From Edgerton to Oakland, Carrier keeps the faith

By Steven T. Slack Reporter staff

Editor's note: The following was originally a two-part story that was published in the Edgerton Reporter on April 24 and May 1.

Playing in the NFL is less a practical career than it is a fantastical fillin-the-blank answer for grade school assignments. Only 7.1 percent of high school athletes move on to the NCAA. Of those, only 1.6 percent will make it to the NFL. So how does a 170-pound wide receiver from a school with an enrollment of around 500 students carve out a six-season career as an NFL tight end?

Ask Derek Carrier, who has done just that, and you'll likely hear one word more than any other, faith. Carrier spoke frankly to the Edgerton Reporter about faith but rarely in regards to himself or his talent. The Edgerton native instead credits his career to his faith in teammates, coaches, his wife, and, most prominently, God.

Carrier grew up in Edgerton, the son of Paula Carrier and Bill Pennekamp, watching the Packers every Sunday and idolizing Brett Favre. Instead of throwing touchdowns, Carrier would be catching them for the Edgerton Crimson Tide.

The 6-foot-4, 170-

pound wide receiver, nicknamed "Bones," also excelled in baseball and basketball. Carrier believes taking part in a variety of sports at the high school level has helped him as a professional.

"Being in different sports with different scenarios and different positions, I think it just helps with overall athleticism," Carrier said of his high school and college career. "In the NFL, players now are asked to do so many different things...No one goes out in the backyard and does special teams drills. Having that diverse base of athleticism helped me in the NFL without a doubt."

Asked about his high school success, Carrier is quick to credit his time with current baseball and football head coach, Mike Gregory.

"He was an awesome coach. He definitely helped me grow as a young man while I was in high school," Carrier reflected. "Everyone has their growing pains and their lessons that they're taught. He helped form me as both an athlete and a man and I'm very thankful for that."

Gregory doesn't recall many "growing pains" with Carrier but instead describes the NFL player as extremely intelligent and a good student. Gregory also noted that Carrier's work ethic was what truly propelled him.

"We've had a lot of

kids that are great athletes in high school but they get to college and the expectations are different," Gregory said while discussing Carrier. "He found the weight room and totally redesigned his body. Once the door was open to him, he stepped through and took full advantage of the opportunity."

The next opportunity Carrier took advantage of was at the Division III Beloit College where he decided to attend school, despite receiving a walkon offer from Wisconsin. Carrier still holds a number of receiving records at Beloit, including most receptions in a season, most touchdowns in a season and most yards in a season and career.

When asked for advice to young athletes who want to play at the next level, Carrier turns again to his faith.

Obviously it begins with hard work and the desire to become better," Carrier says before speaking to his specific experience. "I do everything as if it's worship. The athletic gifts and abilities I was given are to be able to go out and display those and glorify God on the field. At the end of the day, I kind of just leave it and say, 'Whatever the outcome is, Your will be done, not mine."

Carrier next spoke more generally about simply having a reason to achieve outside of one's



Derek Carrier celebrates after catching the go-ahead touchdown with only 21 seconds left on the clock against Pittsburgh. His second career touchdown, Carrier gave the ball to his daughter who had been born just four days prior. (Photo courtesy of the Oakland Raiders)

self.

"With young people sometimes...there's something they want to accomplish that they can show off," Carrier spoke delicately of his generation. "Not everyone's going to make the NFL so you kind of have to have a peace about it but also be able to work hard so that at the end of the day you know you gave it everything and that's what you can rest in."

Not everyone makes it to the NFL, but in 2012

Carrier did, beginning an NFL career that has spanned six seasons and five different teams.

The life of a backup tight end in the NFL is one frequently in transit, bouncing from team to team, uprooted by the whims of various front offices. It's appropriate then that Carrier spoke to the Edgerton Reporter this spring while in transit back home from his daily workout.

When asked about what challenges he faced

upon transitioning to the NFL, Carrier's list sounds mundane to the average NFL fan. Carrier's worries were identical to any young professional first entering the workforce.

"It was definitely a difficult adjustment at first, being in an environment so different from what I'm used to," Carrier said. "I was just trying to navigate everything. Now I have to pay my own bills and now I have to have all these

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