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TOP STORY

WKU FOOTBALL

'Camera man' to starting specialist: How Nash worked his way back into football

Media relations intern joined Hilltoppers two weeks before season opener

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The camera guy who posts to Instagram, that's Jared Nash.

Pacing the sidelines and position drill areas wearing khaki shorts and a Western Kentucky football polo, Nash had one eye on his phone posting social media content and the other on the field of which he was dying to return.

But until Aug. 16, that's who Nash was – a graduate student interning in WKU's media relations and marketing department, the Instagram guy.

So, forgive Terez Traynor for being caught off guard when Nash showed up in the locker room just days before the home opener holding a helmet in his hand rather than a cellphone.

"All the guys knew me as the camera man," Nash said. "Terez says, 'Oh, it's Instagram. Hey bro, get me at my locker.' I throw my helmet up in the locker and he said, 'Oh (expletive), you're playing now? You're not the camera man anymore?' I said 'No, I'm playing now.' "

Nash went from not having a roster position two weeks before the season to taking every long snap through three games and hearing his name called in an NFL Stadium for making a tackle on punt coverage.

If only Nash's journey back into a Hilltopper uniform was as simple as being the former camera guy. That road has included junior college in California as the first of at least seven schools he was either committed to or played for. It also involves odd-end jobs as a spring training bat boy for the Boston Red Sox, Lyft driver in Chattanooga, Tenn., ticket office assistant for the Bowling Green Hot Rods and do-whatever-Jeff-McGill-says position at the Bowling Green Country Club.

Nash attempted to web this all together with the Daily News during his shift in the media relations department on his 23rd birthday this week.

"It's been a crazy ride, honestly."

He then spoke for 45 minutes.

Nash is WKU's long snapper and the veteran presence in a special teams room where he and kicker Alex Rinella are the only ones with college football experience. Nash was once a Hilltopper for the 2016 season, but that one season is just as much a minor part of his story as it is the catalyst for his return.

See, Nash's college playing career chronologically lays out as such: Prepped in Fort Meyers, Fla., played freshman year at Saddleback Junior College in California, played one season at WKU, two seasons at

Tennessee-Chattanooga and is using his fifth and final year of eligibility back as a Hilltopper.

It's how each of those destinations and returns came about that made Nash reflective as he walked back to the field at Nissan Stadium by himself about 30 minutes after the Hilltoppers lost to Louisville on Saturday.

"This is wild," Nash recalled. "Three weeks ago, I was sitting on my couch playing video games and watching football and now here I am in an NFL stadium and my name is called out. All that hard work, all that hell I've been through these past five years."

It all starts with his right knee, which is about shot at this point. He was committed to Wagner University in New York but tore his meniscus three weeks before he was to leave Fort Myers. They pulled his scholarship and asked him to still come as a preferred walk-on.

Nash was a nationally ranked long snapper and rated the top prospect at that position through Kornblue Kicking. Brandon Kornblue, a well-renown kicking specialist, plays a major role in Nash's journey.

He spent one semester at Saddleback Junior College and tore his meniscus again with three games left in the season. He committed to Florida International, expecting to follow a coach there who ultimately took a job elsewhere. Because of the mid-January timing of that move, it

was too late for Nash to register for classes in the spring semester, so he moved back to Fort Myers and took a clubhouse job with the Boston Red Sox for spring training.

Through his tight relationship with Kornblue, Nash was connected to schools that included FIU, Arizona State, Southeast Louisiana State and WKU. Nash worked out for former coach Jeff Brohm and special teams coordinator Tony Levine. He came to Bowling Green and redshirted behind Nolan Dowling as the Hilltoppers went 11-3 and won the Boca Raton Bowl.

During the coaching change from Brohm to Mike Sanford, Nash stayed behind to try and show Sanford he deserved a scholarship and the long snapper job with Dowling graduating. At the time, Nash was a walk-on paying out-of-state tuition and the youngest of three sons to a single mother paying for college.

He found out via Twitter that WKU offered a scholarship instead to the nation's top long snapper in Ben Reeder, who made the 2017 Conference USA All-Freshman Team. Reeder played two seasons before leaving the team in the spring.

"I was caught off guard because they told me they were going to bring in a guy to compete and I had no problem with that," Nash said. "I worked my butt off and I felt like I got stabbed in the back. I wasn't going to get a shot to be put on scholarship."

Nash moved back home in the spring but took online classes through WKU. He committed to play at West Florida in Pensacola, but credits didn't transfer properly. Kornblue, "once again, saved the day," Nash recalls.

He connected Nash with a coach at UT-Chattanooga and he won the long snapping job during camp. He played in five games before yet another season-ending knee injury. But he was awarded a scholarship and played the 2018 season.

When it came to a master's program, UTC didn't offer the sports administration route Nash was looking for. He decided to forgo another year with the Moccasins and enter the transfer portal, looking to walk-on anywhere that offered his program and, just maybe, needed a long snapper.

A few FCS schools offered scholarships, but no master's track. He had preferred walk-on chances at Oregon State, Minnesota, Virginia, Ole Miss and Vanderbilt.

By this time, Nash had saved up enough money through scholarship checks and driving for Lyft in Chattanooga that he was fine with passing up a scholarship just for the sake of achieving a scholarship.

"I wanted to be happy," Nash said. "These past couple of years I've not been happy. I've been chasing that scholarship and all the wrong things."

Happiness was back in Bowling Green where he built strong

friendships with offensive linemen Tyler Witt and Seth Joest and quarterback Steven Duncan. Even when he was playing at Chattanooga, Nash would visit Joest and his family in Lexington and spent back-to-back July 4 holidays with the Witts in Chicago.



Nash came back and worked out for head coach Tyson Helton and special teams coach Andy LaRussa, but all roster spots were full. He still intended to return to WKU as a student and just stay patient in case an opportunity arose.

In the meantime, he picked up an internship with the media relations and marketing departments and an off-campus paid job at Bowling Green Country Club working in the pro shop and washing carts. His third day working at the course was the same day WKU held a tournament raising money for the football program and he once again put his face in front of LaRussa and Helton.

During that time, the walk-on offer from Ole Miss became so serious he took a visit and said he was guaranteed the long snapper job. Nash weighed the cost financially and emotionally and opted to stay at WKU, even if heavily advised to join the Rebels if he wanted playing time.

“I didn’t know if I would be happy there,” Nash said. “I literally live next door to Steven Duncan, Kyle Fourtenbary (and others) and they’re telling me to stay patient, it’s going to happen and you’re good.”

So, Nash became the camera guy taking pictures with his phone during camp and recording interviews all while leaning on hope. He stayed in shape by working out at the Preston Center, looking at Houchens-Smith Stadium in between reps hoping that roster spot would open soon.

Part of his connection to the team was knowing when no one would be at the facility in the evenings during camp. So, when Helton took the squad swimming at the country club or to the bowling alley during camp, Nash would come to the stadium by himself with two footballs and snap into the quarterback nets.

He was once kicked off the field while the soccer team started practice.

“It was hard,” Nash said. “Some part of me would stay ready. I’d still work out.”

The text from Kornblue came Aug. 16, two weeks away from the home opener. Nash was to call LaRussa. The coach picked up on the first ring and said a spot was open and asked him to be at the stadium in 20 minutes to fill out paperwork.

“As soon as it worked out for him, I was able to let him know and coach was on board and we got it done,” LaRussa told the Daily News. “He brings a veteran presence. He’s been in the fire before. He can relate to those guys and talk to them about situational things. He doesn’t get rattled as things come up in the course of a game.”

LaRussa said Nash’s biggest attribute is his consistency. The long snapper position may be the most overlooked position in football until something goes wrong. That happened at FIU on Sept. 7 when, for the first time in nine years doing the job, Nash overshot the 6-foot-5 Haggerty in the first half.

Nash only knew two coverage calls before the season but has eased his way into the routine once again of college football. Hearing his name boom across the stadium for assisting a first-quarter tackle brought everything together.

“When I got that call to come play, I didn’t care if they gave me a scholarship, I got to play football again one last year,” Nash said. “I get to go live out my dream and play with some of my best friends. That’s what I’m happy about. That’s what I came back to Western for.”

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