

College Football

Wyoming QB's passion for football has put him in spotlight

By W.G. RAMIREZ
Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Josh Allen needed one thing before going to sleep when he was a kid growing up in tiny Firebaugh, California. And that meant his father had one responsibility when tucking his son into bed each night.

"I would literally cry if my football was not in my bed, and my dad would go and find it for me," the Wyoming quarterback said Wednesday during Mountain West football media day. "I've always loved football, it's been my favorite sport."

That's why the former three-sport star at Firebaugh High School had no trouble abandoning his 92 mph fastball — and offers to play baseball at the next level — to chase his dreams on the football field. Now the rising junior has been thrust into the national spotlight and is sitting atop many mock NFL drafts. The conference's preseason offensive player of the year, who accounted for 3,726 yards of total offense in 2016, has even been the subject of Heisman chatter.



Josh Allen led the Mountain West in touchdown passes (28) and passing yards per completion (15.33) in his first full year as a D-I starter.

AP File Photo

"Some people will say they love football, I don't think Josh could live without football," Wyoming coach Craig Bohl said. "He's certainly got a passion for it. The fact he was a three-sport athlete when he was younger has served him well. While that may have been a detraction because he

didn't have any of the recruiting stars behind his name ... there's no doubt he's got a passion for this game."

Allen's drive this year stems partly from last year's loss in the conference championship. The Cowboys hosted San Diego State and lost 27-24 when the

Aztecs stopped Wyoming on a fourth-and-20 in the game's final minute.

"I've been doing everything by any means possible to go out there and finish what we started; mentally I'm right there," said Allen, whose 28 passing TDs last season rank third among the single-season leaders in school history. "Going back to last year I feel like a majority of my interceptions were based on decision-making. That goes back to putting yourself in a situation of why you threw here, or why you shouldn't have thrown here, or why you should've thrown the ball away."

Allen doesn't consider himself one of the nation's elite quarterbacks but rather an equal member of a team he feels is poised to make a run at the Mountain Division title and to earn a trip back to the Mountain West championship game. He also sees an even loftier goal in the Cowboys' grasp.

"I keep preaching to the team our goal is the Fiesta Bowl," he said. "If you reach back to last year we were (picked to finish) dead last. This preseason stuff ... I don't care. We, as a team, know that all

this stuff means nothing. You can write it down on paper, it doesn't mean anything. Last year we won the Mountain Division, and this year we're going to come out and win as many games as possible."

Taking all that in stride, it's his humility and poise that demonstrates a maturity well beyond his 21 years.

"It's been crazy, it's been a whirlwind, it's been fun, a lot of media attention, it brings a lot of notoriety to the program and I think I've handled it pretty well," Allen said. "I really don't pay attention to much of the articles, or whatever anybody tweets, or texts or tags me in. I can thank my coaches, teammates, family, and friends for keeping me so well-grounded. I truly believe without all of them, maybe I wouldn't be in the position I am today."

"I'm focused completely and dedicated to the University of Wyoming, I love the teammates there, they're some of the best friends I'll ever have in my life, and I'm cherishing every moment that I have up there. If I wanted to be an NFL guy I would have left last year."

MARINERS: Zunino hits 16th home run

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second pitch of the inning just over the wall in right for his 21st homer. It was the first home run allowed to a lefty this season by Rzepczynski.

The Mets kept the rally going, helped when Wilmer Flores beat out a potential inning-ending double play. Walker and Granderson followed with consecutive RBI singles off David Phelps (2-5) to cap the three-run burst.

Jay Bruce hit his 27th home run in the first inning, a two-run shot on an 0-2 pitch, as the Mets built a 4-0 lead. New York rebounded to win for just the third time this season when trailing after seven innings.

Jerry Blevins (5-0) worked 1 1/3 innings for the win. Paul Sewald squeezed through the eighth despite allowing the first two batters to reach thanks to a strikeout of Mike Zunino and a groundout from Jean Segura with runners at second and third. Addison Reed pitched the ninth for his 19th save.

Conforto had plenty of attention on his return to the Pacific Northwest. He'd played one time in a high school show-



AP Photo/Ted S. Warren

New York's Michael Conforto watches his solo home run during the eighth inning of the team's game against Seattle on Friday.

case at Safeco Field and joked during pregame that the stadium seemed a lot larger as a teenager.

Zunino's 16th home run and Kyle Seager's two-run single were part of a four-run fifth inning that put Seattle ahead 5-4.

UP NEXT

Mets: Jacob deGrom (12-3) looks to become the second

pitcher in the National League with 13 victories. DeGrom has pitched at least eight innings in five of his past eight starts.

Mariners: Yovani Gallardo (4-7) makes his second start since rejoining the rotation. Gallardo went five innings and allowed three runs last time out against the Yankees in his first start since June 17.

TRADE: Ramirez previously played in Seattle from 2012-14

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mostly working in the seventh and eighth innings out of Seattle's bullpen. He was a closer in the past with the Marlins.

It was the second move for a reliever in as many days by Tampa Bay. On Thursday, the Rays acquired left-handed reliever Dan Jennings from the Chicago White Sox. Tampa Bay also nabbed first baseman Lucas Duda from the New York Mets on Thursday and has made a flurry of moves to bolster its

roster ahead of next Monday's non-waiver trade deadline.

The Rays also added right-hander Sergio Romo in the past week to try to solidify the bullpen.

Ramirez is making a return to the team he broke into the majors with. Ramirez has appeared in 26 games, with eight starts, for the Rays this year and was 4-3 with a 4.80 ERA. He was with the Mariners from 2012-14 before being dealt to Tampa Bay before the 2015 season.

Ramirez was primarily a

starter in his first season with the Rays, but has mixed starting and relieving each of the past two seasons.

"Erasmus brings us a good combination of experience, versatility and control as we look to both be better in 2017, and in future seasons," Seattle general manager Jerry Dipoto said in a statement. "We've added depth to our pitching staff in a variety of ways and maintained flexibility as we move forward with a player that is under club control for 2017, 2018 and 2019."



Oregon quarterback Justin Herbert speaks at the Pac-12 NCAA college football media day, Thursday in the Hollywood section of Los Angeles.

AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill

OREGON:

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"We're going to try and go even faster this year," Herbert said. "The emphasis is on going fast. We've got so many guys to make plays, and my job is to distribute the ball."

After fixing two programs already in his head coaching career, Taggart is taking on his biggest challenge yet with the Ducks. Oregon's 4-8 finish last season led to coach Mark Helfrich's firing just two years after he won the Rose Bowl and reached the College Football Playoff's championship game.

But Helfrich's former players hint at fraying aspects of last season's team, some of them visible only in retrospect. When a program has as much momentum and importance as Oregon, it's seemingly tougher to see why things aren't working while it's happening — and the differences under the new coaching staff are already clear.

"We're just coming together as a team and bonding," linebacker Troy Dye said. "You have to respect your brothers, love your brothers, and then it's easy to play the game. Last year, I feel like the team didn't know each other as well. Everybody had their own little groups. Now it's a real team-bonding situation. It's a real family group."

Taggart is the Ducks' first outside hire as head coach since Rich Brooks in 1977, and he realizes the high expectations inherent in the firing that led to his arrival. After several months of implementing his plan heading into fall camp, the former

Western Kentucky and South Florida coach still speaks passionately about his intention to instill his own athletic culture in Eugene, no matter how long it takes.

"It wasn't necessarily broke or anything," Taggart said about the Ducks' off-the-field culture. "I don't know what it was like before. It was just important that we get it the way that we want it, and knowing that that was going to take some time. We're still in the process of changing that, but it's been great."

Until last season, Oregon's approach appeared to work tremendously well. The Ducks had a spectacular six-season run under coaches Chip Kelly and Helfrich from 2009-14, but even the relatively minor slip of the past two years led to a major change.

Taggart made his intentions clear earlier this month when he dismissed talented receiver Darren Carrington following his arrest. Carrington transferred to Utah, depriving the Ducks of an offensive playmaker.

Although last season's slip was a surprise, not many people will be surprised if Taggart needs a few years to get the Ducks back on top. Oregon was picked to finish fourth in the Pac-12 North division in the preseason media poll.

Taggart knows he could have years of work to do, but he'll do it day by day.

"Coach has already brought a lot of energy we didn't have before," Herbert said. "He's so pumped up, even about practice. It's a contagious thing."

HALL OF FAME: Ex-Commissioner Bud Selig, Braves exec John Schuerholz also in

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in major league history and includes 70 or more steals in each season from 1981-86, a streak that stands alone in baseball history. Take a closer look at his accomplishments on the basepaths, and they are quite remarkable — his 84.7 percent success rate tops the list among players with at least 400 steal attempts.

Raines credits his fortune to the increasing popularity of sabermetrics, advanced statistics that give greater insight into a player's worth.

"I think they kind of looked at the numbers on the baseball cards," said Raines, who overcame a recreational drug addiction that hampered his production early in his career. "There's more to the game than just those numbers. Guys can be just as important to a team and an organization in a lot of different ways."

Rodriguez, who holds the major league records for games caught (2,427) and putouts by a catcher (12,376), hit 311 homers and batted .296 in his career. No surprise that he's only the second catcher elected on the

first ballot, following in the footsteps of his childhood idol, former Cincinnati Reds star Johnny Bench.

In 21 seasons spent mostly with the Texas Rangers, Rodriguez was a 14-time All-Star, won a record 13 Gold Gloves and took home seven Silver Slugger awards.

"I think I just prepared myself," said the 45-year-old Rodriguez, affectionately known as "Pudge." "I'm talking about blocking thousands of balls, making thousands of throws to second base, trying to throw the ball to the right side of the base."

"You can have ability, but if you don't have discipline, if you don't work on things you have to do, it's going to be hard for you to do it in your career."

The 48-year-old Bagwell, who played his entire 15-year career with the Houston Astros, was elected in his seventh year on the ballot. He's the only first baseman in history with 400 career home runs and 200 stolen bases.

"This is all overwhelming to me," Bagwell said. "Parts of me wonder, 'Why am I in here?'"



AP Photo/Alex Brandon, File

In this Dec. 5, 2016, file photo, former commissioner Bud Selig, left, and Atlanta Braves president John Schuerholz pose with their Hall of Fame jerseys on, during MLB winter meetings, in Oxon Hill, Md.

Bagwell ended his career with 449 home runs, was 1991 NL Rookie of the Year and in the strike-shortened 1994 season hit .368 with 39 homers and 116 RBIs in just 110 games to unanimously capture MVP honors.

Just as impressive: From 1996-2001, Bagwell had at least 30 home runs, 100 runs scored and 100 RBIs per season, only the sixth player in major league history to reach those marks in at least six straight years.

Schuerholz, who played

second base at Towson University and became a junior high school teacher in the Baltimore suburbs in the mid-1960s, always wanted to be a major leaguer and couldn't get baseball off his mind. So he sent a letter to Jerry Hoffberger, owner of the hometown Orioles.

The team gave him a spot in its minor league system. In 1969, Schuerholz joined the expansion Kansas City Royals and became general manager 12 years later. After the Royals won the 1985

World Series, he moved on to even greater success with the Braves. With Schuerholz calling the front-office shots, Atlanta won a remarkable 14 straight division championships.

In 26 years as a GM, Schuerholz's teams won 16 division titles, six pennants and two World Series. He was the first general manager in history to win a World Series in each league.

"I feel awed," said Schuerholz, whose only regret is that the Braves turned those division titles into only one World Series championship (1995). "I feel as thankful and appreciative of all the people who have helped me in my career and in my life to get to this point where a group decided that this guy qualifies for the Hall of Fame, this guy ought to be in the Hall of Fame."

Selig never realized his childhood dream of replacing Joe DiMaggio in center field for the New York Yankees — he couldn't hit a curve ball — but he left a large imprint during more than 22 years as the leader of the game. He was instrumental in the approval of

interleague play, the expansion of the playoffs, splitting each league into three divisions with wild cards, instituting video review and revenue-sharing in an era that saw the construction of 20 new ballparks.

Fans haven't forgotten that his tenure also included the Steroids Era and the cancellation of the 1994 World Series amid a players' strike.

Still, Selig left baseball in excellent shape economically — without labor strife and with a strict drug-testing policy that has helped clean up the game.

"In the end, I know what I set out to do and we pretty much accomplished it," said Selig, who led the group that purchased the Seattle Pilots in bankruptcy court in 1970 and moved the team to Milwaukee. "Yeah, there are things that happened that I think we reacted well to and got done what you had to get done."

"When I think of where we were in 1992 when I started and where we were when I left and where we are today, it's remarkable."