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Walking the walk: The driving force in Kyle Williams' life



By Doug Haller (/author/doug-haller/) Aug 8, 2019

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CAMP TONTOZONA — Perfectionist? No, that's too strong. Kyle Williams isn't a perfectionist. It's more like this, the Arizona State senior receiver said: "I feel like everything I do I have to do it right. I can't sleep at night if I don't correct a homework problem. Or if I had a bad day on the field and if I don't get those catches again, I won't feel right for the rest of the day just because the balance is off."

Williams told me this last year, sitting in the ASU media room. We spent an hour discussing his football and academic success. The demands of Barrett Honors College and his pursuit of a career in sports medicine.

At one point I asked about his insecurities — everyone has them — and that's where this story turned.

"I'm a big guy in faith," said Williams, then 19. "I've been trying to grow my faith with Christianity, reading the Bible a lot more. Honestly, when you read the Word like that you kind of just let go a lot of things that used to bother you."

Religion is personal. It means something different to those who practice it. But as Williams approaches his final season, you can't write about him without writing about his faith and how it's shaped him as a person and competitor. Doing so would not provide a complete portrait. He knows this. His coaches know this. His teammates know this.

After Thursday's practice, I stopped senior right tackle Steven Miller and asked him what he admires about Williams. "His work ethic and his faith in God," he said.

At ASU media day last month, I asked freshman quarterback Ethan Long a similar question. "I think that his life being Christ-centered is what makes him so comfortable in his skin. He won't apologize to anybody for that. He is what he stands for. He's an amazing dude."

Williams knows how some people view Christians. As the guy on the street corner, yelling through a bullhorn: "Repent or go to hell." He's not that guy. Nor is he the dude pulling aside a teammate, saying, "*This is bad, my brother. We shouldn't be doing this.*" What Williams does is simple: He makes himself available, he attends team Bible study (some ASU players met just Wednesday night), he leads by example.

"Kyle tries to walk the walk and talk the talk," position coach Charlie Fisher said.

Living this way at any age requires discipline, but even more so for someone at this stage of life. College, after all, is the smorgasbord of temptation. During the first of two conversations, I asked Williams about his bad habits. "Probably music, honestly," he said. "Or saying bad words, which are things I'm trying to work on."

Williams believes what goes into a man comes out of a man. He believes the habits created at a young age can cause problems later in life. For example, a young man cheating on a girlfriend in college could have the same issue in marriage. "I'm not saying guys should stop doing it; I'm just saying think about it for a second," Williams said.

Then there's music. At one point, this was especially hard for Williams. A lot of today's music contains profanity and questionable lyrics. It's not very Christian. At the same time: "I love the beats," Williams said. "It bangs. It's tight. It's hard to maybe not indulge in that stuff. It's really hard."

I asked what he does when it plays in the locker room: "I dance!" Williams said. "Literally, it's like being exposed to like a toxin or something."

Avoiding profanity is just as difficult, especially in sports. Drop a pass. Miss a block. Sprain an ankle. Four-letter words can be attached to each. It's part of the jockstrap lingo. Just not with Williams. His go-to words in times of frustration:

Freak!

Frick!

Crap!

"The usuals," he said.

I asked cornerbacks Chase Lucas and Kobe Williams — who work against Williams in practice — about this. Have they ever heard Williams curse?

Lucas: Not at all.

Kobe Williams: We talk mess with him at practice here and there, but he just walks straight back to the huddle.

Lucas: He's always calm and composed.

It's not easy.

"Locker-room talk, you know how it goes," said Kyle Williams, admitting he sometimes slips. "We're just kids, man. We're young dudes, and it's hard to control your tongue, but it's something I want to do."

(For the record, ASU coach Herm Edwards also tries to avoid profanity. Growing up, it was never part of his household, Edwards said. He heard it in the neighborhood, of course, but tried to keep it from his vocabulary. "And then, meeting Tony Dungy when I did," Edwards said. "Just being around him, playing in the league and then obviously coaching with the guy, that changed my whole perspective. Then it was, 'Can you coach like that?'"

Williams, now 20, has a lot going for him. In addition to being an honors student, he has shadowed Dr. Anikar Chhabra, a national expert in orthopedic surgery and sports medicine. On the football field, the 5-foot-11 receiver has 110 career catches, which gives him a solid chance of reaching the top 10 in school history before he's finished.

All this goes back to who he is. Not a perfectionist, but a young man trying to be his best in everything he does — academically, athletically and spiritually.

"Pretty much just trying to live a pure life," Williams said. "That's the goal of being a young Christian man."

(Photo: Christian Petersen / Getty Images)

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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>).

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Nate V. Aug 9, 2:53am 5 likes

@doug Haller one of the best stories I've read on here. Great job!!!



Doug Haller STAFF Aug 11, 8:41pm

@Nate V. Thanks, Nate!

James F. Aug 9, 3:58am 2 likes

Hope Kyle gets the touches he deserves unlike last year in which he was terribly underutilized. His sophomore year he proved to be an invaluable asset on offense. Thanks Doug!

GO DEVILS!!!

Juanita S. Aug 9, 3:57pm 3 likes

All these players have their own unique stories. I enjoy getting to know more about them & admire how much they balance in their day to day lives to compete at this level.



Doug Haller STAFF Aug 11, 8:41pm

@Juanita S. Nice seeing you, Juanita

Stephen B. Aug 10, 10:53pm 2 likes

Love these kind of personal stories you write so well, Doug.



Doug Haller STAFF Aug 11, 8:42pm

@Stephen B. Thanks, Stephen. But all credit to Kyle for opening up when we talked.

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