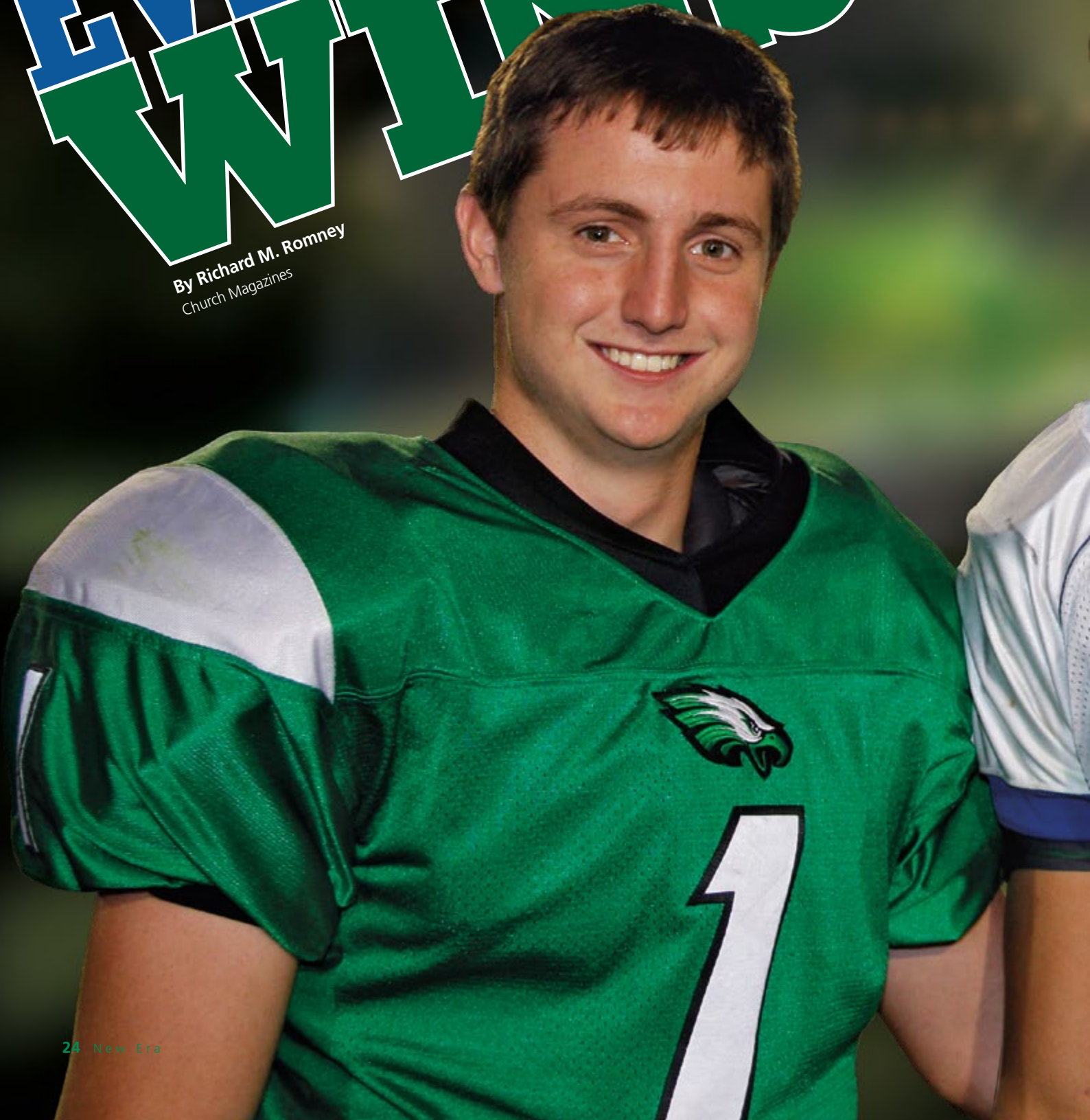


EVERYONE WINS

By Richard M. Romney
Church Magazines





When rivals meet, anything can happen. Even baptism.

When rivals play football, emotions run high. Players gear up to perform beyond normal expectations. Whole communities don school colors as neighbors debate with neighbors about the greatest game ever played. Who will win bragging rights for the coming year?

That's the type of intensity that builds in Arizona each time the Safford Bulldogs and the Thatcher Eagles meet in a rivalry that spans 80 years. So imagine what the Safford quarterback, Brandon McEuen, and the Thatcher quarterback, Teren Bingham, might discuss face-to-face the day before the big game.

How about baptism?

That's right. On Thursday they reviewed plans for Brandon's baptismal service. On Friday they faced each other as starters on opposing teams. Then on Saturday, Teren Bingham of the Eagles baptized Brandon McEuen of the Bulldogs.

Play by Play

Let's rewind and watch again so you can see what happened.

The story actually begins with basketball. Clear back in grade school, Teren and Brandon played recreational ball and became friends. "Brandon was always a better athlete than everyone else," Teren says. "I was just hoping to get into the game." As they continued to play various sports, they remained friends, even when they were rivals. And they both became stellar athletes.

Fast-forward to more recent times, about two years ago. David Palmer, having spent several years teaching at the Safford High seminary, had recently become principal of the Thatcher High seminary. Brother Palmer had been playing rec league basketball, where he became acquainted with Brandon. Brandon learned that Brother Palmer's son, Matthew, age 8 at the time, was about to have surgery to remove a lump in his jaw. Doctors feared it might be cancer.

"Brandon asked if he could visit my son after the surgery," Brother Palmer explains. "When

SAME JERSEY

"As priesthood bearers, we must realize that all of God's children wear the same jersey. Our team is the brotherhood of man. This mortal life is our playing field. Our goal is to learn to love God and to extend that same love toward our fellowman. We are here to live according to His law and establish the kingdom of God. We are here to build, uplift, treat fairly, and encourage all of Heavenly Father's children."

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, "Pride and the Priesthood," *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 56.





Brandon breaks free for another impressive run, as he did throughout the game. Above (left to right), Teren leads the Eagles on a successful drive despite a stubborn defense, Brandon scores big in seminary attendance, and both athletes build strength and endurance through scripture study with seminary principal David Palmer.

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See a video about this story at lds.org/go/812 or by scanning the QR code below (see page 40 for instructions). Also see a photo gallery at youth.lds.org.



he visited, he gave him a note and said if Matt would let him know when he came to a game, he'd make a three-point basket and then point to him in the stands." Sure enough, when the next Thatcher versus Safford basketball game rolled around, there was Matt in the stands with his father. On the first play, Brandon was open for three, sank the shot, and then turned and pointed to his young friend.

Brandon scored 30 points that night, with several baskets from beyond the arc. Each time he scored a three, he pointed at Matthew. That cemented Brandon as a hero to Matt.

Team Prayer

That night in family prayer, Matt started asking Heavenly Father to guide Brandon to join the Church. The Palmer family had already been praying to find someone who would want to learn the gospel, and Matt was sure Brandon was an answer to that prayer.

And the Palmers weren't the only ones praying. So was Teren. "In priests quorum we quote section 4 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which says we should serve God with all our heart, might, mind, and strength," Teren says. "I felt there must be something right in front of me that I was missing." He asked Heavenly Father to help him figure it out. "That's when Brandon started taking an interest in the Church, and I said to myself, 'I want to help with that.'"

The Conversion Is Good

Brandon already knew a little about the Church. "I had been to meetings with Teren and with his cousin before," Brandon says, "but I wasn't as consistent as I should have been. Then the Palmers invited me to their family home evenings." One of the first lessons was about Joseph Smith's efforts to find the true Church.

"I liked how Joseph was looking for the right Church, wanting to gain peace and faith like I wanted to," Brandon recalls. The Spirit bore witness that Joseph's story was true, and Brandon accepted the commitment to study and pray. That was a turning point. The next day he sent a text message to Brother Palmer: "I asked God, and He told me this is true."

The more he studied and prayed, the more he found answers. He started coming to seminary, going to church, and meeting with the missionaries. "The discussions were good," he says. "The missionaries explained things. They made it easier to understand, and they taught me the commandments—the Word of Wisdom, tithing, all of the things that Heavenly Father wants us to do."

But what impressed him the most was how he felt about showing his love for the Savior through service. "The gospel has brought me closer to Christ," Brandon says. "I've learned a lot about how important it is to serve others, because when you do, you're serving Him."

Time Out, Time In

Had the time come for baptism?

"Brother Palmer asked me if I would be baptized," Brandon recalls. "I had already told him yes. Then the missionaries asked, too. I remember that was on August 4. They said, 'How about September 4?' I said, 'That's the day after the big game. I don't know if that will work,' and he called for time out to think it over. It didn't take long. He thought about what he had learned and the answers he had already received.

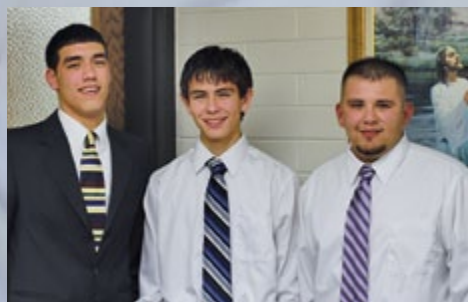
"I knew I had to decide," Brandon said, "And once I made the decision, I knew it was right. I knew I would fulfill my promises to the Lord with all my heart."

The same way—with heart—that both he and Teren played in the rivalry game.

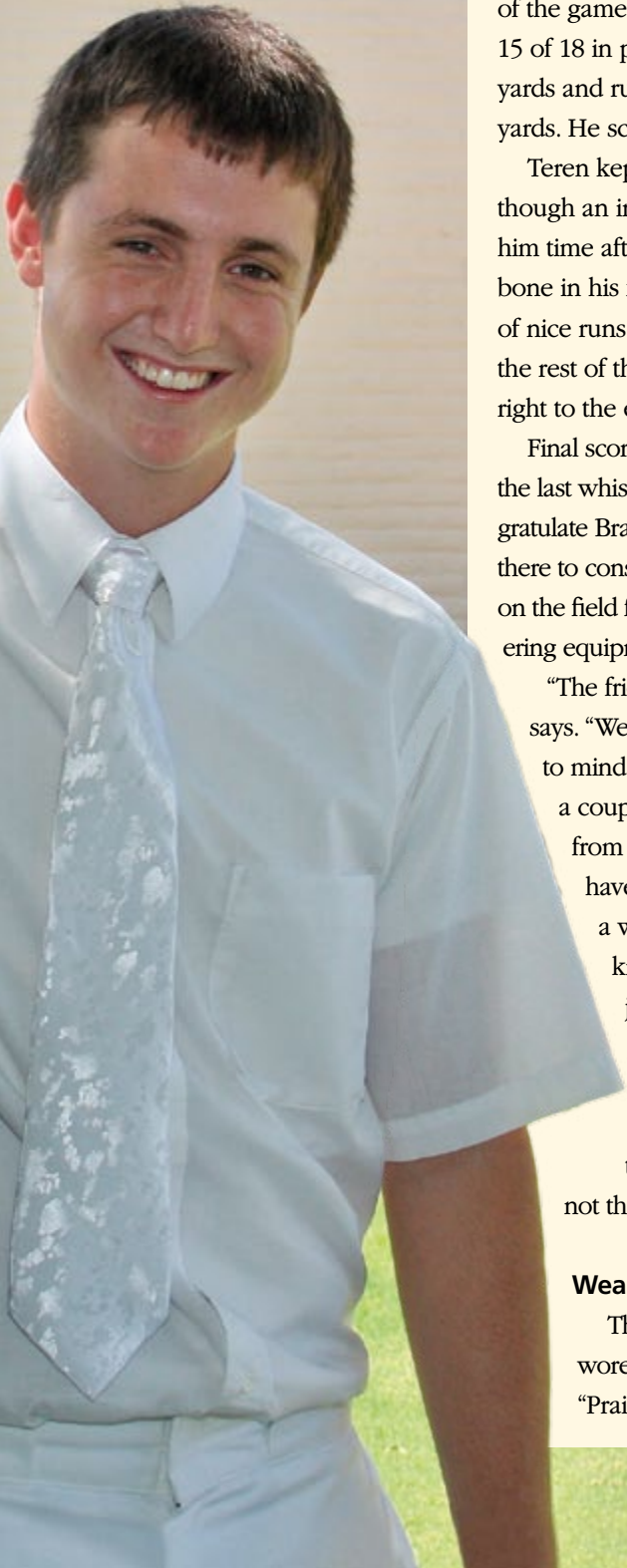


OVER TIME, VICTORY

The big game, as well as Brandon's baptism and confirmation, took place in September, 2010. But that's not the end of the story. Before joining the Church, Brandon had already started working on Duty to God. When he read the section about inviting all to come unto Christ, he felt inspired to share the gospel with at least three people during the year. He began talking with friends about his own conversion, and one of them, C. J. Villalba, has joined the Church, along with his older brother and his father. Brandon performed the baptism for C. J.



Brandon, Brother Palmer, and Teren are joined by dozens of friends and family members at Brandon's baptismal service (above, right). Matt Palmer, one of Brandon's most loyal fans, is proud of his friend (left). After his own baptism, Brandon continues to share the gospel (see sidebar, left).



High Score for Friendship

More than 3,500 fans filled the stands that Friday night. On the second play of the game, Brandon raced for 49 yards. Moments later, he rifled a 21-yard pass to a fellow seminary student for a touchdown. By the end of the game, Brandon was 15 of 18 in passing for 260 yards and rushed for 203 yards. He scored five touchdowns.

Teren kept rallying the Eagles, even though an intense defense crashed in on him time after time. Despite a fractured bone in his foot, he broke free for a couple of nice runs and threw solid passes. Like the rest of the Eagles, he kept playing hard right to the end of the game.

Final score: 44-21, Bulldogs. And when the last whistle blew, who was there to congratulate Brandon? Teren. Likewise, who was there to console Teren? Brandon. They met on the field for a photo as others were gathering equipment and heading for the buses.

“The friendship was there first,” Teren says. “We’ve always had that.” It brought to mind something else he had said a couple of days before: “Ten years from now, when I’m 27, I want to have been married in the temple to a wonderful wife and have some kids. I want to have a successful job so I can provide for my family. And I want to still be friends with Brandon. I hope people see that it’s a fun thing to have a rivalry, but it’s not the most important thing.”

Wearing White

The next day, both young men wore white. The congregation sang “Praise to the Man” (*Hymns*, no. 27),



chosen by Brandon because Joseph Smith’s experience was key in helping him gain a testimony. Teren, limping on his broken foot, and Brandon, with a broad smile on his face, entered the baptismal font together.”

In the talks at the baptismal service, football analogies were often repeated. The armor of God was compared to a football uniform. Brandon was welcomed to the “priesthood team”—like joining a football team, only better. The analogies were valid and memorable. One statement in particular, however, stayed on the minds of many people: “The Church of Jesus Christ doesn’t have boundaries or borders or rivalries. The Church of Jesus Christ is for everybody.”

On Sunday, Brandon was confirmed a member of the Church and received the gift of the Holy Ghost. He was interviewed by his bishop, and they talked about when he would receive the priesthood. Then Brandon was introduced during priesthood meeting and met the other young men who would now become part of his life. After the confirmation, Teren went to his own ward and joined in a priesthood lesson, even though he kept his leg propped up on a chair. The rivalry game had come and gone, but the priesthood teamwork was continuing. When that happens, everyone wins. **NE**