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Holidays

PressBox takes an inside look at the home of

RAVENS STAR SAFETY ERIC WEDDLE,

where life revolves around family, faith and football

FROM
**THE
WEDDLE
FAMILY**

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BY BO SMOLKA

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PHOTO OF THE MONTH



SABINA MORAN/PRESSBOX

'HEY, YOU LOOK FAMILIAR'

RAVENS LINEBACKER TERRELL SUGGS SHARES A MOMENT WITH INJURED DETROIT LIONS DEFENSIVE TACKLE HALOTI NGATA AFTER THE RAVENS' 44-20 WIN AGAINST THE LIONS DEC. 3 AT M&T BANK STADIUM. SUGGS AND NGATA, WHO WERE TEAMMATES ON THE RAVENS FROM 2006-2014, WENT TO THREE PRO BOWLS TOGETHER AND WON A SUPER BOWL TOGETHER IN FEBRUARY 2013.

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ONE FAN'S OPINION

Giancarlo Stanton, Shohei Ohtani Deals Warm Up Baseball's Big Offseason

★ **STAN "THE FAN" CHARLES**



Normally, baseball's off-season hot stove really gets heated up at the Winter Meetings. But that was not how it played out this year.

Just before the 2017 Winter Meetings were set to begin in Orlando, Fla., the rug was pulled out from under them when the two stories dominating the offseason both came to their conclusions Dec. 8 and Dec. 9.

In the days leading up to the winter meetings, slugger Giancarlo Stanton's huge contract was still on the Miami Marlins' books -- all \$295 million of it. New owner and front man for the team Derek Jeter had talked of wanting to knock its payroll down from the \$130 million range to a much more market-manageable figure of around \$80 million.

In the early part of the week, both the San Francisco Giants and St. Louis Cardinals were granted an audience with Stanton's representatives to plead their case to have Stanton waive his full no-trade protection. Both teams had basically agreed upon the players they would send to South Florida and the amount of money they would pick up of the \$295 million.

That charade was allowed to go on only for a couple days, and then in rapid-fire succession the Marlins saved \$13 million a year for the next three years by trading second baseman Dee Gordon to the Seattle Mariners, and then Stanton said he was not going to San Francisco or St. Louis and would only accept trades to four teams: the Houston Astros, Chicago

Cubs, New York Yankees and the team he really wanted to play for, the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Within hours, Yankees general manager Brian Cashman entered with both feet in the Giancarlo Stanton Sweepstakes. None of the other three teams made so much as a move toward serious engagement with the Marlins, and by the morning of Dec. 9, Stanton was added to the first lineup card Aaron Boone will sign in late March 2018.

On the face of it, the Yankees have probably ushered in a seven-to-10-year period in which they'll have a great chance to get back to the head of the class. With a nod to former Boston Red Sox president Larry Lucchino, the Evil Empire is back.

A couple observations on this move. First, this is what happens when under-financed ownerships are allowed into the game. And make no mistake about it, the Marlins ownership -- still searching for another \$250 million in investment -- are undercapitalized. Jeter did accomplish his goal in two rapid-fire moves of getting his payroll adjusted by knocking roughly \$42 million-\$44 million off the books. He may not stop there, as teams are going to be attempting to trade for outfielders Christian Yelich and Marcell Ozuna. Don Mattingly may still be the skipper of the Marlins, but his job description sure did change in a hurry under Jeter.

The return to the Marlins beyond second baseman Starlin Castro was unclear, but there's a reason why this deal was able to come together so quickly. One of the key poaches from the Yankees organization by Jeter was their longtime director of player development Gary Denbo, who is now the Marlins' vice president of player develop-

ment and scouting.

While none of the Yankees' top prospects were included in this trade, Denbo was probably able to cherry-pick three-four nuggets, who in time may make this deal much more palatable from the Marlins' side.

The other big story ended Dec. 8, when young Japanese pitcher Shohei Ohtani signed with the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim, who will send the maximum \$20 million posting fee to the Pacific League's Nippon-Ham Fighters.

Angels general manager Billy Eppler was with the Yankees as an assistant to Cashman until 2015. And now, before his third season as the Angels' general manager, Eppler has landed one of the most highly coveted prospects. Previously, Eppler was part of the Yankees' pursuit of Japanese superstar right-hander Masahiro Tanaka.

Ohtani had narrowed his choices to seven teams -- the Giants, Dodgers, San Diego Padres and Cubs of the National League and the Angels, Mariners and Texas Rangers in the American League.

It was a wild situation MLB hadn't seen before. Because of his age, the 23-year old Ohtani is limited to signing a minor league contract, so the money didn't scare any of the teams away. Ohtani is reported to be a two-way star -- a phenomenal pitcher who can throw at 100 mph and a left-handed hitter who all the scouts drool over for his power.

There are some general managers and scouts who claim he can do both, be a starting pitcher and an almost everyday player. Then again, there are others who point out that it sounds too good to be true and any attempt by Ohtani to pitch and bat may limit his ability to excel at either.

Well now it'll be up to Eppler and long-time skipper Mike Scioscia to figure how to put Ohtani's unique skill set to work.

Clearly, the AL's designated hitter rule had a great deal to do with him choosing an AL team. And just as clearly was the fact that Ohtani wanted to play in a market as close as possible to home and one in which there would be a

Japanese-speaking population. •

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RAVENS COVERAGE



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Paul Janish

KENYA ALLEN/PRESSBOX

Former Oriole Paul Janish Heads Back To School

Paul Janish has always had to make adjustments. That's the life of a fringe major league player.

The 35-year-old Janish, who spent several weeks with the Baltimore Orioles in 2017 filling in for injured shortstops J.J. Hardy and Ryan Flaherty, played 473 major league games with the Cincinnati Reds, Atlanta Braves and Orioles, but during this past season he knew it was time to start thinking about life after his playing days.

Janish wanted to remain in baseball, but he wasn't sure if he'd stay with the Orioles' organization or go back to college. When a job as an assistant baseball coach opened up at his alma mater, Rice University, he knew the timing was right.

"I wasn't going to get called up again in September," Janish said. "It would have been difficult for me to pass up going to the big leagues in September."

So while playing for Triple-A Norfolk in August, Janish announced he'd be leaving to take the coaching job.

Less than two months after his final major league at-bat, Janish returned to a college campus. Now, Janish, who played on Rice's NCAA championship team in 2003, is busier than ever.

In addition to his job as an assistant coach, Janish is taking three of the five classes he needs to fulfill the requirements for an economics degree. He is also a husband and a father to three small children.

After leaving the Orioles' organization, Janish returned to his suburban Houston home where he and his family are living in a rented house just a few blocks from the Rice campus.

"It's been an adjustment getting back into study mode," Janish said.

Janish's classmates are often about 15 years younger than he is, but he's found it isn't hard to fit in, especially after trading in his large truck for a bicycle. He rides a bike, like many students do, to navigate the campus but also to commute home.

While a classroom obviously is a different environment than a major league baseball stadium with thousands of screaming fans, Janish is enjoying his new life.

"The classroom thing, it's not as foreign as you may think," he said. "That part of it, I actually find to be almost interesting, almost you could argue therapeutic a little bit. I kind of enjoy it, and it's interesting material."

Taking tests again has been somewhat nerve-racking, however.

"I've never, by nature, been ... nervous," he said. "Even playing, I was always pretty even-keel. It's probably a good quality, right? ... I hadn't taken a test in a long time. ... You're reading through the test and you find that you have 50 minutes to take it, and all of a sudden, my hands are sweating, and I'm nervous."

Janish is much more relaxed on the field, where he's one of two coaches assisting Owls head coach Wayne Graham.

Graham, 81, has been coaching at Rice for 27 years. More than a half-century ago, Graham had a brief major league career, playing for legendary manager Casey Stengel's 1964 New York Mets.

When Graham heard Janish was eager to get into coaching, the head coach thought Janish would bring a level-headedness to his program.

"You've had success, but you haven't had enough

that it's spoiled you in any way," Graham said of Janish. "You've had to fight your whole life, so you relate to all of the players. [It's] not only the stars that you can relate to, you can relate to the guys that are struggling. I think it makes for, potentially a much better coach."

As the hometown Houston Astros won the World Series, Rice's players found it hard to believe Janish had been a teammate of their heroes.

"To me, it's not that big a deal because that's just the way it is," Janish said. "But to these guys, it's, 'How do you know [Houston catcher Brian] McCann?'"

As far as what the future holds, Janish isn't thinking too far ahead.

"I'm still, relatively speaking, fresh off of playing and still very much in touch with a lot of the people I played with," Janish said. "I made a lot of close friends in the Orioles' organization."

"What happens after Coach [Graham leaves]? Who knows? There's no way to know that. By no means am I writing off at some point going back to [the major leagues]. I hope that I would have that opportunity based on some of those relationships."

-- RICH DUBROFF

Ravens And Orioles Boost Helping Up Mission

At this year's 16th annual Ravens Coat Giveaway for the Helping Up Mission on the Monday before Thanksgiving, Ravens long snapper Morgan Cox watched a man struggle with a coat that didn't fit him. He went over to the coat table and helped the man find a bigger size.

"Morgan gets great joy out of helping the men find coats that fit them," said Kris Sharrar, Helping Up Mission's director of philanthropy. "Imagine how that guy feels, and you understand the impact an athlete can have on someone's life."

Sharrar also mentioned Ravens quarterback Joe Flacco, who had been ill and had played a game in Green Bay the night before, also showed up after the flight was delayed for more than four hours.

"He still wasn't feeling well on Monday morning," Sharrar said, "but he mustered and showed up."

The Helping Up Mission website states that its mission is to "provide hope to people experiencing homelessness, poverty or addiction by meeting their physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs." Since 1997, the organization has graduated 1,500 men back into society. One in six will stay for the full five-month term.

Helping Up Mission's approach to treatment is holistic in nature, integrating the practical needs of its clients -- food, clothing and shelter -- with their clinical, mental health, medical, educational and vocational needs.

"We're trying to address the underlying issue of homelessness: addiction," Sharrar said. "We try and treat the whole person. We all have gifts, and we want to help those men rediscover their gifts -- softball, running, poetry."

The Ravens' involvement with the Helping Up Mission began in 2001 with the coat giveaway. In 2006, former Ravens linebacker Bart Scott reached out before Thanksgiving to arrange a meal.

"He wanted to do something special but not on Turkey Day," Sharrar said. "He wanted it to be a home-cooked southern meal."

Former Ravens safety Ed Reed was in attendance for the first event, and former running back Ray Rice started coming in 2008. The Bart and Friends Dinner just celebrated its 11th anniversary, with Scott attending in person or via Skype throughout the years. In addition to Scott

COURTESY OF HELPING UP MISSION



The Bart and Friends Dinner at Helping Up Mission

and his wife, Valerie, Matt Judon, Marshal Yanda and O.J. and Chandra Brigance also attended this year's dinner.

"The Ravens really flood the community," Sharrar said. "[Head coach] John [Harbaugh] plays a key role. ... [defensive coordinator Dean] Pees as well. There is also security officer Craig Singletary. When they clean out their lockers at the end of the season, the players leave equipment behind for us. We really feel valued."

The Orioles are also supportive of the Helping Up Mission. Former Orioles manager Dave Trembley and former bench coach Dave Jauss started coming in 2009. Former and current Orioles who have been involved include: Matt Wieters and his wife, Maria; Brian Roberts and his wife, Diana; and Chris Davis and his wife, Jill.

The relationship between the men at the shelter and the players is special. Those at the shelter will sign banners and then present them to the players.

"One year, we had 300 men wanting to get player autographs," Sharrar said. "So we turned that around. Now the men sign banners and the players love it. Matt Wieters was blown away. He told me, 'Those are the most special autographs.'"

Helping Up Mission has come to rely on players from the Ravens and Orioles because sometimes they can make all the difference.

"These guys are facing struggles," Sharrar said. "They are lower than low at times. Sports provide an escape. That one word of encouragement, the shaking of hands. That's money."

-- DEAN SMITH

Eddie Murray, Cal Ripken Jr. Help Christen Eddie Murray Youth Baseball Field In West Baltimore

There they were side by side again -- former Orioles greats and Hall of Famers Eddie Murray and Cal Ripken Jr.

Murray and Ripken, who were teammates from 1981-1988 and again in 1996, continue to be linked in their post-playing careers, as the pair was on hand Nov. 15 for the dedication and ribbon-cutting ceremony for the James Mosher Baseball league's newly renamed Eddie Murray Field at BGE Park, adjacent to James Mosher Elementary School in West Baltimore.

A gathering of more than 200 people -- including local politicians, baseball dignitaries, business representatives and members of the James Mosher Baseball league -- were in attendance for the unveiling of the first youth baseball field named in Murray's honor.

"You start to think about this city getting back together and baseball is a wonderful way to do it," Murray said as he prepared to cut the ribbon for the field dedication. "Here's to getting our kids in the city of Baltimore back to dreaming again."

Murray, pointing toward a newly placed red-brick monument along the third-base line adorned with bronze plaques honoring him, Cal Ripken Sr. and the founding members of the James Mosher Baseball league, added: "I'm honored to have my photo next to Cal Sr.'s over there."

-- CHARLIE VASCCELLARO

Calvin Butler, CEO of Baltimore Gas and Electric, was among those who spoke and participated in the ribbon-cutting ceremony and was instrumental in creating the partnership among all of the entities involved.

"We want to leave a legacy here in the city in West Baltimore," Butler said, "and then to name it in honor of Eddie Murray, an African-American Hall of Famer who played in Baltimore, and to have the kids who come play here every day understand what that means and that they can dream big."

"... Cal Ripken Jr. and I sat down and talked about why Eddie was a natural for us, because he can connect with these African-American boys and girls, and it gives them a chance to connect back to history as they become our future."

The creation of the Ripken Foundation's 74th field was the culmination of two years' worth of planning to refurbish the main diamond and home field for James Mosher Baseball, which is believed to be the oldest continually operating African-American youth baseball league in the country.

"Not only did I think it couldn't happen in two years' time, I couldn't believe they got it fixed as fast as they did in three-months time," said James Mosher Baseball president William Neal, "because we finished our season in July. The construction crew arrived on Aug. 1, and you see what we got here today. It's an amazing transformation within a 90-day period, and, yes, I was surprised, but I am happy."

A joint effort of the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation and its primary sponsor, BGE, the inspiration for the new synthetic turf baseball diamond, with enclosed covered dugouts and large digital scoreboard, came in the in the aftermath of the civil unrest in the city in the days following the death of 25-year-old African-American and West Baltimore resident Freddie Gray, who died in police custody.

"After the rioting, we knew we had to do something," said Steve Salem, president of the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation. "It's not a solution, but as you can see, it's a start."

Said Ripken: "The communities love the ballparks and protect them and make then a safe place to play."

The James Mosher Baseball league got its start in 1960 when a group of men, known as the James Mosher Associates, created the youth baseball league "to address the social and personal problems facing youth in the city of Baltimore."

Founding member Al Meacham Sr. has witnessed the league's evolution.

"We never imagined a day like this," Meacham said. "We felt if we got it started and we kept on nurturing, there was a possibility that it would continue, and with our ups and downs and all of that it wasn't an easy job, but we survived. Having this field in place guarantees that this will continue."



Cal Ripken Jr., Eddie Murray and Ripken Foundation board chairman Mark Butler with members of the James Mosher Baseball league at the Eddie Murray Field ribbon-cutting ceremony

CHARLIE VASCCELLARO/PRESSBOX

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HCC's APG Federal Credit Union Arena Provides Opportunity For The School And Community

★ **BILL ORDINE**



At first glance, it might appear overly ambitious for a county community college to build an arena and renovate a nearby facility to the tune of tens of millions

of dollars when the sports teams that will play there are limited to two basketball teams and a volleyball squad. However, as it turns out, the decision to construct Harford Community College's APG Federal Credit Union Arena simply made good sense.

The arena -- home to the Fighting Owls men's and women's basketball teams and women's volleyball team -- opened its doors late in the fall of 2012. Since then, more than 300 events have been held there, from concerts and theatrical circuses to business meetings and consumer-product expos to high school graduations.

"The arena has opened up a lot of great opportunities, not only for the college, but for the community -- and that was its intention," Stacy Rutherford, general manager of the arena for the past two years, said.

The arena seats 2,500 people for basketball games, but more people can be accommodated for events in which visitors can be on the main floor, such as a home improvement expo. Maximum capacity is 3,000.

The arena, located on the college's campus in Bel Air, Md., had its genesis about a decade ago when school officials considered renovating an existing building at the school, the Susquehanna Center on Thomas Run Road. The Susquehanna Center, which has been around since 1968, is now largely devoted to fitness and physical education.

"The folks around the table at the time were discussing renovations to the Susquehanna Building," Rutherford said. "And around that table came the thought, 'Well, what if during this renovation process we not only improve the existing building, but build an arena that would not only be a resource to the college but to the community as well?'"

While the process had its conceptual start in 2007, the going was slow at times. Eventually, the project was supported by Harford County government and approved by the state. The price tag was \$26.7 million with the state putting up 57

percent of the money, the county providing 36 percent and Harford Community College contributing 7 percent.

Groundbreaking took place in August 2011, and the 19,000-square-foot arena opened its doors Nov. 15, 2012 with a basketball doubleheader featuring the Harford men's and women's teams -- each posted wins against Delaware County (Pa.) Community College.

About six weeks later, the arena enjoyed its first sellout, a performance by the always-popular Harlem Globetrotters.

Since then, the arena's menu of events have featured an eclectic mix of entertainment, such as county-western artist Trace Adkins, comedian Billy Gardell and the dog whisperer, Cesar Millan. An event that seems to always generate excitement is WWE NXT pro wrestling, which the arena hopes to have about twice a year.

Apart from Harford's own sports teams, athletic events at the arena have included gymnastics, martial arts and cheer competitions. Plus, this year eight public high school graduations will be held at the arena.

The arena also fulfills a community service role, exemplified by an upcoming event that will be a gathering to help provide the homeless with resources to improve their lives.

A significant part of Rutherford's job

is to fill dates on the arena's calendar.

In fiscal year 2016 (June 2015-July 2016), the arena had 44 event days apart from the college's own activities. The following fiscal year, that number increased to 56 events outside of college activities, a 27 percent jump.

In addition to the college's own basketball and volleyball games, there are six weeks of summer camps organized by the college's athletic department.

Still, it's Rutherford's goal to increase those outside events by a similar 20-plus percent.

The nearby Susquehanna Center has helped add flexibility to the arena. For instance, some outside athletic events may require warm-up areas or perhaps a staging area for trophy presentations. The Susquehanna Center provides that ancillary space. And when an arena event forces a college sports practice to be moved, the additional gym space in the Susquehanna Center allows for an easy relocation.

The money that the college received from the state and county to build the arena does not have to be repaid, and Rutherford said it was a great financial boost to have APG Federal Credit Union sign on as the building's naming sponsor. That deal is worth \$800,000 over 15 years, adding more than \$50,000 to the

arena's bottom line.

Still, the arena is a costly operation that is currently subsidized by the college, with Rutherford hoping to make the building financially self-sustaining in the next five years.

"In that case, if there were a profit in the future, I would look to carry forward those funds toward investment in facility improvements," she said.

In the meantime, there's plenty of work to be done as the variety of events the arena hosts require frequent reconfigurations.

"The arena is constantly re-inventing itself," Rutherford said.

Some events are national touring shows that the arena books, such as the winter-themed theatrical circus show Snowkus Pocus that was scheduled for Dec. 15. In other cases, the arena is rented to outside event planners who require the space for their own shows, expos or competitions.

Those types of groups, such as the ones that put on cheerleading or martial arts competitions, bring their own community of followers into the building. But when the arena hires the talent, the responsibility of selling tickets falls on arena staff.

"We really have to do a top-notch job of outreach to make sure people are aware of the shows that do take place in the arena," Rutherford said. "... Hopefully, we bring in the artists and the talent that encourages people to spread the word and tell their friends about the tickets they just purchased.

"That part of the job requires a consistent focus on marketing and promoting the arena to make sure people are aware of all they can do on the college campus." •

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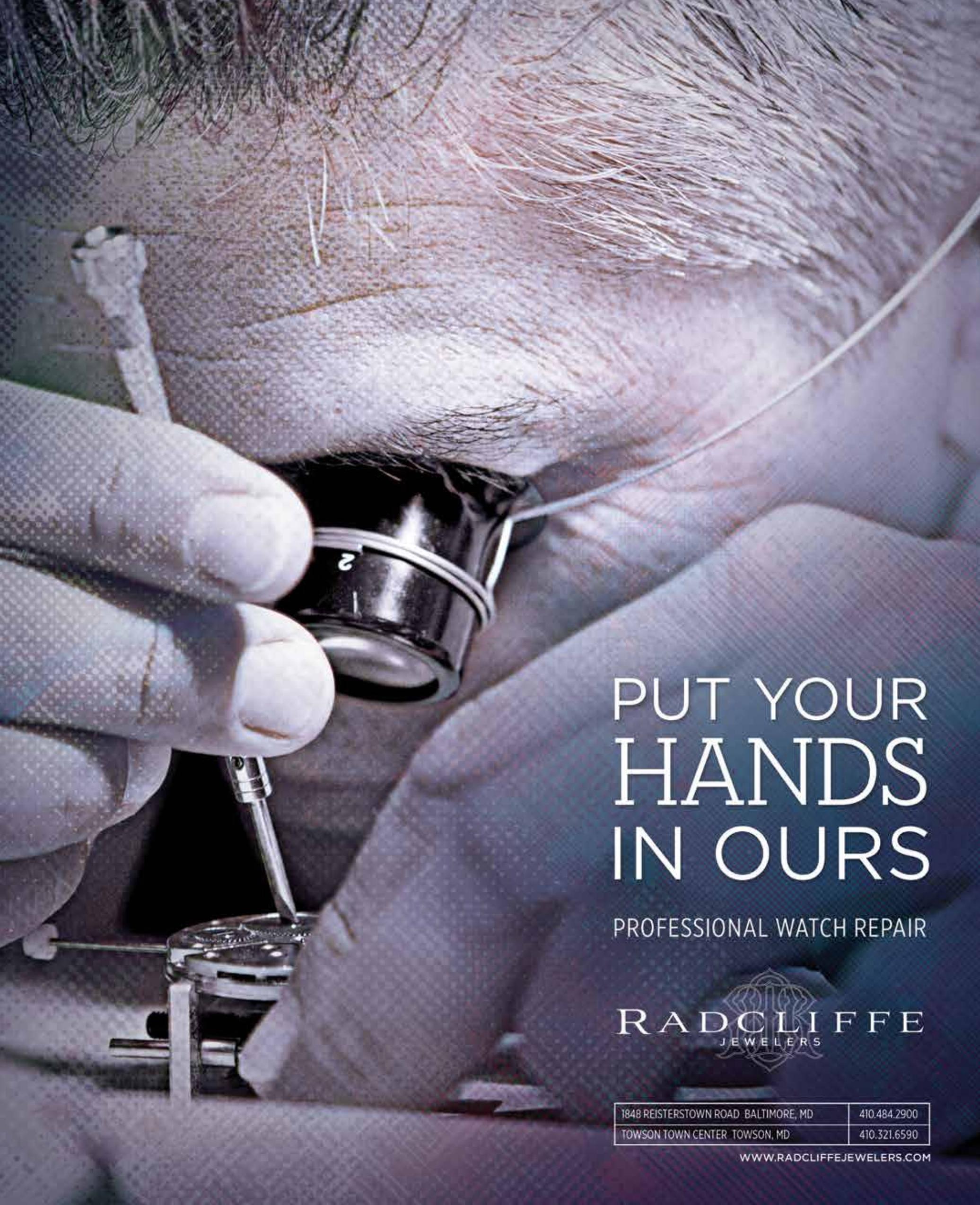
10 Questions With Ravens Cornerback Brandon Carr

• By Bo Smolka



SABINA MORAN/PRESSBOX

- Q1** *What's your favorite "cheat" food?*
I love peanut butter cookies, so I've been going to Insomnia Cookies.
- Q2** *Who was your favorite sports star when you were a kid?*
Charlie Ward. Charlie Ward was a smaller guy, he played quarterback, and he was a point guard, and that's what I grew up playing. Florida State was my favorite team.
- Q3** *If you weren't playing football what would you be doing for a living?*
Pediatrician. I thought about it. My freshman year in college I had to make a decision. I thought about it [post-NFL], but I don't want to take away 12 years from my kids after this. So first a pediatrician, and now, I think I would be coaching, probably like a ninth-grade team and work my way up to the varsity.
- Q4** *On a scale of one (terrible) to 10 (awesome), what is your cooking ability?*
I can hold it down. I'm about a five or six.
- Q5** *What's your favorite thing to do on an off day?*
Sleep, visit a school, read to kids, spend half a day with them.
- Q6** *What's your favorite city to visit on the road?*
I like Seattle. Seattle's a nice city. I like to get out before curfew and just walk around the downtown and stuff. It's got a nice little vibe to it.
- Q7** *What is your all-time favorite movie?*
"A Christmas Story."
- Q8** *Do you have any pets?*
Not here. My kids have some fish at home.
- Q9** *What's on your bucket list as far as a place to visit that you've never been to before?*
I want to go to the Gold Coast over in Australia. I want to go to Africa. And I'd also like to go to Finland. I think it's a nice tranquil place, and it always seems on the list of top places with happy people.
- Q10** *What's your favorite thing about Baltimore?*
The food.



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RAVENS REPORT



COURTESY OF FOCUS PHOTOGRAPHY

Anthony Levine Making His Mark With Ravens And Baltimore Community

★ **BO SMOLKA**

As Sam Koch waits to catch the ball from long snapper Morgan Cox, Anthony Levine stands a few yards in front of Koch and barks out the signals. After Cox fires the ball to Koch, Levine picks up a rusher up the middle, giving Koch the time he needs to unload another booming kick.

As Chris Moore waits for a kickoff to land in his hands, Levine sprints 30 yards toward Moore, then turns around and seals off an opponent, opening a lane for the Ravens' kick returner.

As Justin Tucker launches a kickoff toward the opposing end zone, Levine darts downfield, sheds a blocker and makes a tackle.

If there is a play involving the Ravens' special teams, Levine is probably right there in the middle of it. He has become the de facto captain of the Ravens' standout special teams unit, even earning the nickname "Co-Cap" from his teammates.

There might not be much glamour in punt protection or kick-return blocking,

but coaches know the value. It's a big reason Levine, now in his sixth season with the Ravens, signed a new, three-year, \$4.2 million deal in March. It's been quite a run for an undrafted player out of Tennessee State who couldn't get on the field in two years with the Green Bay Packers before coming to Baltimore.

Levine, 30, has also excelled as a role player on defense, so versatile that cornerback Jimmy Smith has called him a Swiss Army knife of the Ravens' defense. Levine is a safety by training, but he has increasingly been used as a dime linebacker this season and also has played cornerback -- where he made the only three starts of his career in 2014.

"He has played excellent on special teams," head coach John Harbaugh said. "But defensively, you see him out there, and he plays multiple positions. Is he a safety? Is he a linebacker? A corner? What is he playing out there? He does all of those things equally well. ... [He's] an underrated talent. He has been a big part of our defense."

Through 12 games this season, Levine led the Ravens in special teams tackles with nine, two shy of the career-high he set in 2013. He also had 11 tackles on

defense, a pair of sacks and his first career regular-season interception, which sealed the Ravens' 23-16 Monday night win against the Houston Texans Nov. 27.

"Every year I just come out and try to do better than what I did last year," Levine said. "I try to up my game on special teams, I try to up my game on defense. When you have a guy like Eric Weddle, one of the greats, when you have a guy like Terrell Suggs, when you got a young, prime C.J. Mosley, they up your play."

"When you come and play for the Ravens and you get on that field, and when you're around guys like that, you have no choice but to raise your play."

Levine was second-team All-Ohio Valley Conference as a senior at Tennessee State. He signed with the Packers' practice squad and was technically a Super Bowl champion as a rookie, as the Packers beat the Pittsburgh Steelers in Super Bowl XLV after the 2010 season.

But after two years on the Packers' practice squad without ever being promoted to the 53-man roster, Levine was cut at the end of training camp in 2012. He was signed to the Ravens' practice squad a few days later, and then the

team promoted him to the active roster in November 2012. Levine played just two games before going on injured reserve with a shoulder injury, but for the second time in three NFL seasons, his team went on to win the Super Bowl.

Since then, Levine has steadily carved out a larger role on the Ravens' roster, and the Abbeville, La., native is also carving out a role in the Baltimore community.

This past fall, Levine, who wears No. 41, "adopted" the football team at Mergenthaler Vocational-Technical High School in Northeast Baltimore via his 4Every1 Foundation. Levine visited with Mervo's team, offering advice to the players on succeeding in life and in school, and kept in touch with them throughout the season.

He gave the players his personal email address and invited them to reach out to him with issues, problems and questions, which they have done.

"The things that the kids are telling me, I went through myself," Levine told PressBox in October. "So I'm like, 'Man, I understand what this kid's going through.' When he's emailing me I'm like, 'I understand,' so I know how to respond to them."

Levine popped in on Mervo's team the day they played Poly, and Mervo head coach Patrick Nixon said, "The guys were so excited it was really a challenge for me to get them calm for the game." (They apparently managed, since Mervo won, 46-20.)

"I think they're just seeking validation, really, for them that you pretty much can make it if you work hard enough and listen to the right people," Nixon said. "It's the same message that many of us coaches are telling these kids; now they have someone who's in front of them that's actually done it."

Levine's foundation hosted a Thanksgiving turkey drive last month and has partnered with local schools to pay for SAT test prep classes and testing fees for students in need.

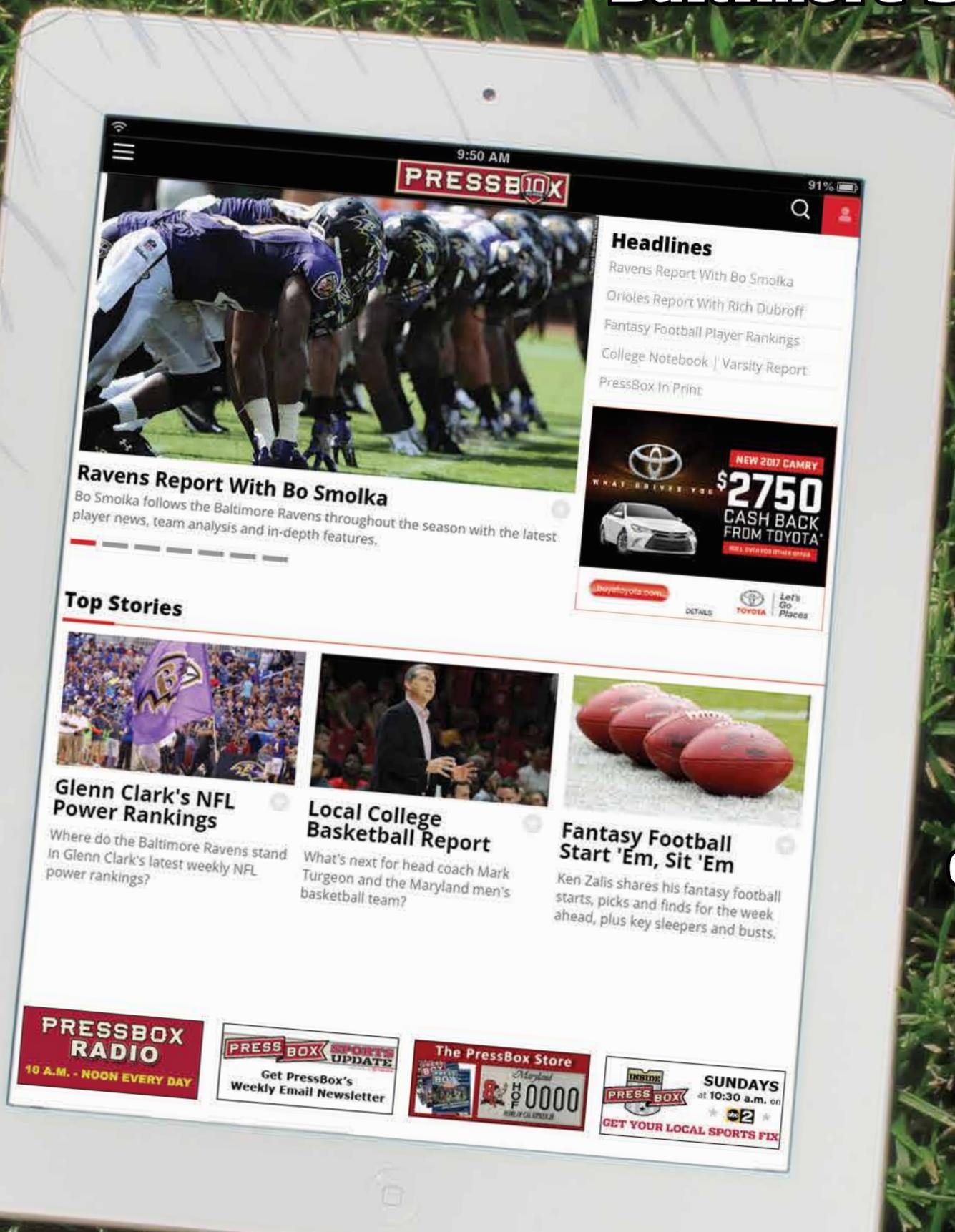
As he has for many years in his career, Levine will enter this offseason with questions about his future. He turns 31 in March, an age when many NFL careers are winding down -- or over. But he still has a relatively cheap contract and a versatile and significant, if often overlooked, role. He has played more special teams snaps than anyone else on the roster this season.

"We look for guys like that," Harbaugh said. "There are players over the years who have made careers in that particular role. You look at the really good teams in the National Football League, they have guys who play specific roles. That is the way football is built. There are roles involved. It is really important, and we value that." •

PressBox's Glenn Clark contributed to this story.

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'Tis the season for giving and receiving gifts. Although I know what you're thinking, and you're right. No one in Baltimore seems to be doing much of any "receiving" this season.

But it is indeed the season for giving. So no matter which holiday they're celebrating, here are the top 15 gifts we'd give to Baltimore sports figures.

[01] FORMER BALTIMORE COLTS LINEBACKER MIKE CURTIS, FORMER MARYLAND BASKETBALL HEAD COACH LEFTY DRIESELL AND FORMER ORIOLES PITCHER MIKE MUSSINA:
THE HALL OF FAME NODS THEY RIGHTFULLY DESERVE.

It looks better and better that Mussina will eventually get in -- even if it doesn't happen this January. Since we have no idea who even votes for the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame, it's impossible to have any sort of feeling as to whether the old left-hander will get to Springfield, Ma., (note to Hall of Fame voters: he turns 86 on Christmas Day). And the "Mad Dog" getting to Canton, Ohio, will be up to the Hall's Seniors Committee in the coming years. All three deserve the recognition. If late former Ravens owner Art Modell was still with us, he'd be on the list, too.

[02] ORIOLES FIRST BASEMAN CHRIS DAVIS:
WHATEVER HE GOT FOR CHRISTMAS BEFORE THE 2013 AND 2015 SEASONS.

If he got a Blu-ray copy of "The Dark Knight Rises" for Christmas 2012, get him another one. If it was a Fitbit and a Keurig for Christmas 2014, get him two more of each. Whatever can be done to best re-create those offseasons, let's make it happen.

[03] BOXER GERVONTA DAVIS:
ALL OF THE SESAME STREET-THEMED HOODIES HIS HEART DESIRES.

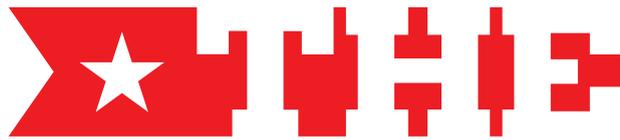
Perhaps you remember the boxer dressing as Cookie Monster for his fight on the Floyd Mayweather-Conor McGregor undercard in August. While he was sloppy, he kept winning. So if it will help, go get him one that looks like Big Bird, Elmo, Oscar The Grouch, Grover, Abby Cadabby, whoever. My 2-year-old is available to help him pick them out.

[04] ORIOLES EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT OF BASEBALL OPERATIONS DAN DUQUETTE:
THE RIGHT TO ACTUALLY SPEND INTERNATIONAL SIGNING MONEY ON A BASEBALL PLAYER.

I think we all know the Orioles are definitely better off having traded for pitcher Konner Wade than spending that money on a scrub like Shohei Ohtani. But let's just pretend that move doesn't work out as perfectly as we assume. Maybe this gift could prove to be a nice change of pace in the future.

[05] MARYLAND FOOTBALL COACH DJ DURKIN:
ONE SINGLE FRICKIN' HEALTHY QUARTERBACK FOR NEXT SEASON.

Some kids ask for literally every toy known to man. But Durkin would settle for just one. One single



stinkin' healthy quarterback in 2018. If Santa truly sees you when you're sleeping, he probably didn't see Durkin at all while he had to make it work without a quarterback in 2017.

[06] RAVENS QUARTERBACK JOE FLACCO:
LITERALLY, ANY HELP AT ALL.

It could come in the form of a draft pick that actually pans out. Or in the form of a free agent signed before the Fourth of July. Any sort of help whatsoever would be nicer than the many lumps of coal the Ravens got their signal caller last year.

[07] ORIOLES CATCHER CALEB JOSEPH:
ANYTHING BUT TICKETS TO SEE THE HOLIDAY CLASSIC "THE NUTCRACKER."

He'd probably be happy with just about anything else. He's a drummer, so perhaps some new sticks would work. Just nothing to do with cracking nuts. We might be more than a year removed, but that would still seem really cruel, you know?

[08] ORIOLES THIRD BASEMAN MANNY MACHADO:
ENOUGH MONEY THAT MONEY NEVER MATTERS TO HIM AGAIN.

Perhaps you're thinking to yourself, "What if we got him crab cakes from Jimmy's Famous Seafood for life?" The problem is, he actually already has that. The restaurant offered him crab cakes and meal prep services for life after he stood up to late former Kansas City Royals pitcher Yorlano Ventura in 2016. So the only thing that can keep him around is cash. So maybe if he gets a ton of it he won't want as much in the future? It's worth a shot. And if you really want to give someone crab cakes, the address at PressBox is 3600 Clipper Mill Rd.

[09] RAVENS GENERAL MANAGER OZZIE NEWSOME:
THE SCOUTING REPORTS FOR THE OFFENSIVE PLAYERS IN THE NFL DRAFT, TOO.

I'm as confused as everyone else as to why he only got the scouting reports for the defensive players last year. But what's in the past is in the past. This year we can get him the reports for the guys on the other side of the ball, too, and maybe he'll see something he likes. Are offensive players available in SkyMall?

[10] RAVENS WIDE RECEIVER BRESHAD PERRIMAN:
THE CHANCE TO GET HIS MIND CLEARED BY ONE OF THOSE LITTLE MACHINES FROM THE MOVIE "MEN IN BLACK."

The former first-round pick is likely to be around for another year in Baltimore. So how do we make this work? Getting his mind right might be a good place to start. So let's call Will Smith (his wife is from here!) and see if he kept one of those things from filming, and let's give it a shot.

[11] OLYMPIC SWIMMER MICHAEL PHELPS:
THE ITCH.

If we really get to 2020 without Phelps swimming, the Olympics stand to be way less interesting. If he's going to dominate in Tokyo, it would seem as though he would need to start training again at some point in 2018. So this would be the perfect time for him to get that itch again.

[12] BALTIMORE MAYOR CATHERINE PUGH:
A WEALTHY DONOR WITH ENOUGH MONEY FOR A NEW ARENA AND TO REBUILD PIMLICO.

Sure, there are about a billion other issues the mayor could use funding to address. But it would be nice to address these before I die. Also, I'm only 34. But yes, I'm very concerned neither will be fixed in my lifetime.

[13] ORIOLES MANAGER BUCK SHOWALTER:
ANYTHING AT ALL THAT COULD MAKE HIM SMILE FOR A SECOND.

The man deserves a little joy in his life for a change considering all of the joy he's brought us. If a Fingerlings Interactive Baby Monkey would do the trick, get him one. If he's more of a socks and underwear guy, make it happen. If he wants a pair of tickets to see Kid Rock at Royal Farms Arena in 2018 ... someone else needs to buy them for him. I don't think I can support that.

[14] RAVENS RUNNING BACK DANNY WOODHEAD:
A NEVER-ENDING SUPPLY OF "GRITS" WOULD SEEM APPROPRIATE.

He's a blue-collar, lunch pail kind of guy. So let's fill that lunch pail with ... whatever the hell grits actually are. I honestly have no idea, but they're tasty. Maybe if he eats more he'll get hurt less.

[15] RAVENS OFFENSIVE LINEMAN MARSHAL YANDA:
AS MANY OF OUR ANKLES AS HE NEEDS IN ORDER TO FIND THE RIGHT ONE.

Seriously, he can have both of mine. Maybe they can meld them into one super-ankle that's good enough to help him. Every Ravens fan should line up to offer the All-Pro guard theirs, too. It's called doing your part. So you won't be able to play adult kickball in the spring. You weren't that good to begin with and you were only in it for the drinking anyway. Do the right thing and give the man your ankles already. •



HAPPY

Holidays



FROM THE
WEDDLE
FAMILY

BY BO SMOLKA

LONG AFTER THE CROWD

has filed out of M&T Bank Stadium after a Ravens home game, safety Eric Weddle returns to the field. The seats are all empty, but his biggest fans are there.

Dressed in street clothes and a baseball hat, Weddle tosses a football to his son, Gaige, while his wife, Chanel, helps one of their three daughters do back handsprings in the stadium grass. About an hour or so after virtually every Ravens home game, this is the Weddles' playground, their family room, the place where Weddle's roles as NFL star, husband and father converge most clearly.

Weddle, now in his 11th NFL season and second in Baltimore, takes each of those roles seriously, and it's not an easy balancing act. An admitted workaholic, Weddle heads to the Ravens' facility in Owings Mills, Md., before dawn many mornings, but he takes his 3-year-old daughter Kamri to pre-school on his off days. Road games mean a lot of time away from home, but Monday is reserved for date night for him and Chanel, high school sweethearts who have been married for 12 years.

Spend any time with Weddle, and the word "family" frequently pops up -- referring to his own brood or the atmosphere that he says pervades the Ravens' organization. That's one reason the West Coast transplant has loved his time in Baltimore. Simply put, family matters.

As the Weddle family prepares for a holiday photo shoot in their Pikesville, Md., home, pig-tailed Kamri takes a small tumble down the steps and ends up in tears, and 9-year-old Brooklyn rushes over to comfort her. The other children, 8-year-old Gaige and 6-year-old Silver, bound down the stairs, then back up, then back down again. Chanel, her shoulder-length hair colored with a tinge of red, surveys the scene with the calm that comes from being a mother of four.

In the vernacular of her husband's profession, she is a nearly 10-year veteran of this parenting game. She's got this.

"She keeps us together," Weddle said. "She's the rock of our family. I'm lucky to have her."

COMPETITIVE FROM THE START

Eric Weddle isn't really supposed to be here. Not in Baltimore, not married to Chanel, not a father of four, not on this earth.

When Weddle's mother, Debbie, was in her second trimester of pregnancy in 1984, she woke up one night with the sheets soaked with amniotic fluid. She feared she had lost her baby. After rushing to the hospital, she was told by doctors that she was likely to have a miscarriage or quickly go into premature labor. Neither happened -- not that night, not in the days that followed as she was closely monitored at the hospital. The baby's heartbeat remained strong, and Debbie's uterus recovered as well, mystifying doctors. Four months later,

Eric Weddle was born.

So he comes by his competitive fire naturally. He was literally born with it.

Weddle was a high school sports star at Alta Loma High School in Southern California, playing football, basketball and baseball -- which might have been his calling if not for a high fastball that caught Weddle near his left eye and effectively ended his baseball career.

As a 5-foot-11, 185-pound football player, scholarship offers from the Pac-10 schools -- and just about every other Division I football program -- never materialized, even though Weddle was a two-time league MVP. Utah at that time had an up-and-coming coach named Urban Meyer, and he wasn't all that impressed, either.

"Are you sure about this guy? Is this guy for real?" Kyle Whittingham, then an assistant to Meyer and now the Utes head coach, recalls Meyer asking him. "Cause he looked like 10,000 other high school players. I mean, there was nothing really special about him, just looking at him."

But Whittingham saw something right away when he recruited Weddle.

"When you watched the tape, and when you watched him, he was a four-sport guy," Whittingham said. "There was nothing he couldn't do. I said, 'Trust me, Coach,' this guy is special."

Weddle signed with Utah and was a starter by the third game of his freshman year. He ended up a two-time Mountain West Defensive Player of the Year and was drafted in the second round in 2007 by the San Diego Chargers.

"He's one of the most competitive people you'll ever meet," Whittingham said. "It doesn't matter what you're doing, whether it's golf or chess or whatever. He's in it to win it." (Weddle has a single-digit handicap in golf and made a hole-in-one in 2014.)

Whittingham recalls one Utah spring game when Weddle, by now a star with the Chargers, returned as an honorary captain. Just for fun, Weddle was asked to kick an extra point in the game -- but it was blocked, and the other team tried to return it for a score.

"He's out there in his cutoff jean shorts and tennis shoes," Whittingham said, "and he proceeds to chase this guy down, running full speed down the field for about 80 yards. He finally catches him and I'm thinking, 'Oh man, I hope the Chargers never see this clip.' ... It was just a harmless point-after-touch-down kick, and he turns it into a full-out, competitive play."

Chanel Weddle notes that competition in the family runs deep. She is an athlete in her own right, a former soccer player at Utah State.

"If we drive somewhere in separate cars," she said, "we try to race home."

FOOTBALL WIFE, FOOTBALL LIFE

Football has been in Chanel's life as long as Weddle has. She'll occasionally stay up after the kids are asleep and rewatch Eric's game with him on a Sunday night, critiquing his play.

"We don't do that as much anymore,"

she said, glancing over at him. "I think he's getting kind of sensitive in his old age."

"I don't know coverages and all that, but I can tell when he's playing good and when he's not."

At this point, nothing about the long hours, the travel, the grueling physical toll that her husband's occupation exacts comes as a surprise. But that doesn't make it any easier trying to maintain a house and keep tabs on the homework, extracurricular activities, dinner and more for four active children under age 10.

"He's just gone a lot," Chanel said. "And when he comes home he's mentally and physically tired, so it's draining for him and then it's hard on me."

"When he's home he's very hands on. It's just the times he misses with the kids. That's probably the hardest part."

MOVING TO BALTIMORE

By his second season with the Chargers, Weddle was a starter, leading the team in tackles with 127. By his fifth season, he was headed to the Pro Bowl and a fan favorite in Southern California. Weddle played nine seasons with the Chargers and made three Pro Bowl appearances, but his tenure with the team ended in acrimony.

After the Chargers did not show interest in signing Weddle to a contract extension, he skipped voluntary offseason workouts in 2015. The tension boiled over in late December that year in what proved to be his final home game with the Chargers; Weddle stayed on the field at halftime to watch his daughter perform as part of a halftime show, and the team fined him \$10,000. The



Weddle acknowledged the tug-of-war that arises from a fierce commitment to football and to family, but he sees the conflict as a short-term issue.

"This may be selfish," Weddle said, stroking his trademark bushy beard, "but this is what it takes for me to be the best, and luckily she understands that, and appreciates it. ... I love the game, and I know what a difference it makes if I put extra work in."

"So I do miss out on a lot, but ... this is just a short time where I'm doing this, and I'll be able to make up a lot of that down the road."

Said Chanel: "If we can just get through this little bit of time, then he'll be there for everything."

But, she added with a smile, "I think he likes missing homework time."

team then placed him on injured reserve for the final week of the season.

Given how that season ended, Weddle welcomed free agency, and the Ravens -- who had recorded a franchise-record-low six interceptions in 2015 and had failed via the draft or free agency to adequately replace Ed Reed at the back end of their defense -- jumped at the chance to sign a safety who had been named a first- or second-team All-Pro for five straight years. The Ravens signed him to a four-year, \$26 million deal with \$13 million guaranteed.

Weddle, eager to take part in voluntary OTA workouts with his new team, commuted cross-country every week that spring while his young children finished the school year in California.

"Monday to Thursday in Baltimore, home for the weekend," he

said. "Do it all over again for 10 weeks. That was hard. ... It was a long stretch."

In his first season with the Ravens, Weddle finished with 89 tackles and led the team with four interceptions, earning his fourth Pro Bowl selection, and he has been an anchor again this year on a defense that has led the league in interceptions all season. He recorded the fourth interception return touchdown of his career during a win against the Detroit Lions Dec. 3.

Weddle has also been a mentor to younger players such as cornerback Marlon Humphrey, who credits Weddle with helping him adjust to NFL life as a rookie, and Weddle helped recruit running back Danny Woodhead to the Ravens as a free agent.

"He's a great dude, I mean aside from football," said Woodhead, who played three seasons with Weddle in San Diego. "I'm going to remember a lot of great players, but the people I'm really going to remember are the guys that are great people, too, and do things the right way. He's a prime example of that."

As in San Diego, Weddle quickly became something of a fan favorite in Baltimore, an engaging, approachable star whose beard makes him one of the team's more recognizable players. It's not uncommon for Eric to be approached for autographs when he and Chanel are out on one of their date nights.

"I don't mind it a bit," he said. Blue-collar Baltimore can also appreciate the everyman qualities of Weddle, who sends his kids to public school, who sees a direct cor-

relation between sweat equity and performance, who is deeply guided by his faith. The Weddles are Mormons -- he converted in his 20s -- and this month the family performs acts of service in the 25 days leading up to Christmas. That has included donating toys to their church nursery, paying a stranger's restaurant tab and passing candy canes around their neighborhood.

Weddle also shares with fans via Twitter his unapologetic passion for ice cream. After wins, Weddle will tweet out a photo of his latest victory snack to his more than 85,000 followers.

"Strawberry ice cream, freshly cut strawberries, crunched up nilla wafers and sprinkles," he tweeted out after a Monday night win against the Houston Texans. "Nothing better than this."

'THE LAST SPOT FOR ME'

Weddle, who turns 33 in January, knows the end of his career is on the horizon. He is under contract with the Ravens for two more seasons, and that timeline is not entirely up to him.

"My last two years aren't guaranteed, so they could ... release me," Weddle said. "And if that's the case I'll just retire. I don't want to move my kids and start over again."

"When I signed here two years ago I said this would be the last spot for me. I've loved every second of it. ... So we'll see. I'm just living it up, loving every day, trying to help my team win and make the most of it,

because you never know."

Eleven NFL seasons have done a number on Weddle's body, although he has missed just three games over the past eight seasons, playing through a host of injuries.

"It's a lot," Weddle said of the physical toll the sport has taken. "Neck, shoulders, not being able to sleep, walking up and down stairs sideways cause your knees hurt so bad, or your hips, or your lower back. ... It's hard."

Then there is the specter of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), the degenerative brain disease that has become a hot button in the NFL, with many past players having been found to have suffered from it. A 2015 movie on the subject, "Concussion," was "hard to watch," Chanel said.

Still, she added, "You can't live in fear, you know? I'm not a worrywart, so I don't really worry about it. ... He's doing what he loves. The thing about Eric is you can't ever tell him what to do. So if I was like, 'You need to stop [playing] because you're not going to be able to walk,' he would for sure keep going."

Said Weddle: "I look at myself as intellectual. I think, I speak well, I like to read, I try to challenge myself. So if I continue to do those things, why would anything change?"

CALIFORNIA DREAM HOUSE AWAITS

Whenever his career ends, Weddle said, "The house will be ready and waiting for us." "The house" was built over the past

couple of years high on a hill in Poway, California, northeast of San Diego. There is a million-dollar view, a pool, a basketball court, a trampoline, and, given that Weddle is a movie buff, a "secret movie theater," with the screen revealed when a bookcase slides away.

"It's like you dreamed what you'd want your house to be, and then you have it. It's kind of surreal," he said.

He said it's no accident that the house has no stairs -- he already knows his post-football body will have no interest in dealing with staircases every day.

Chanel said the house was designed with family in mind.

"We want our house to be the house where everyone comes, and their friends hang out," she said. "I have great visions for his retirement," Chanel said with a smile, draping an arm over her husband's leg before throwing her head back and closing her eyes. "I'm just going to be laying there. He's going to be on kid duty, school duty, home-work duty."

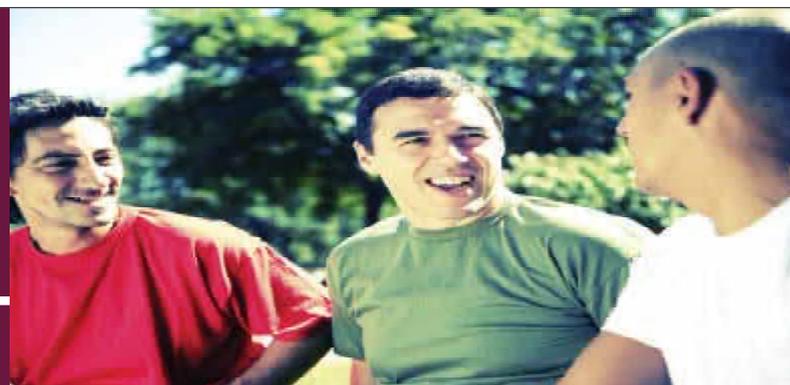
Weddle said he isn't thinking too far in the future about post-career work but did say it would be "cool" to coach Gaige's high school football team.

Other than that, "I'll just be able to sit back, not be in pain, and not have to worry about this and that," he said. "Just enjoy the kids, enjoy Chanel, enjoy being a dad, being able to be there for everything." +

- PHOTOGRAPHY -

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In the event of a tie in regulation, the fourth winner will be determined by the final score.

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 ZERO Prostate Cancer Challenge		 Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance		 U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum		 Shoes For Grades		 Extreme Family Outreach	 LifeBridge Health
	 BARCS	 Wounded Warrior Project	 Baltimore Humane Society	 Special Olympics of Maryland	 St. Elizabeth School		 ZERO Prostate Cancer Challenge	 Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation	
 Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation	 Catch A Lift Fund	 Ravens Roost 15	 Cool Kids Campaign	 ZERO Prostate Cancer Challenge		 Johns Hopkins Children's Center	 St. Vincent's Villa	 LifeBridge Health	 Karma For Cara
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ORIOLES REPORT

Orioles' Best And Worst Free-Agent Signings In The Dan Duquette Era

★ RICH DUBROFF



With free-agent season here, let's examine the Orioles' best and worst free-agent signings since Dan Duquette became executive vice president of baseball operations in November 2011.

BEST

1. Adam Jones re-signs for six years, \$85.5 million.

In May 2012, the Orioles, who were showing signs that they could be competitive after 14 straight losing seasons, re-signed their star center fielder, who could have become a free agent at season's end.

Since the extension took effect for the 2013 season, Jones has averaged 29 home runs and 88 RBIs.

"The dude rang the cash register every time he hit a home run," Duquette cracked at the time of the signing.

Not only has Jones produced on the field, but he's been a great presence in the community.

2. Nelson Cruz signs a one-year, \$8 million contract.

In February 2014, spring training had already started and this slugger was still on the free-agent market.

The Orioles scooped up Cruz, and it was a bargain. He led the major leagues with 40 home runs and drove in 108 while the Orioles handily won the American League East.

Cruz, who played left field and served as the club's principal designated hitter, helped keep the offense potent when third baseman Manny Machado and catcher Matt Wieters were lost to season-ending injuries and first baseman Chris Davis to a suspension for using amphetamines without a prescription.

After Cruz's one-year contract with the Orioles, he declared for free agency and signed with Seattle, where he has hit 126 home runs and batted .292 during the last three seasons.

3. Wei-Yin Chen comes to Baltimore via Taiwan and Japan.

In January 2012, the Orioles desperately needed starting pitching, and Duquette signed a 26-year-old Taiwanese left-hander who was pitching in Japan to a three-year contract for \$11.3 million. A \$4.75 million option for 2015 was included.

Chen was 46-32 with a 3.72 ERA in four years with the Orioles, and the team made the postseason in 2012 and 2014.

Since he left the team after the 2015 season, Chen has pitched in just 31 games for the

Miami Marlins due to injuries. He has an \$80 million contract with Miami that has three years remaining.

4. Miguel Gonzalez is signed to a minor league deal.

No one had heard of the right-hander, who was toiling in the Mexican League when the Orioles signed him during spring training in 2012.

Gonzalez had only pitched in one Triple-A game before he was signed, and after he came up in May 2012, he became a dependable starter.

In four seasons with the Orioles, Gonzalez was 39-33 with a 3.82 ERA.

He was released in April 2016.

5. Nate McLouth's career is revived after being released by the Pittsburgh Pirates.

McLouth had been an All-Star and won a Gold Glove for the Pirates in 2008, but early in 2012, Pittsburgh released the outfielder, and the Orioles signed him to a minor league deal.

He was hitting .140 when the Pirates let him go, and after a few weeks at Triple-A Norfolk, McLouth joined the Orioles.

Playing left field, McLouth became the leadoff hitter after right fielder Nick Markakis suffered a broken left thumb in September.

In his final 30 games of 2012, McLouth hit .280 with five home runs and stole six bases while playing an excellent left field.

He re-signed with the Orioles for 2013. Injuries truncated his career with the Washington Nationals a year later.

WORST

1. Chris Davis signs record-breaking six-year, \$161 million extension.

Davis had just led the majors in home runs for the second time in three years, and after protracted negotiations, the first baseman signed by far the biggest contract in team history.

He hit 47 homers and drove in 117 runs in 2015, but in the two seasons since signing in January 2016, his production has dropped off sharply. While showing some power (64 home runs, 145 RBIs) over the past two seasons, Davis has hit just .221 in 2016 and .215 in 2017 while striking out 414 times.

Still smarting from the losses of Cruz and Markakis to free agency after the 2014 season, the Orioles overpaid for Davis, and the contract runs through 2022.

2. Ubaldo Jimenez signs four-year, \$50 million contract.

Prior to February 2014, the Orioles had never given a four-year contract to a pitcher

from outside the organization, but they thought the right-hander was worth it.

In four seasons from 2014 through 2017, Jimenez was 32-42 with a 5.22 ERA. He was healthy and considered a model teammate, but only pitched well during much of 2015 and the second half of the 2016 season.

We'll see if bad memories of the four-year deal prevent the team from pursuing top-tier free-agent pitchers this offseason.

3. Yovani Gallardo signs a two-year, \$22 million contract.

Like Cruz and Jimenez, Gallardo was still available during spring training, and the Orioles wanted another starter in 2016. They originally had an agreement with the right-hander for three years and \$35 million, but medical concerns prompted a renegotiation.

In 2016, Gallardo was 6-8 with a 5.42 ERA in 23 starts and missed nearly two months with a right shoulder injury.

The team sent him to the Seattle Mariners in January 2017 for right fielder Seth Smith. That deal worked out reasonably well for the Orioles, as Smith had a decent season while Gallardo was 5-10 with a 5.72 ERA.

4. Mark Trumbo comes back to the Orioles on a three-year deal.

Because they clearly missed the production provided by Cruz and Markakis in 2015 and were afraid that Davis would sign elsewhere, the Orioles were only too happy to obtain Trumbo from the Mariners when Seattle was eager to shed salary.

The move looked brilliant when Trumbo led the major leagues with 47 home runs in 2016.

Over last winter, the right fielder/DH found a tepid free-agent market, and in January he signed a three-year, \$37.5 million contract.

Trumbo, who had never hit more than 34 homers before 2016, experienced a marked drop-off in production in 2017. He hit 23 homers and drove in 65 runs.

The Orioles would love to move that contract and find pitching in return, but it's going to be hard to find a partner.

5. Orioles attempt to make a splash by signing Tsuyoshi Wada to two-year contract.

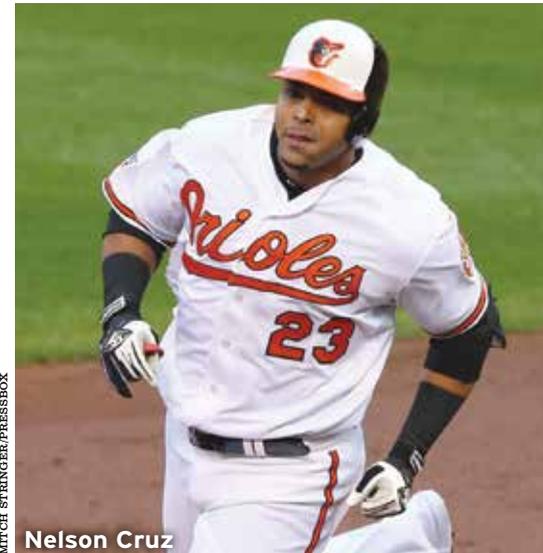
Duquette's first major free-agent signing was a 30-year-old Japanese left-hander who was eager to try the major leagues. The Orioles signed Wada to a two-year, \$8.15 million contract in December 2011.

Unfortunately, Wada never pitched for the Orioles. He needed Tommy John surgery early in the 2012 season and didn't pitch well enough for Norfolk in 2013 to merit a recall.

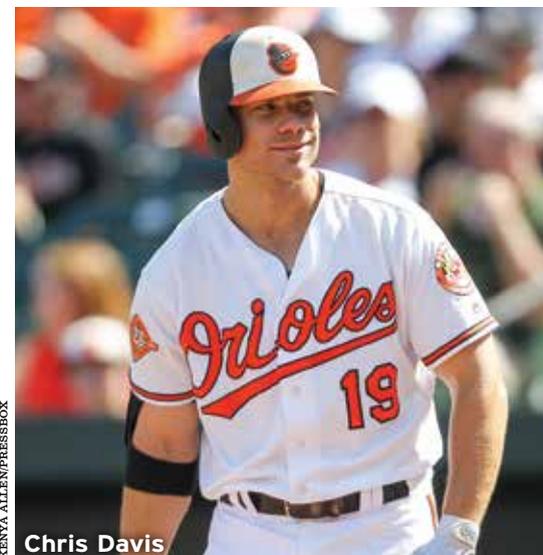
Wada pitched briefly for the Chicago Cubs, and he beat the Orioles at Wrigley Field in August 2014. He's now back in Japan. •



Adam Jones



Nelson Cruz



Chris Davis



Mark Trumbo



CONNOLLY'S CORNER

Eli Manning Saga Brings To Mind Buck Showalter's 'Fallen Star' Phrase

★ DAN CONNOLLY

Orioles manager Buck Showalter's catchphrases and homespun vernacular often provide amusement to those of us who cover his team for a living.

After seven-plus years, the stories get repeated, and the colorful phrases often become commonplace, but there are a few that register beyond the chuckle and/or eye-roll scale.

"Don't let a star fall on you," is the one that has stuck with me the most, because it is more philosophy than quip. I think Showalter credits his late mentor, New York Yankees manager Billy Martin with that one. But, honestly, it could pre-date Martin, too.

The sentiment is simple: One of a manager's biggest challenges is when a great player's skills begin to deteriorate to the point in which he is not helping the team. Hands are tied. Emotions are high. There's

no good solution.

Showalter has had it happen to him before and, in his deadpan, will say about those experiences, "not much fun."

There's a delicate balance between doing what's best for your team while not embarrassing someone who has given so much and succeeded so often in a sport.

When I read about the saga involving New York Giants quarterback Eli Manning, I could hear Showalter's drawl.

Manning's star crashed violently, enraging a fan base and, ultimately, costing two men their jobs.

Manning, 36, had started 210 consecutive games at quarterback for the Giants, dating back to Game 10 of his rookie campaign in 2004. Under his direction, the Giants won two Super Bowls, making Manning at least a borderline Hall of Famer.

But with the Giants dreadful this season, sporting a 2-9 record and already eliminated from the playoff race heading into December, second-year head coach Ben McAdoo

and general manager Jerry Reese made the decision to bench Manning in favor of underwhelming backup Geno Smith for the Dec. 3 contest against the Oakland Raiders. The outcome of that game -- a 24-17 loss to the Raiders in which Smith threw for 212 yards and one touchdown -- is incidental.

What is monumental is that Manning's consecutive starts streak, tied for ninth-most in NFL history and second-longest among all quarterbacks, was snapped.

The day after the Giants' 10th loss of the season, and amidst continual fan and media backlash, McAdoo and Reese were fired. To be fair, they may have been canned at the end of the season anyway, given how much the club tanked after its 11-5 campaign in 2016.

Furthermore, McAdoo and Reese weren't fully acting alone; the idea of sitting Manning in favor of Smith and, eventually, Davis Webb, the team's third-round pick in 2017, was reportedly first initially broached by Giants' co-owner John Mara weeks before.

That plan, though, was ill-conceived. Mara and crew wanted Manning to start the remaining games this season, but then be taken out at some point -- likely halftime -- in each one so that they could further evaluate their other quarterbacks. Manning, understandably, didn't want any part of that plan. He felt it was disingenuous, just a ploy to keep his starting streak alive. Plus, he's a competitor. He didn't want to start something without a chance to finish it each week. This isn't the preseason.

So, McAdoo benched Manning, the star fell and all hell broke loose. Mara ultimately apologized to fans, and Manning is back as a starter, beginning a new streak.

It was an absolute disaster -- and Exhibit A of what not to do with an aging superstar. The Giants were going nowhere, it was likely Manning's last season with the team and likely Smith's as well, so it made no sense to see what he could do. We all have a fair idea of what Smith and his career 29-36 touchdown-interception mark in parts of five seasons can do.

Perhaps if the change were made to immediately start Webb, that would be more acceptable, but the rookie had been on the scout team this season and wasn't quite ready to step in. Besides, Manning deserved to have a say in how his Giants career ends. That's common courtesy for such an important member of a franchise, especially when a team, and the talent surrounding the quarterback, is terrible.

This situation is age-old, pun intended.

Many longtime Baltimore sports fans will wax poetic about how Marty Domres replaced a 39-year-old Johnny Unitas in 1972 when the Colts were 1-4 (and ended up 5-9). And how Domres heard it from all angles -- except from Unitas -- during that painful season.

Doug DeCinces received hate mail in 1976 and 1977, when he was supplanting Hall of Famer Brooks Robinson at third base for the Orioles. DeCinces said it seemed like each time he made an error it would trigger, "We Want Brooks," chants.

Then there were the delicacies involving Cal Ripken Jr., his legendary games played streak and his shortstop position. Ripken was the Orioles' cornerstone -- how could any manager push Ripken off short or take him out of the lineup for a spell, especially when they didn't have anyone better in which to replace him?

Indeed, Ripken agreed to move from shortstop to third base when the Orioles signed Mike Bordick because Ripken respected Bordick's work ethic and style of play. And Ripken was the one who decided in 1998 that it was time to end his streak before the home finale of that season. Manager Ray Miller simply obliged.

I covered Ripken's final season in 2001, and he did everyone a favor by deciding early that year that it would be his last in the majors. It created a farewell tour, which was an added responsibility for Ripken (and for the local media covering him), because he had to have a news conference in every city in which the Orioles played that second half.

Yet it also took the pressure off then-manager Mike Hargrove, who didn't have to worry about any ramifications of sitting or not sitting Ripken on a specific day. In fact, Ripken, at 40, appreciated the occasional breather that year.

During his tenure in Baltimore, Showalter has only had one concrete example of the star falling on him. In his first full season, 2011, Showalter was tasked with where to put Vladimir Guerrero in the Orioles' lineup. Guerrero, then 36 and a likely Hall of Famer, no longer could drive the ball out of the ballpark. He hit just 13 homers that season, and only three in his final two months of play. But, for the most part, Showalter kept Guerrero in the cleanup spot in the order despite having other options.

That Orioles' team was bad -- 93-loss bad -- so ultimately it didn't matter. But Showalter still thinks back on that situation when he has to make tough decisions involving slumping players and lineup changes in the past few years, such as in the case of first baseman Chris Davis.

It's possible that Davis, if he can't rebound to his old form during what remains of his seven-year contract, will be a star falling on a manager in the future. That may or may not be Showalter.

But it's because of Showalter and his turns of phrase that every time this situation arises -- like it did with Manning in New York -- I think about the Orioles' skipper and falling stars. •

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UPON FURTHER REVIEW

Yankees, Aaron Boone Show Baseball Managers Aren't What They Used To Be

★ JIM HENNEMAN

It's getting to the point where baseball managers and old gray mares have a lot in common -- they ain't what they used to be.

That's a weak attempt at humor, perhaps, but it's becoming more obvious by the hire that managers don't have the same clout as their predecessors. In fact, you might not be far from the truth to classify recent newcomers as little more than mid-management.

Front-office puppets might be a little too strong for those who have been in the establishment for a while, but you get the point. If the nerds haven't taken over, they've at least planted a strong foothold in the castle -- and there is zero indication the trend will change anytime soon. All of which means that manager Buck Showalter is probably riding in his last rodeo -- which I would guess means he'd be much more likely to accept an extension from the Orioles than take a chance on another horse to ride.

With seven-plus years in the Orioles' dugout, and with more than 18 years of managing in the major leagues on his resume, Showalter qualifies as one of the dinosaurs of a changing profession. Experience is rapidly giving way to OJT (on-job training) programs, and while the jury is still out, the evidence overwhelmingly suggests the "old guard" is being phased out, very soon to be regarded as the "former guard."

There was a time when prospects needed some major league exposure just to get in line to buy a ticket for the managing carousel -- and once aboard they were usually guaranteed a couple of turns around the circuit. That is no longer the case, as MLB has moved on to a trial-by-error system. Call it "managing by the numbers."

Make no mistake about it, for better or worse, MLB is being driven by analytics,

not strategy. The "gut" feel has given way to pitch-by-pitch statistical analysis that relies more on technical than strategic skills.

When the New York Yankees cut ties with manager Joe Girardi after coming within one game of the World Series in a year they were picked no higher than third, it became obvious executive vice president Brian Cashman had a plan that had little to do with tradition. The fact that the most storied team in all of professional sports had a managerial vacancy for more than a month after the season ended, barely a week before the Winter Meetings, pretty much told you all you needed to know.

New Yankees manager Aaron Boone, who had a 12-year playing career, comes from a third-generation baseball family that has a staggering total of 64 years of experience in the big leagues. His brother Bret logged 14 years, and their father Bob caught for 19 years and managed for six more.

Boone's grandfather, Ray, had three hits including a home run during a 3-0 win for the Tigers in the first game ever played by the Baltimore Orioles, in Detroit April 13, 1954 -- the seventh season of his 13-year career. He is the patriarch of the first family to produce three generations of major league players -- the first of five such families in MLB history.

(Bret's son Jake was drafted by the Washington Nationals last year, and should he ever make the major leagues, the Boones would become the first four-generation baseball family and, having seen all of the four Boones play, it'll be time to go.)

With this kind of background, Aaron Boone would figure to be a logical candidate to manage any team, but my first thought when he was hired by the Yankees was that ESPN had lost a very good analyst who had quickly become one of the best in the business. And more than likely it was his experience in the booth and on the fringes of the game that played a big

role in Cashman's decision.

While the game that he had grown up around changed, Boone obviously was more than a casual observer. As is the case now with any new hire, Boone understands the impact analytics have had on the game, undoubtedly a key element.

There can be little doubt that the Yankees have bought in big time. It wasn't like they were in a massive postseason drought. Girardi was in New York for 10 years, and an average of 91 wins would seem to satisfy even the most demanding critic, certainly this past season. But there was only one World Series trophy delivered, and Girardi had detractors, many obsessed with his somewhat stoic demeanor, but you'd have to be a nitpicker of the highest order to complain about the overall body of work.

We'll never know what would've happened had the Yankees outlasted the Houston Astros and made it to the World Series. It's hard to imagine Girardi losing his job under those circumstances, but the

mere fact the Yankees let him go into the final year of his contract without any hint of an extension probably said more than his win-loss record.

As this is written, the Yankees still didn't have a coaching staff in place, a situation that would be deemed unsettling for most teams, but somehow seemed almost normal given the unusual set of circumstances. The fact that most of Cashman's interviews would have been rookie managers pretty much said it all. Tradition was not going to be a factor in naming the 33rd manager in Yankees history.

Boone himself has a very brief, but unique, background in pinstripes. Filling a hole at third base, Boone played 54 games for the Yankees in 2003, when he hit two memorable home runs -- one a game-winner against the Orioles, the other a more dramatic, 11th-inning blast off Tim Wakefield that beat the Boston Red Sox in Game 7 of the American League Championship Series.

But it was that winter that Boone had a prolonged effect on the next decade of Yankees history. He tore up his knee playing basketball, which opened the door for the infamous trade that brought Alex Rodriguez to New York.

The Yankees have made a bold move gambling that his second venture won't produce the same degree of unrest. •

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Terps' Bruno Fernando Exhibits Energy, Enthusiasm On And Off The Court

★ LUKE JACKSON



aryland men's basketball freshman forward Bruno Fernando quickly became one of the Terps' most indispensable players after the 2017-18 season started, bringing toughness to a team that struggled to rebound last season, as well as athleticism and offensive skills to a team that needed interior scoring.

But it's Fernando's energy on the court that has endeared him most to fans early in his career in College Park, Md., as he goes all out on both ends of the court while encouraging the home crowd to get loud

whenever possible. Fernando's enthusiasm for life off the court has drawn people to him in recent years, as well, which includes his season with the IMG Academy (Fla.) postgraduate basketball team during the 2016-17 school year.

John Mahoney, the head coach of IMG's postgraduate team, recalled an event last school year in which his team worked with the Sarasota, Fla.-based Miracle League of Manasota to help special needs adults play baseball.

"I remember this kid, he was playing -- he probably had to be 25," Mahoney said. "He was about 6-[foot]-5, 6-[foot]-6 and walked over to Bruno and goes, 'Hi! My name's Dan. What's your name?' And Bruno told

him, and he just walked away. So someone wanted to take a picture and [Fernando] goes, 'Dan! Get over here. You're my buddy. You're taking a picture with me.'

"And that was it, that was his boy the rest of the day. And he was just that kind of kid. It was fun to watch. I was like, 'Wow. This kid's special.' A lot of kids, it's an uncomfortable environment to be in, around people like that that are less fortunate, but he gravitated to it."

Fernando grew up in Luanda, Angola, with seven siblings. He developed into a standout with the country's national basketball program and started his basketball career in the United States at Montverde Academy (Fla.). Fernando also played for the Florida-based Each 1 Teach 1 AAU program, which competes in the Nike Elite Youth Basketball League circuit.

Fernando played for E1T1's 17-and-under squad during the 2015 and 2016 seasons. He played with Jonathan Isaac of the Orlando Magic and Tony Bradley of the Utah Jazz in 2015 and Kentucky star Kevin Knox in 2016. Steven Reece, Fernando's coach with E1T1, said Fernando was "probably one of the most dominant players of the EYBL circuit" by the end of the 2016 season, but something else impressed Reece, too.

"On the court and off the court, Bruno's been like a big brother and mentor -- when I say mentor, like lead by example, always checking up on all the kids in our program," Reece said. "Even when he was on [the 17-and-under] team, he would come to a 15-and-under game and he'd go right to the bench and encourage the younger guys. And he still does that to [this day]. He'll give me a call or shoot me a text, say, 'Coach, I love you, thinking about just checking on the guys.' That's Bruno Fernando."

Fernando committed to Southern Methodist in April 2016, but de-committed later in the spring. He then enrolled at IMG Academy for a postgraduate season, committed to Maryland in October 2016 and signed with the Terps a month later as part of Maryland head coach Mark Turgeon's 2017 recruiting class, which also included guard Darryl Morsell (Mount St. Joseph).

Mahoney said Fernando came to IMG as a post player, but given the construction of Mahoney's roster and Fernando's offensive skill set, Mahoney moved Fernando to the wing for the season. That helped develop Fernando's ball-handling and shooting -- Mahoney said Fernando led IMG in 3-point shooting at 44 percent, while maintaining his game on the interior.

At one point, Mahoney's team hosted U.S. Army personnel for a 36-hour Invictus course that pushed his team physically and mentally.

"Bruno was unbelievable," Mahoney said. "He stood at attention. He was, 'Yes, sir! No, sir!' Within two hours, we'd have to do all these tests and stuff -- and it's more mental than it is physical. ... The major came over to me and he said, 'That's your leader right there. He is unbelievable.' And I said, 'Bruno?' And he goes, 'Yes. I'm telling

you.' And he was."

Fernando declined the opportunity to play for Angola in the FIBA U-19 Basketball World Cup this past summer, instead opting to take summer courses at Maryland. Turgeon hinted at his team's media day Oct. 31 that Terps fans would enjoy watching Fernando play, calling him a "6-[foot]-10 Dez Wells," who was a first-team Big Ten player for the Terps several years ago. Turgeon's observations turned out to be prescient.

Fernando was averaging 10.2 points, 5.6 rebounds and 2.0 blocks per game while shooting 61 percent from the field through 11 games. He has the athleticism to play well above the rim to finish off pick-and-rolls against man-to-man defense or alley-oops over a zone defense, and the polish to catch the ball deep in the post and score with one of his reliable post moves. One of his moves is a spin move to his right that takes him to the rim.

"That spin move, I think I've been with that spin move since I was [at Montverde] -- my junior year," Fernando said. "And my coaches always told me, 'Stop spinning, stop spinning!' But I just keep doing it. It's just something that comes natural. I think I do a great job recognizing where the defense is and just spinning and try to score out of it."

Fernando was responsible for the biggest play of the first month of Maryland's season. Facing a two-point deficit in the waning seconds of regulation at Illinois Dec. 3, Fernando put back a missed 3-pointer by sophomore Kevin Huerter to send the game to overtime. Fernando fought off an attempted box-out with his left arm and tipped in Huerter's miss with his right hand, a show of strength and skill. The Terps went on to earn their first Big Ten win of the season in overtime.

Fernando also was a key contributor during Maryland's comeback win against Bucknell Nov. 18. The Terps were down 15 at halftime.

"For me, I just think I'm a freshman on paper," Fernando said. "I'm not really a freshman when I'm out there on the court with the guys."

Fernando suffered a low right ankle sprain during the second half of the Terps' 87-62 victory against Ohio Dec. 7 and will likely miss the Terps' next few games. The team is hopeful he'll return in time for conference play.

When he does return, the next step for Fernando is ensuring that he's on the court more often. He had four fouls against St. Bonaventure Nov. 24, at Syracuse Nov. 27 and at Illinois Dec. 3, which cut into his playing time. Officials have called Fernando for fouls when he's tried to establish position in the post on both ends of the court.

"He's sometimes committing fouls that for him, he's like, 'I'm barely touching the guy,'" Huerter said. "And also being a big center -- someone who's really dominant, physically imposing -- the refs may look for him, to call more fouls on him. But for him, we need him in the game as much as he can be, and there's been a bunch of games so far this year like [Syracuse] where he's dominated the game when he's in but he's only really in for 16, 17 minutes, so we need to work on him being able to stay on the floor." •



Bruno Fernando

Nearly Fully Recovered From Knee Injury, Stephanie Jones Stepping Up For Maryland

★ JEFF SEIDEL



For the first time since she's been at Maryland, sophomore forward Stephanie Jones is showing what she is capable of doing on the basketball court when she has two good

knees.

After suffering a torn ACL midway through her senior year at Aberdeen early in 2016 and undergoing surgery, Jones returned to the court as a freshman for the Terps that fall instead of sitting out the season.

Jones, who came off the bench last year while continuing to strengthen her knee, now looks more like the player she was at Aberdeen prior to the injury.

The 6-foot-2 Jones started Maryland's first nine games this season and ranked third in scoring (11.7 points) and second in rebounds (6.4).

"I feel like I'm a lot better than I was last year, maybe not 100 percent of myself, but I'm getting there," Jones said. "It's like a mental game a little bit, especially when rebounding because that's how I got hurt. I just needed to get over it and play basketball. But I'm past that now."

Her older sister, Brionna Jones, also suffered a torn ACL midway through her senior season at Aberdeen. Brionna went on to become one of the country's top players while at Maryland from 2013 until last season. As a senior, Brionna, who now plays with the WNBA's Connecticut Sun, helped her younger sister work through the issues associated with coming back from the injury.

"Just having my sister here, and [because] she went through the same thing ... really helped," Stephanie Jones said. "She just told me to be patient and to keep working hard and your time will come."

Mike Jones, Stephanie and Brionna's father, was an assistant coach at Aberdeen when both girls played there. He initially thought Stephanie might be better served by sitting out last season.

"She struggled somewhat early last season because of the knee," he said. "She said she didn't feel normal until this summer. I think she can do a lot better, but for where she was last year to where she is now, there's no comparison."

Stephanie Jones played in 34 of the Terps' 35 games last season, all off the bench, and averaged 4.1 points in 9.1 minutes per contest.

This season has been a different story. Jones recorded her first career double double -- 11 points and 18 rebounds -- during Maryland's season-opening, 91-58

route of Albany Nov. 10.

Jones also posted 21 points and nine rebounds during a 92-65 victory against Niagara Nov. 16 and scored 24 points and added seven rebounds during a 111-49 rout of Howard Nov. 21.

Last season, Jones never reached double figures on offense.

Maryland head coach Brenda Frese has enjoyed watching Jones develop into a true threat this season.

"She's just showing the consistency factor game in and game out," Frese said. "She just brings a level of tough-

ness. She's just the glue for us."

Part of what makes Jones so valuable is her versatility. Jones played all five positions at Aberdeen but is now working mostly at power forward and center. Frese said Jones can do anything the Terps need.

Amber Milnes coached Jones at Aberdeen and said she's not surprised by how quickly her former player came back from the serious injury.

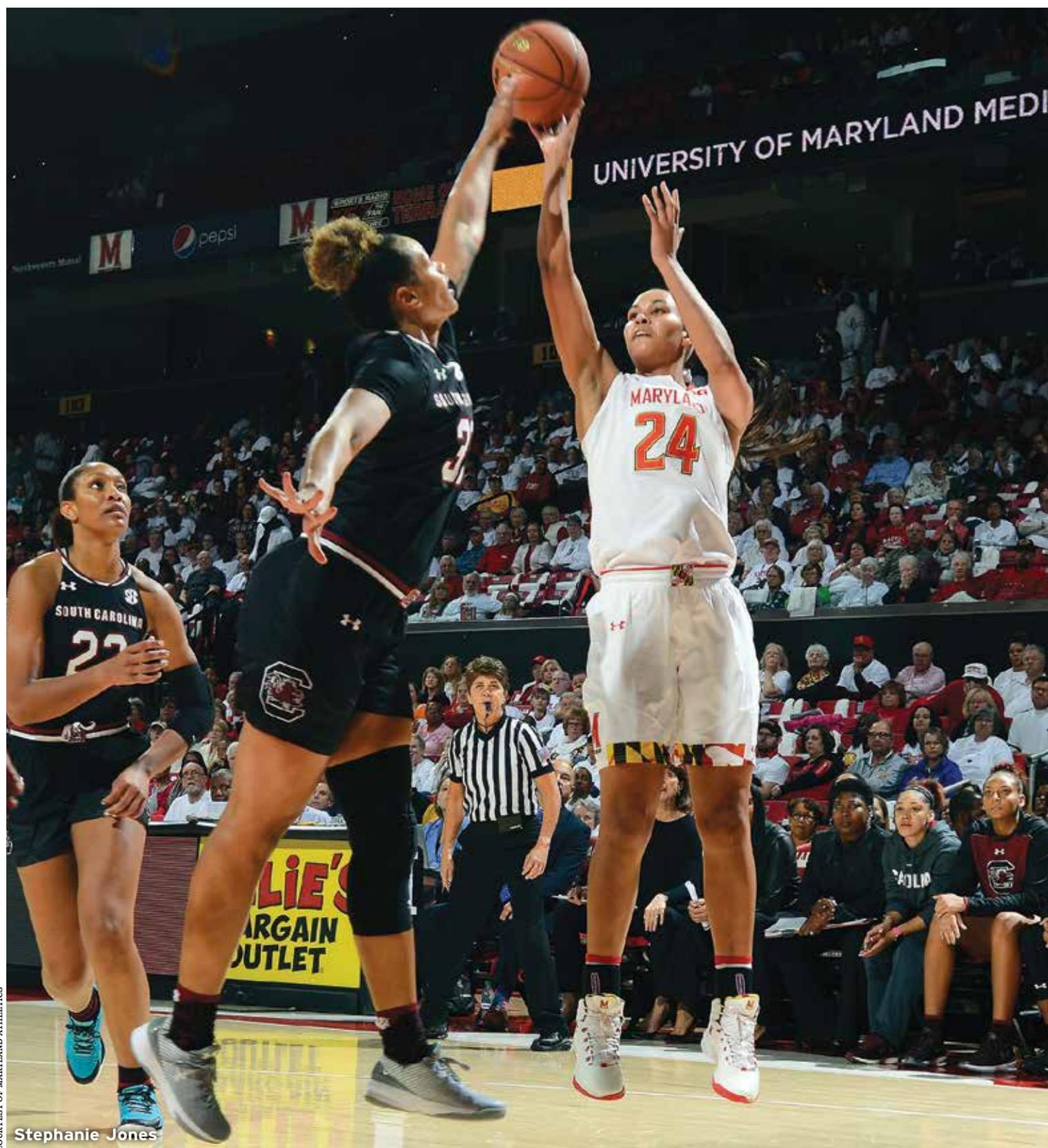
"Stephanie is that player that will give you 110 percent all the time," Milnes said. "I am not surprised at all that she

worked hard during her rehab and continued to put in the work. She comes from a family that knows hard work is what gets you what you want."

Jones may have gained one positive from the experience -- insight into a possible career. The kinesiology major hopes to become a physical therapist, something she became interested in while laboring through her own recovery and rehab.

Now almost two years since the injury, Jones has endured surgery and rehab and evolved into a significant part of the Maryland women's basketball program.

"I think from last year to this year, I am more confident in myself on the court," Jones said. "You have to play hard every day. I feel real confident with myself." •



Stephanie Jones

COURTESY OF MARYLAND ATHLETICS

Fullback Anthony Gargiulo Emerging As Key Playmaker For Midshipmen

★ TODD KARPOVICH

Navy fullback Anthony Gargiulo searched the stands following a breakout performance against SMU Nov. 11 and tracked down his biggest fans -- his mom and dad.

Sal and Lisa Gargiulo leaned over the lower guard rail at Navy-Marine Corps Stadium and each gave their son a huge hug as the Midshipmen celebrated another key victory.

Gargiulo, a 6-foot-2, 239-pound junior, carried the load during the Midshipmen's 43-40 win that day. He broke two runs for 21 and 29 yards on Navy's final possession that set up the game-winning field goal by J.R. Osborn.

When Navy's sputtering offense needed a spark, head coach Ken Niumatalolo turned to Gargiulo. The burly fullback responded by leading the Midshipmen's heralded rushing attack, much to the delight of his close-knit family.

"I'm blessed to have the parents I have," Gargiulo said. "They're great people. They're probably my greatest supporters. Everybody says, 'I've been watching you forever,' but they literally have been watching me forever.

"It's funny because my mom didn't want me playing football when I was little. She said, 'You're too soft, you're too nice, you're never going to be able to play.' My dad said, 'No, no, he's going to play.' And ever since 4 years old, I've been playing. I'm honored and blessed to be at the point I am now."

Gargiulo rewarded his coaches' confidence in him by running for 145 yards on 15

carries and a touchdown against SMU. He followed that up with 87 yards rushing during a 24-17 loss against Notre Dame Nov. 18, and 71 yards and a touchdown during a 24-14 loss to Houston Nov. 24.

When asked about his career day against the Mustangs, Gargiulo said the answer was simple: His offensive line opened huge holes for him to break long runs.

"I know exactly where it came from. It was that front five," Gargiulo said. "I don't think I've ever seen holes as big as they made. It just seemed like everything was perfect. I've never seen holes like that in practice, and that's usually where you see the good stuff. All I had to do was run straight, stay up and hold the ball. I couldn't have asked for a better performance from that front five."

The Midshipmen are generally loaded at fullback each season. As a result, there is fierce competition for playing time. Gargiulo excelled during spring practices this year and moved to second on the depth chart entering the regular season behind senior Chris High, who has also played a key role.

Gargiulo shed 12 pounds to help with his quickness and that strategy paid off. Over the course of the year, he has earned more reps and has been a go-to player out of the backfield.

"I'm just proud of the way Anthony has progressed through the program," Navy fullbacks coach Mike Judge said. "He's kind of your prototypical Navy football player in that regard. He came in and had a lot to learn, but embraced the culture here of working hard and grinding away. He stayed the course, has improved ev-

ery year and earned everything he's gotten."

Gargiulo appeared in just three games last season and finished with 29 yards on nine carries and a touchdown. He scored his first collegiate touchdown on a 2-yard run against SMU in 2016. Gargiulo knew he needed to work harder in the offseason to earn his reps. He impressed his coaches and teammates with his determination to make an impact.

"Having that competition really pushed me to be better," Gargiulo said. "I got into the playbook a lot harder and paid more attention to what I had to do. I realized there were a lot of little things I needed to perfect to even get noticed among all the talented players we have here. It definitely helped me to be better."

Gargiulo was a standout in football and lacrosse at Colts Neck High School in Monmouth County, N.J. He earned first-team all-state and first-team all-division honors and was the league's Offensive Player of the Year his senior year. He was also a first-team *Asbury Park Press* and first-team All-Monmouth selection.

Gargiulo caught Navy's attention when he finished his final high school season ranked fifth in New Jersey with 1,666 rushing yards, fourth with 27 rushing touchdowns and second with 139 tackles. He ran for more than 1,000 yards in each of his last two seasons and 3,436 yards for his career. He also received the Board of Education Award of Excellence and the Maxwell Football Club Award.

Gargiulo received offers from Penn State as a preferred walk-on, Connecticut, Towson and Villanova. However, he thought the Naval Academy would better

prepare him for his professional life after graduation.

"To be honest, it was mainly for my family," said Gargiulo, who attended the Naval Academy Prep School during the 2014-15 academic year. "I didn't know what I was going to do with my life, and I saw the opportunity of getting a great education, having a job afterward and playing Division I football for a great coach. I couldn't really turn that down. I talked to my family, and they were behind me one-hundred percent."

Gargiulo also could have played college lacrosse and was recruited by several schools during his freshman year of high school. He was a starter on the 2010 under-15 U.S. National Lacrosse Team that went undefeated and won the championship. Gargiulo was a four-year starter for the Colts Neck lacrosse team and served as team captain his senior year.

"Freshman year, I had schools talking to me," Gargiulo said about lacrosse. "But I turned them down. I wanted to focus on football."

However, there was a big transition in playing football at Navy, which runs the triple option and relies heavily on its fullbacks to set a physical tone. He was able to run behind a lead blocker in high school. At Navy, he is asked to break through the line and reel off yards.

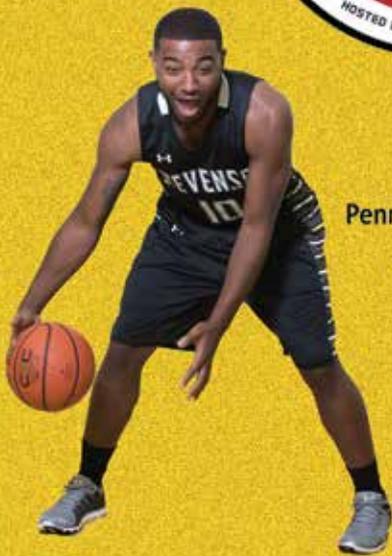
"In high school, I was able to get the ball, slow it down and see what was opening up and then hit it at the end," he said. "In this one, it's full speed, and if it's not there, you have to make it there. I know that was my biggest challenge. I tend to overthink things sometimes."

Now, Gargiulo is prepared to play an even bigger role next year as a senior. As an economics major, the foundation is also laid for a successful life after football.

It's the Navy way. •



Anthony Gargiulo



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Penn State Abington vs. Merchant Marine - 6 pm
Medgar Evers vs. Stevenson - 8 pm

Saturday, December 30
Consolation Game - 2 pm
Championship Game - 4 pm

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Cross Country Runner Soliana Goldrich Leaving Her Mark At Goucher College

★ SCOTT LOWE



When Soliana Goldrich was a sophomore running for her high school cross country team, her goal was to not finish last in every race.

Now, as she prepares to graduate from Goucher College with a degree in psychology after two seasons as cross country captain and emerging as the team's top

runner, her coach isn't quite sure how he will replace her.

"It will be a tough void to fill," said John Caslin, Goucher's head coach of cross country and track and field, "but she led by example, and I think her teammates are ready to try and see if they can fill her shoes. Soliana has been a reminder of what four years of college can help a student-athlete become."

At Goucher, Goldrich has progressed from being a runner who was sidelined by anemia as a freshman to becoming a team leader and the Gophers' top finisher at the Landmark Conference Championships. She will graduate a semester early, magna cum laude with honors and better than a 3.7 GPA.

Her cross country and track and field commitments, which include daily practices, weight-room workouts several times a week, team meetings and meets, would be enough to wear out any college student. Yet she finds time to do more and still excel academically.

Goldrich has been a campus resident assistant, a member of two national honor societies, a dean's list student since fall 2015, a participant in psychology research groups that meet weekly, a presenter of research findings at conferences in Boston and Vancouver, a volunteer for various causes and a leader in starting a campus interfaith club.

"It's a lot of time management," said Goldrich, an Austin, Texas, native. "Honestly, I think competing in a sport has pushed me to manage my time better, because when you have your specific class times and your specific practice times and your time to lift, making sure that you have time for all of that really forces you to learn how to fit things in."

Goldrich's ability to juggle so many commitments and activities while excelling athletically and academically earned her recognition as the 2017 Landmark Conference Women's Cross Country Scholar-Athlete, presented to one women's cross country competitor who maintains at least a 3.2 GPA.

"It's not something I expected," she said. "The person who won last year was our conference champion, so I always associated it with being a stellar athlete and stellar in academics. I do decently well in academics, so that component doesn't necessarily surprise me, but being recognized for my athletics and academics is something I never saw myself doing. It's not like I'm a naturally talented runner. I've put in a lot of work over the years to improve, just like I've worked hard to improve my academics. So seeing all that hard work pay off and being recognized for that is really exciting."

Goldrich was the fourth Goucher women's cross country runner to receive the honor.

"Soliana's academic record was the main reason she was selected," Caslin said. "But her improvement as a runner also stands out. She has made remarkable improvement over her four years, improving by over seven minutes for 6,000 meters, winning the Goucher Cross Country Classic and just missing making all-conference by finishing 16th [at the conference championship]."

As a freshman, Goldrich's anemia left her "tired from climbing a flight of steps," but it also pushed her to learn more about what foods would help maintain her energy and research the optimal diet for distance runners.

She came back stronger as a sophomore, and then

something clicked athletically. Goldrich became one of the top three runners on the team, and Caslin challenged them to finish in the top 10 at their home meet. She had not previously performed at that level, but that day Goldrich pushed herself like never before, and all three runners achieved Caslin's goal.

"Not being able to run my freshman year really helped me develop a hunger," Goldrich said. "I would watch people while they were doing the workouts. Sometimes it gets hard while you are running, so I think realizing that I really

missed it and it was something I wanted to do even though it was hard, was really important for me."

Since then, Goldrich has not stopped improving. She competed in the first indoor track meet of the season Dec. 1 at Susquehanna University and turned in her best career performance. Goldrich improved her mile time by 10 seconds, recording the seventh-best mark in school history (5 minutes, 39 seconds), and also turned in Goucher's fourth-best 3,000-meter time (11:22.67).

While Goldrich thinks she could break a few school records if she had another month to compete, that was her final meet as a collegiate athlete. In a few weeks she will graduate and wait to see where she is accepted for graduate school.

"Nothing like going out on top," Caslin said. "It has been an honor and a privilege to coach her." •



Soliana Goldrich

DAVID SINGLAIR/GOUCHER ATHLETICS

Quiet Demeanor Belies Bel Air Wrestler Brent Lorin's Extraordinary Success

★ WICK EISENBERG

Brent Lorin is a subtle person.

To Craig Reddish, Lorin's wrestling coach at Bel Air High School, his quiet demeanor makes it easy for the 5-foot-4 junior to blend in with his teammates.

"If I lined up all the wrestlers on my team, I'm not sure you'd pick Brent out of the group as the two-time state champion -- even if you have a couple guesses -- because he doesn't jump out at you," Reddish said. "That all goes away when you watch him wrestle. He does a great job, and it becomes apparent how talented he is very quickly."

It also becomes obvious how adept Lorin is on the wrestling mat when you read his accomplishments. Lorin, who currently competes in the 120-pound division, hasn't just won two Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association state championships, but he's also undefeated in high school competition.

He's also the first multi-time state champion Reddish has coached in his 25 years as head coach at Bel Air.

"Brent has tremendous balance, which makes him really tough for people to score on," Reddish said. "He's always in control during his matches and also has a tremendous work ethic. In practice, he goes full tilt. Brent isn't the type of kid who wrestles to get attention or glory. He does it because of this inner pride he has. It's great to watch."

As exceptional as Lorin has been, he entered the scene under the radar. While Lorin did wrestle before high school with Bel Air Junior Wrestling, he experienced more success in judo. Lorin started to compete in judo as a 7-year-old and won a United States Judo Association/United States Judo Federation national championship at 12 in 2013. He also finished second as a 14-year-old at the 2015 Presidents Cup.

For all his success in judo, Lorin wasn't sure how he'd fare on the high school wrestling mat.

"When I started in high school I had no idea where I would end up," Lorin said. "I just wanted to join the team and didn't even know if I would make varsity. It's a sport I really like, so I just went into it focused on getting better. I wasn't preoccupied with where I'd end up within the team."

Where he ended up was at the top of the podium at the 2016 MPSSAA 4A/3A state wrestling tournament. In the 106-pound class, Lorin beat Christian Balmoris from Springbrook High School by a 4-2 decision in the championship round.

"It's hard to describe what it's like to win a state championship, but the payoff of having to put all this work into something and then getting that much out of it makes you want to scream," Lorin said. "That payoff at the end of a long season means so much to you. It's really something special."

Lorin began his sophomore campaign competing in the 113-pound weight division with a target on his back.

He continued to win, though, and capped off his second undefeated season by beating Parkdale High School's Axel Giron, 3-2, for the MPSSAA 4A/3A state title.

Lorin enters his junior year with 90 career wins in high school competition, which means he might have a shot at the public schools state record set by Joey Thomas of South Carroll.

Thomas, who graduated earlier this year, finished his career with 195 wins. Though Lorin would have to wrestle more matches than he has the past two seasons to surpass the record, he's actually had a better start to his career than Thomas, who lost four times during his freshman season.

To Lorin, breaking the record would be exciting, but it isn't something he's thinking about. He's more concerned with how he does against elite competition.

"I'm more focused on how I do in high-profile matches, like state championships," Lorin said. "If it's feasible for me to break the record it would be cool to do, but I just want to keep facing better wrestlers."

Lorin went outside the state during the offseason to compete against top wrestlers. He participated at the National High School Coaches Association Nationals in Virginia Beach, Va., where he finished with two wins and two losses.

He's also begun to think about where he'd like to compete collegiately. Lorin has excelled in the classroom, getting A's throughout high school and becoming a member of the National Honor Society. He has a 4.8 GPA for his junior year and will probably have the option of attending elite academic colleges.

Lorin has some time to make the decision, but whichever school he decides to attend, Reddish is confident both the professors and wrestling coaches will be ecstatic to have him.

"With Brent it'll come down to what he wants to pursue, though whatever he chooses to do, I have no doubt he'll be successful," Reddish said. "If he wants to wrestle at the Division I level, he can do it. If he wants to become a doctor, he can do that, too." •



COURTESY OF AERO
IN

Brent Lorin

Emma Kirts Named U.S. Army Impact Player Of The Month

★ WICK EISENBERG

Emma Kirts, who plays soccer at Towson High School in Baltimore County, is the U.S. Army Impact Player of the Month.

Kirts was nominated for the award by Brendan McFadden, an assistant coach for the Generals' girls' soccer team.

"On the soccer field, Emma is the ideal leader," McFadden wrote in his nomination email. "She leads by example while also being a vocal and supportive teammate."

With a roster consisting of just three seniors, Towson was in need of a leader in 2017.

Despite being a sophomore, Kirts, a forward, was thrust into the role of captain because she was one of the team's more experienced players after a freshman campaign in which she scored 10 goals and contributed nine assists.

"I like being a leader because I like helping my teammates," Kirts said. "I feel really honored that they would look up to me for guidance, especially this year because we were such a young team. It was really hard at first starting with mostly freshmen and sophomores, but we really grew as a team, which was special to be a part of."

Part of the team's growth happened as a result Kirts' idea that the team watch game tape as a group. During the sessions, players could offer tips and talk about their vision of the game together.

On the field, it translated to Towson playing as a more cohesive unit.

"It was more of a soccer tutoring program," Kirts said. "Watching yourself from another perspective, as well as talking about it, always helps you improve and become aware of what everyone is thinking on the field."

For her part, Kirts put together an excellent season that saw her earn Baltimore County All-Division honors, finishing the year with eight goals and 10 assists. Towson thrived, too, finishing with a 10-6 record. The group carried a four-game winning streak into the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association 3A North regional final,

where the Generals' season ended with a loss to Bel Air.

It's the third season in a row Towson has lost to Bel Air in the regional championship game.

"The whole team was motivated this year, especially after last season when we had a tough loss in the regional championship," Kirts said. "Even though our season ended the same way, we wanted the best for everyone and that was the idea behind watching film as a group together -- to keep bettering ourselves."

When she's not playing soccer at Towson, Kirts referees games during the fall for younger players and gives them tips on how to progress their skills. Kirts is also a counselor at a soccer camp during the summer.

"I help a lot of the kids learn simple soccer skills, and I try to work with all of them," she said. "It's a great time. I love to teach them, and I'm really looking forward to when the camp starts next summer. The kids come in every day excited to learn as much as they can, and I love that I get to help them personally. It's a really humbling feeling."

Kirts also plays basketball and lacrosse at Towson. She holds a 3.5 GPA and plans to continue her soccer career in college.

After the young Generals' encouraging 2017 campaign, the team has big hopes for the next couple seasons.

"We want to win states," Kirts said. "I think it's manageable because we are a really young team and we have lots of time to grow together."

In Kirts, the Generals have a leader they'll enthusiastically follow the next two years.

"She's a source of inspiration and motivation on the coldest and rainiest days," McFadden wrote. "Emma is the ideal player in many ways, and we are excited to see her continue to grow and lead." •

The Impact Player of the Month Award is given to an individual who has impacted his or her team in a positive way, both on and off the field.



SANDY BAILEY/COURTESY PHOTO

Emma Kirts

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COMMUNITY BEAT



★ WALKS/RACES

DEC. 17 -- HOLIDAY HUSTLE 5K

Celebrate the holidays with family and friends. Holiday attire is encouraged -- there are even awards for the best dressed. The race begins at 9 a.m. at Harford Community College and benefits Harford Community House, which provides transitional housing for homeless families with children in Harford County. To register, visit charmcityrun.com.

JAN. 1 -- RESOLUTION RUN

Worried about those extra holiday pounds? Looking for a way to make a difference in the community? Make a Resolution To Run or Walk is held in Patterson Park and benefits Earl's Place -- a transitional home for men who are experiencing homelessness. You can kick-start your fitness regimen for 2018 while you help give someone a safe place to live and a new beginning.



★ BASEBALL/SOFTBALL

JAN. 13 -- BASEBALL CARD SHOW

A sports card and memorabilia show to benefit Monsignor Slade Catholic School will be held at Monsignor Slade Catholic School in Glen Burnie from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. For more details, call Leo at 443-416-6447.

BLUE DEVIL UMPIRE ASSOCIATION

New baseball umpires are needed to officiate in Baltimore, Carroll and Frederick counties. No experience is necessary. Email Bob Frank at lawyerfrank@comcast.net or call 410-493-7011, or

contact Larry Silverman at Bluedevilumps@comcast.net or call 410-484-2118.

ADULT BASEBALL

Join the Eastern Baltimore County over-40 baseball league, which plays with wood bats on 90-foot diamonds. Players of all skill levels are encouraged to visit over40baseball.org or call Mike Lockett at 410-446-0443.

COCKEYSVILLE RECREATION

For updates about baseball registration for the Cockeysville Recreation Center, visit leagueathletics.com/?org=cockeysvillereccouncil.org or call 410-887-7734.

MUSEUM OF NEGRO LEAGUES BASEBALL

Visit the Hubert V. Simmons Museum of Negro Leagues Baseball at the Owings Mills Metro Centre. The museum is named after Bert Simmons, who played for the Baltimore Elite Giants. The museum is open daily and admission is free. Volunteers are always welcome. For more information, visit smnlbinc.org.



★ SOCCER/RUGBY/SQUASH

CELTIC SOCCER CLUB

Tryouts for the Celtic Soccer Club are for boys ages 6-18 and girls 6-12. Registration and additional information is available at baltimoreceltic.com.

SQUASH

SquashWise provides incentives for middle school students to excel academically, athletically and socially, as well as the opportunity to compete in local and national squash tournaments. No squash experience is necessary to become a tutor. Visit baltimoresquashwise.org to make your tax-deductible donation. To make equipment donations and/or become a volunteer tutor, email abbym@baltimoresquashwise.org.

MIGHTY KICKS PUP LEAGUE

The Pup League provides year-round soccer training for boys and girls of all abilities ages 2-7. It's designed to build motor skills, self-confidence and basic techniques. Ongoing programs are available around Baltimore. For more information, visit mightykicksbaltimore.com.

RUGBY

The Baltimore-Chesapeake Rugby Club, the region's only Division I men's rugby club, is looking for experienced players or those new to the game. For more information, email baltimorechesapeakerugby@gmail.com or visit baltimorerugby.net.



★ FOOTBALL

BALTIMORE TERPS YOUTH

Games are open to all players ages 4-14 regardless of weight or skill level. The games provide a platform for participants to play the proper position for their body size while also ensuring their success as they move on to high school and beyond. To register, visit baltimoreterps.com or call 443-863-TERP.

★ OTHER ACTIVITIES

BABE RUTH MUSEUM

The improved Babe Ruth Birthplace Museum has reopened next to Camden Yards. Babe Ruth's legacy shaped the sports and American life we live now. Consider making a tax-deductible donation. Visit baberuthmuseum.org/donate or call 410-727-1539, ext. 3012.

HOMESCHOOL SPORTS

Baltimore-area homeschooled boys and girls in grades six-12 interested in playing interscholastic sports -- such as soccer, volleyball and baseball -- can register for the upcoming school season. For more information or to register, email chensports@verizon.net.

MARYLAND OFFICIALS CLUB

Interested in becoming a high school swimming official in the Baltimore-Anne Arundel area? Experience as a competitive swimmer or coach at the high school, college or masters level -- or prior experience officiating -- is strongly preferred. Email mdcommish@comcast.net or call Mike Connors at 410-653-7307.

DUCKPIN BOWLING

There are openings for youth duckpin-bowling leagues for ages 3-21 at various duckpin centers in Baltimore. Most programs run Saturday mornings and include bowling, shoe rental and coaching. For more information, visit ndya.org, call Stacy Karten at 410-356-0936 or "like" duckpin bowling at facebook.com/theduckpinnews.

BICYCLE REPAIR

As a cooperative bicycle shop, visitors can work on a donated bike, use tools to fix a broken bike or buy ready-to-ride second-hand bikes. Volunteer staff will provide assistance. For details, visit velocipedebikeproject.org.

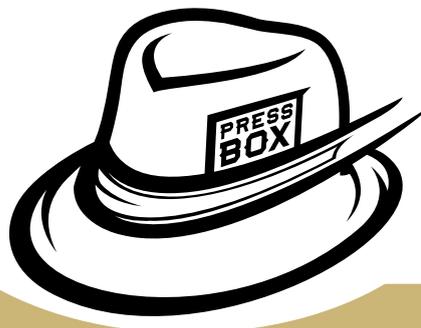
OFFICIALS WANTED

Do you love roller derby? Do you love whistles? Do you love stats? Then you may be ready to join the ranks of the Charm City Roller Girls' officiating crew, which is looking for skating and non-skating officials of all skill levels. No experience necessary. For more information, email referees@charmcityrollergirls.com.

BALTIMORE FITNESS ACADEMY

BMoreFit's goal is to reduce childhood obesity throughout the Baltimore metropolitan area by educating and mentoring urban youth with targeted programs for improved health, fitness and nutrition. For more details, visit bmorefit.org.

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MARYLAND GAMING

Optimism Abounds For Proponents Of Broader Legalized Sports Gambling

★ **BILL ORDINE**



he showdown presentations regarding sports wagering in front of the U.S. Supreme Court earlier this month resulted in great optimism among

proponents of broader legalized sports gambling who are hoping for a ruling in their favor sometime in the first half of next year.

It was not so much the persuasiveness of the competing oral arguments in the case pitting New Jersey versus the country's major sports gambling organizations that had legalized sports advocates smiling. Rather, it was the questions the justices posed to each side during the court session Dec. 4.

Supreme Court watchers reference those questions from the bench as a weathervane for how certain justices are leaning. After all, the briefs from both sides have been filed for quite some time, so oral arguments are more an opportunity for the justices to put the lawyers to the test.

For those keeping score -- and after all, this is a sports publication -- questions from five of the nine justices have been interpreted as showing a lean toward New Jersey, which has been trying for years to overcome a federal law that has kept the state's casinos and race tracks from offering sports betting.

Of the remaining justices, three seemed to pose questions that could be viewed as a lean toward the anti-sports gambling law being lawful.

This really is not a partisan issue, but since it always comes up these days, the five justices with the tilt toward Jersey could be viewed as primarily but not exclusively conservative and the three who leaned the other way are regarded as liberal. Justice Clarence Thomas, regarded as a conservative, reportedly did not speak.

The case revolves around a federal law known as the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act (PASPA). The oft-told tale of PASPA, which just observed its 25-year anniversary, is that it bans the vast majority of states from authorizing and regulating sports gambling while grandfathering four states that already had it in some fashion when the law was passed in 1992: Nevada (full

sports gambling) and Delaware, Montana and Oregon (limited sports gambling).

In recent years, two states have tried to offer full sports gambling -- New Jersey and Delaware -- but were stymied when professional sports leagues and the NCAA went to federal court and prevailed.

Eventually, New Jersey tried an end-run by repealing its own sports gambling laws as those laws applied to casinos and racetracks. The sports organizations went to court again to stop New Jersey, and again they won in federal district court and in front of a federal appeals panel.

Finally, New Jersey appealed to the Supreme Court, and in a surprise plot twist, actually got a hearing.

Among the legal arguments in the case, New Jersey contends PASPA unconstitutionally "commandeers" the states to not allow sports gambling. In opposition, the sports organizations argue that pre-empting a state from allowing sports wagering is not the same as "commanding" a state to do a specific thing and, consequently, is permissible under the Constitution.

And that, folks, is what makes for horse races.

However, consider this observation from Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy during oral arguments:

"So the citizens of the state of New Jersey are bound to obey a law that the state doesn't want but that the federal government compels the state to have."

In other words, if that's not "commandeering," what is?

As an aside, six years ago New Jersey voters went to the polls and actually approved sports wagering.

OK, so what happens now with the high court, which will rule perhaps in the spring?

- The Supreme Court could rule PASPA is flat-out unconstitutional, which would allow New Jersey and a bunch of other states to get the sports books up and running pronto.

- The Supreme Court could rule that PASPA is entirely within Constitutional allowances, which means that only Congress could change the sports wagering landscape by amending or repealing PASPA.

- Or the Supreme Court could issue a ruling that narrowly but favorably impacts New Jersey's unique attempt to allow sports wagering and green lights sports betting in that state.

In the latter case, the Supreme Court would sidestep broader ramifications of a full smackdown of PASPA, a result that could affect many other state-federal issues such as marijuana, physician-as-

sisted suicide and even self-driving cars, according to legal scholars.

If the Supreme Court does a tightrope walk and gives legalized sports-wagering proponents a limited win in New Jersey, that state's outgoing governor, Chris Christie, has said Jersey would have the sports books operating in a matter of weeks. There's a good chance Delaware, which already offers parlay betting on NFL games at its casinos, will try to be close behind.

Many other states are poised to use whatever blueprints they need to follow to get sports book operations into their casinos and racetracks, but all that will take some time.

In the case of Maryland, that time will likely be years. In order to have sports gambling in Maryland, a statewide referendum is required. The next opportunity for that is next November, but the General Assembly would have to move at the speed of light to make a 2018 referendum happen -- an extremely slim chance considering the General Assembly's 2018 session will probably be ended by the time the Supreme Court even rules.

Realistic bottom line: Even with a court ruling favorable to sports gambling, there will be no referendum in Maryland on sports wagering until at least 2020.

Meanwhile, casinos in New Jersey -- and perhaps even in Delaware and Pennsylvania -- will be writing those sports wagering tickets and becoming popular destinations for every hot sports date from March Madness to the Super Bowl. •



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THE REALITY CHECK

Glenn Clark's Baltimore Sports Wishes For 2018

★ GLENN CLARK



In my final print column of 2016, I introduced a hashtag (#In2017CanWe...) and offered Baltimore sports wishes for the coming year. Looking back on it, I didn't get my way.

Among my hopes for 2017 were: that we'd stop complaining about attendance at games; Baltimore would get high-level pro soccer back; get more live national sports broadcasts on local radio; honor Terps basketball legend Adrian Branch in the Xfinity Center rafters; embrace Baltimore's new Arena Football League franchise; see the Ravens develop an impact receiver; have the Orioles extend third baseman Manny Machado's contract long-term; see the UFC return to Baltimore, and take steps toward a new arena and revitalization of Pimlico Race Course.

It really wasn't my year. Although I

did also hope to see Maryland snap its 42-year lacrosse national championship funk, so I guess one out of a million ain't bad.

Let's try it again. The hashtag is #In2018CanWe... It can't be as bad as last year.

#In2018CanWe... get at least one of the five greater Baltimore men's basketball teams back in the NCAA Tournament?

It seems incredible that of the five Division I men's teams in Baltimore, none have made the tournament since 2012 (Loyola). Towson hasn't gone dancing since 1991 but has perhaps the best chance of any of the five to reach March Madness this season. (Morgan State also has a better-than-decent chance, while UMBC is pretty good in a tough America East conference.)

It's always nice to have Maryland go dancing, but there's something really wonderful about watching alums and fans of the local schools embracing teams they may not have otherwise been

paying attention to for years. (Although shame on you, because college basketball is one of the great treasures in the Baltimore sports landscape and these teams deserve more support in general.) How wonderful would it be for Morgan State to have a shot at knocking out Duke in the first round of the Big Dance? We can only dream.

#In2018CanWe... see some sort of direction from the Orioles at all?

Orioles executive vice president of baseball operations Dan Duquette has argued against a full rebuild of the team by stating that such overhauls aren't "very much fun." To some extent, he's right. There's nothing pleasant about trading away talent and signing up for losing seasons. At least not immediately.

But we've really gotten smarter as sports fans in recent years. Thanks to examples such as the Chicago Cubs and Houston Astros, we know that rebuilding is often the absolute best possible way to go about building a championship caliber team. And if the Orioles aren't going to spend the big money necessary to win a World Series, it might be their only hope. Many Philadelphia 76ers fans (albeit a different sport) have thoroughly enjoyed #TheProcess. Perhaps in Baltimore we might actually love #BirdSeeding or something like that, too.

The point is that we just want to see some sort of direction here. With Duquette and manager Buck Showalter's contracts about to be up, where is this franchise headed? Whatever the direc-

tion is, we'd just like to see it.

#In2018CanWe... feel a bit more of a "touch" from the Ravens?

This is a tough one because I don't think this issue is necessarily unique to the Ravens ... or to football ... or to Baltimore necessarily. But as we saw more empty seats in the stands at M&T Bank Stadium this year, I couldn't help but wonder if there was a bigger "touch" issue for the Ravens.

On a given day, where can a Ravens fan go to celebrate or embrace their fandom that has an actual feel from the team? Certainly the Ravens would tell you that their website, mobile app and social media platforms handle just that. And to some extent they'd be right.

But there's no brick-and-mortar options. You can't go to an official Ravens restaurant or pub for dinner. You can't stop by an official team store (unless you're at the stadium for an event). It's almost impossible to know where to find Ravens television programming at this point, and their flagship radio stations are: A. a conservative talk station that turns off half of the market and barely talks about the Ravens; and B. a rock and roll station that also barely talks about the Ravens.

So where does a Ravens fan turn to embrace their fandom in Baltimore? It would be nice to see this out more in 2018.

Also, let's roll over all of the stuff that I wanted but didn't get in 2017. A man can be greedy.

Happy New Year, Baltimore. •

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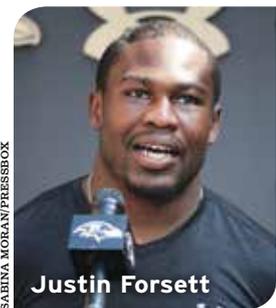
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SABINA MORAN/PRESSBOX

Justin Forsett

"It was incredible. I was definitely emotional. Just the kind of career I had, just had to bounce back and fight my whole career to establish myself and get my big break. [I] got an opportunity to shine here, and the fans and the city took me in as if I was their own. And it's meant a lot to me and my family, just this city. It was the land of opportunity for me, and I'll always have a special place in my heart for the city of Baltimore."

- Former Ravens running back Justin Forsett Nov. 30 on being recognized as a Ravens' "Legend of the Game" before the Nov. 27 Ravens-Texans game

"I love Darryl Morsell. I'm a big Baltimore guard guy. I had [former Virginia Tech star] Malcolm Delaney. I love Baltimore guards. So I love Morsell, I think he's terrific, and he's going to continue to get better. This team will get better. Roles are being redefined. [Forward] Justin [Jackson] will be more comfortable at the four, you'll see Morsell continue to improve as well as [freshman center] Bruno [Fernando] ... the potential for this team, to me, is really special."

- ESPN analyst/former Virginia Tech head coach Seth Greenberg Nov. 28 on whether (unlike past years) Maryland can improve as the season goes on

"It's a travesty what's happening at the youth level. I'm watching coaches care more about coaching plays and coaching good athletes, and they're not spending enough time teaching the game and proper technique, so I think it all starts at the youth level. If you teach it right at the youth level



KENYA ALLEN/PRESSBOX

Darryl Morsell

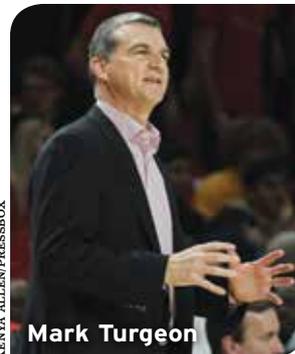
you can take away some of the big hits. And if you [take away those hits], now you're taking away some of the damage to the brain. The game of football is not for everybody. Just because you have size and you run fast and have some athleticism, that doesn't make you a football player."

- Former Maryland and NFL running back LaMont Jordan Nov. 9 on the dangers of kids playing football



COURTESY OF THE NFL

LaMont Jordan



KENYA ALLEN/PRESSBOX

Mark Turgeon

"It's so delicate, fragile and tenuous in what it takes to win a national title. But I do think what [head coach] Mark Turgeon's building is a consistent program that will deliver good results, and the more you knock on the door, the more likely you are, the more you enhance the odds, the probabilities, the percentages of eventually getting to that Final Four or winning it all. ... I think if this group stays together for consecutive seasons, then there's an opportunity to have that special run."

- Fox Sports analyst/former UCLA and St. John's head coach Steve Lavin Nov. 16 on the Terps having never made a deep NCAA Tournament run with Turgeon

"I've been playing third base. I'm feeling pretty confident over there right now and definitely getting better every day. I'm ready to play anywhere, just trying to become more versatile and just play wherever I can make a team. The more positions you can play, the better player you'll be. I just go out there and try to play hard every day and whatever happens, happens. Whatever [the Orioles] want to do with me is up to them."

- Orioles prospect Ryan Mountcastle Nov. 17 on continuing to transition from short stop to third base in the Arizona Fall League



PATRICK CAVAY/FREDERICK KEYS

Ryan Mountcastle

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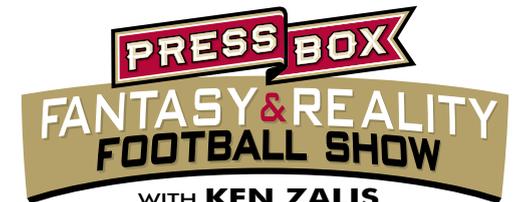
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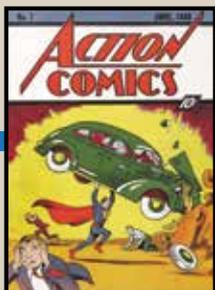
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