior cornerback Chase Lucas said. “He was open to playing linebacker at one point. Open to playing (safety). As a person that was the first QB to be committed in this class, and now he’s playing a different position, that’s remarkable. You can tell how unselfish he really is. I respect him a lot.”

Edwards isn’t surprised. He knew exactly what he was getting.

“He’s a special young man, and he just wants to play football,” said the coach, adding that Long will be on the field one way or another. “Some people say, ‘Well, that’s Coach’s guy.’ Well, all these guys are my guys. His name just

happens to be Captain America.”

*(Top photo: Kevin Abele / Icon Sportswire via Getty Images)*



**Doug Haller (/author/doug-haller/)** covers Arizona State football and basketball for The Athletic Arizona. He previously worked 13 years at The Arizona Republic, where he covered three Final Fours and four football national championship games. He twice has been named Arizona Sports Writer of the Year. Follow Doug on Twitter **@DougHaller** (<https://twitter.com/DougHaller>).

12 COMMENTS

**C.J. Holmes**

STAFF

Aug 20, 9:47am 11 likes

Loved this!

**Chris L.** Aug 20, 2:56pm 11 likes

Chris L.

Great insight into a young man and his family who may have a lot to say about what direction the football program goes the next several years. As a fan an alum, Ethan is the kind of player that strengthen the case that Herm, AP and Luginbill are doing a good job in talent evaluation. Herm's first two classes appear to be better talent wise than their class rank. Also appears that Tony White may be a pretty good stealthy recruiter that has really not be talked about. Really looking forward to the season.

**Richard C.** Aug 20, 5:55pm 8 likes

You don't find guys like Ethan Long every day. Glad he is a Sun Devil.

**Mike K.** Aug 20, 7:07pm 1 like

Great story!

**Tom G.** Aug 20, 8:58pm 2 likes

Mike Lombardi always talks about the importance of culture building to breed success. It seems several assistant coaches said things like they came here to help Herm, they wanted to be a part of this staff, etc. Also, the selfless quotes from Long & Yellen recently show maturity beyond their years and the high-character guys the staff is recruiting. I'm very excited about the culture surrounding the program. If you have a strong foundation of leaders it allows Herm to feel more comfortable taking chances on the Jack Jones of the world. 8/29 can't come soon enough!

**Stephen B.** Aug 20, 10:52pm 4 likes

A lot has been written about this unique freshman, but this excellent piece provides the back story of how Ethan became the person he is.

**Doug Haller**

STAFF

Aug 21, 12:06am 1 like

@Stephen B. Appreciate this. Thanks for reading.

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**Ross F.** Aug 21, 12:27am

Great article Doug, i'm curious what his ultimate role will be on the team

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**David S.** Aug 21, 6:05pm 2 likes

Swiss Army knife.

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**Aaron H.** Aug 21, 5:14am 2 likes

Doug 'MF' Haller. Great insight, as always.



**Doug Haller** STAFF Aug 22, 12:57am 1 like

@Aaron H. LOL -- thanks Aaron

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**Jordan E.** Aug 23, 5:52am

As a father of 2 boys I need a lesson from his parents. Wow, cool story

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