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Photo courtesy of ASU athletics/Rick Hartgrove.

Not Just for Kicks

Julian Rauch Aims for the NFL

By Steve Goldberg

There are large green signs that name the stretch of I-85 through Gaston County for Marshall Rauch, honoring the man who served 24 years as a popular and effective North Carolina state senator, a man who built a small textile company that milled crochet yarn and kite string into one of the largest Christmas tree ornament manufacturers in the world. Obviously, the former politician and successful business leader is an important man.

Since last September though, he's not even the most famous Rauch in his family. With one swing of his leg last fall, grandson Julian Rauch took that mantle with a field goal that lifted Appalachian State University's football team over the mighty Michigan Wolverines.

It was a classic David and Goliath story that grabbed national attention and exponentially spiked the sale of ASU merchandise in the state of Ohio. Appropriately, this David, at least one of them, was Jewish as well.

Unlike Long Island where Marshall Rauch grew up, being Jewish in Gastonia much like Charlotte and the south in general has been something that takes a little extra commitment. Gastonia's Temple Emanuel, of which Julian's maternal great-grandfather was a founder about 80 years ago, has about 65 members in a city of nearly 70,000. The only Jewish kid in his elementary school with maybe one or two families more than that when he moved to high school, Rauch was Bar Mitzvahed in the same temple as his father and later visited Israel

on a Birthright tour.

As with most southern football programs, Rauch notes that, "Appalachian is a very hardcore Christian based football team."

That was never an issue but it made the family focus more important. "Within the family it's very strong," says Julian, "but when you get outside and you're on your own, it's kind of hard to make it part of everyday life. A lot of it is within myself because of where I am or what I do."

Like his father Pete, Julian was born and bred in Gastonia. They both graduated from Ashbrook High School and were athletically inclined. Pete played about every sport possible while Julian developed into a soccer star, starting for his high school squad as a freshman and traveling to Europe with his club team. Their athletic genes came from Marshall who came south as a teenager from Woodmere, New York to play basketball and study at Duke. After a stint in the army during WWII, where he continued to play basketball for the 222nd Infantry team and even boxed, Rauch returned to North Carolina, forgoing his degree at Duke to work at his in-laws textile business and eventually settling in Gastonia.

Pete's brothers Marc and John were also athletes as were sisters Ingrid and Stephanie. John earned a basketball scholarship to Catawba College while both sisters played tennis at UNC.

Burnt out on the seemingly endless soccer season, a 145 pound Rauch first tried to double as a kicker and linebacker on the high school football team, soon deciding to focus on kicking. By

the end of his junior year, he had bulked up to 200 pounds. After finishing the regular season 6-5 his senior year, Ashbrook went on an improbable run, winning four playoff games on the last play of the game, three on kicks by Rauch, including the state championship for which he was named MVP. After the game, he learned that he kicked the winning field goal with a broken foot. After scoring only three field goals in eleven regular season games, he had ten in the playoffs and suddenly college football was an option.

Originally offered a scholarship to Appalachian, Rauch decided to walk on at East Carolina but left after one semester. He transferred to ASU only to have the coach tell him that he now had to earn his scholarship. He started every game for four years.

After three straight national championships at ASU - with rings the size of Volkswagens to prove it - Rauch is facing uncertainty in the football career he wants to continue. Undrafted, he was signed as a free agent by the Pittsburgh Steelers. That in itself was a problem as the Steelers already had an established veteran kicker in Jeff Reed, coincidentally an East Mecklenburg and UNC graduate.

With limited rosters, it's a rarity for an NFL team to carry more than one kicker so his chances of staying with the Steelers were slim from the start. Reed joined the Steelers mid-season as a free agent in 2002, helping them to win the Super Bowl in 2006. Before heading to the Steelers camp, Rauch assessed the situation matter-of-

factly, "I could be cut tomorrow, I could be cut ten years from now. You don't know."

Rauch set the reasonable objective of working through training camp as best he could and getting the chance to kick in a pre-season game. That was taken out of his control when injuries to other players forced the Steelers to let him go in early August in order to bring a 323 pound center into camp.

"That's every kicker's story. I don't believe any kicker's gone to a team and gotten the job that day. They bounce around until they get that opening. And then you've got to produce to keep it."

Rauch returned home, telling his grandfather, "I'm going to work out every day. I (also) want to work in the office with you, not to hang out with my friends but to do something productive and kick, so when and if I get a chance, on a moment's notice I'll be ready."

About Julian's maturity, Marshall says, "We talk a lot about those things and Julian knows where he's at in life and his plans. He knew he would be cut; he did not know when. And he already had his plans for when he was cut, what he would do. He has perspective."

"He's got his feet on the ground. He knows what he wants and I believe he will play pro football."

When pressed to rank Julian's achievements in the pantheon of Rauch family accomplishments, his grandfather, whose biography, available at the Levine Sklut Judaic Library, is titled "Success is

a Team Sport, The Marshall Rauch Family Story," displays the diplomatic skills that made him an effective legislator.

"I'll never answer that question," he says with a laugh. What is clear is that Julian is the product of his family, as an athlete and as a person. To those who know them, the attributes of his parents and grandparents are obvious in him.

It wasn't a Miracle of Light that led Julian and his Appalachian Maccabees to victory against an overwhelming opponent but confidence in themselves and the work they had done to get to that point.

So as he lined up for that kick in Ann Arbor with more than a hundred thousand people screaming for him to miss, Rauch recalled what his high school coach told him before his first ever game winner, that one in the playoffs with the season on the line.

"Coach Briggs said, 'This is what you want; this is what you kicked for, so go out there and do it. This is what's going to make it or break it.' And I've always mentally prepared myself (saying) 'this is what you want.'"

What he wants now is an NFL career. Whether that happens or not, Julian Rauch is still another great chapter in the family story. ☆

Steve Goldberg is a Charlotte-based journalist, marketing and media consultant. His work has been published by Time, USA Today, and Charlotte Magazine among others. He was a walk-on place kicker for the University of Georgia in 1976.



Julian and his dad, Pete Rauch. Julian is serious about learning the family business and about football.

Jewish Federation Surpasses Fundraising Goal of \$3,180,000

Thank you to all of our donors and volunteers for their extraordinary efforts in helping our community raise \$3,181,992 to support Jews in need locally, in Israel and around the world.

(See related information pp. 4-5)