



Football's More Than a Game to the Beathard Family

6/17/16

Link: http://espn.go.com/college-football/story/_/id/16262951/iowa-quarterback-cj-beathard-brothers-learned-football-bobby-beathard-legendary-nfl-general-manager

C.J. Beathard and his best-friend brother, Tucker, were thrashing through their mom's Bible, hunting the perfect scripture. Like Scripture, tattoo ink is eternal.

It was spring 2014, well before C.J. emerged as Iowa's gritty all-Big Ten quarterback or Tucker signed a major Nashville recording contract; well before C.J. led the Hawkeyes to an undefeated 2015 regular season and a Rose Bowl berth or Tucker shunned a Division I baseball scholarship to take a swing at Music Row.

This was just a couple of kids primed to stipple their emergence to manhood across their chests. Literally.

Time was short. The boys' father, songwriting icon Casey Beathard, was en route home from a writing summit in Mobile, Alabama, and the boys took advantage of his absence to score some ink. They eventually settled on Psalm 27:1 -- "The

Lord is my light and my salvation -- whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life -- of whom shall I be afraid?"

In that moment, their old man was of whom they should be afraid.

"Dad was pissed, called me out," Tucker laughs now, seated alongside C.J. in Des Moines, where later that day he would perform at a charity benefit. "He said, 'Y'all just did that to be cool! Well? What's that verse say! What's it mean!'

"Well... We hadn't quite learned it yet. We got caught, and didn't come up clutch once dad got home."

Casey was steamed. He'd been tipped off by a friend that both boys had new tattoos on the upper left side of their chests. Same message. Same location. He expected honesty. C.J. eventually caved.

"It was funny," Casey says. "C.J. came clean, mumbled a little bit, looks over at Tucker and says, 'Tucker knows what it says.' I said right there, 'If you're gonna do it, walk that walk. If you're going to be that kind of leader, be a leader of men. You can't be a hypocrite. You better walk it.'"

If anyone ever had a leadership road map it's the Beathard boys. From the time they were born, the Beathard boys studied at Accountability U. Chancellor: Grandpa.

The family patriarch is legendary NFL general manager Bobby Beathard, whom Sports Illustrated once called "the smartest man in the NFL." In a 38-year career, Bobby assembled seven Super Bowl teams -- four of which won championships.

Despite the rigors of the game, Bobby always made certain family was first. His sons describe him as a humble and kind man who treats everyone with equal respect. His grandsons revere his love and compassion, not his resume.

"He never let ego creep in," Casey says. "To this day, he goes on and on about the things he missed. Goodness -- he has no idea how much he made, and how much that meant."

Before Bobby took any job, he ensured that management and the coaching staff approved of his children tagging along at training camp. Don Shula and Joe Gibbs both applauded it. In turn, Casey says he and his brothers, Jeff and Kurt, learned time management, dedication and the importance of relationships and accountability, all while mingling with legends.

"Family was and is my highest priority," Bobby says. "I take huge pride that the whole family feels such a close connection to each other."

Bobby's sons volunteered at Dolphins and Redskins training camps for years. Casey fondly recalls running barefoot across practice fields fetching water and towels and footballs for Hall of Famer Larry Csonka, whom he calls a "gigantic mentor."

With time, the grandkids enjoyed the same privilege.

"Growing up, we had no idea who he was -- we just knew we were getting to hang out with a bunch of NFL players, throwing the ball around," C.J. says. "We didn't have any idea why. He just worked for the team. When you get older you realize he's a legend."

Bobby was retired in San Diego, enjoying relaxing days on the waves, when Atlanta Falcons owner Arthur Blank called to recruit him back to the game. He happily obliged.

"I'm convinced the only reason he left California to come to Atlanta was to give my kids the experience that we had," Casey says. "That's one of the great memories for us as a family. He didn't do it for money. He did it to share that experience with those grandkids."

As young boys, C.J., Tucker and their youngest brother, Clay, ran around with All-Pros like Rodney Harrison, Junior Seau and Michael Vick. Through Vick's meteoric rise and plummeting fall and rebirth, Casey says his sons learned the scrutiny celebrities face.

These days the Beathards remain a charmed bunch. Casey is a decorated songwriter, issuing numerous hits to country music titans like Eric Church, Kenny Chesney and Tim McGraw. Tucker's career is taking off. His first single, "Rock On", is climbing the Billboard country chart. Clay is a former Tennessee Mr. Football who will play quarterback at Tennessee-Martin this fall.

And C.J., says grandpa, is an NFL prospect if he's ever seen one, with smarts, stature, strength and speed.

As a boy, C.J. would ask Casey if he should be a rock star first, or a NFL quarterback first. Casey, fearful C.J. would never grow into a Division I body (C.J. was just 5-foot-7, 113 pounds as a high school freshman, livid he wasn't the varsity starter) told C.J. "rock star" isn't a bad gig.

But by his junior year C.J. was 6-foot-2, with a big arm and a bigger heart.

"He's got the whole package at that position," Bobby says of C.J.. "He's an exceptional passer. I'm very confident he'll get drafted in the NFL."

For now, C.J. is focused on unfinished business. After that 12-0 start last fall, during which C.J. threw for nearly 2,400 yards and 14 touchdowns, the Hawkeyes lost a heartbreaker to Michigan State in the Big Ten championship game. Then Stanford, behind Heisman Trophy finalist Christian McCaffrey, crushed Iowa in the Rose Bowl.

"I can't even think about those games -- it still makes me sick," Casey says. "It took C.J. a long time to get over them."

Even though those losses are bitter, family was integral in helping C.J. move on.

"Dad said, 'I don't have a room for you to sleep in anymore,'" C.J. joked. "They were there for me. They were really beat up by it. But if you think about it too much you'll go nuts. Twenty seconds away from the B1G championship and the playoff, that's tough. But that's life."

For the Beathards, family is life. One day last spring -- Clay now 18 and legal -- Tucker grabbed his little brother, sped him off to the tattoo parlor and forced him to stipple Psalm 27:1 across the upper left portion of his chest.

"It was important to us that we all three have it; we're so close," C.J. says. "It's like a brotherhood thing."

A brotherhood thing, indeed.

Sounds like a country song.