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TIGER KICKOFF: Meet small-town Missouri hero Miles Drummond

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COLUMBIA — Miles Drummond knew the hour was too early.

His grandparents were supposed to wake him up at 5:30 a.m. for a weightlifting session at the high school. But when they shook him awake, his internal body clock told him something wasn't right.

A voice cut through the pitch-black silence.

“Miles, she’s having the baby,” said Drummond’s grandfather Terry Fazee. “She’s up against the wall. I can’t move her.”

Drummond, sporting his long brown dreadlocks, rose out of bed, put on his shoes and walked out to the barn. A pregnant mare lay cast against the wall of her stall, her uncomfortable position threatening to kill her and her newborn in the birthing process.

After talking the horse down to make it keep still, Drummond grabbed hold of the 1,000-pound animal and pulled it away from the wall before it gave birth.

Two years later, the Missouri running back smiles at the memory.

“Before I knew what sports were, my parents had me on the farm all the time,” Drummond said. “I was riding horses from the time I was 8-months old. I didn’t start playing sports until seventh or eighth grade.”

Several circumstances led him to Lynn and Terry Fazee’s farm in Centralia.

His father left his mother when she was pregnant, and when Drummond — a 22 ½ inch, 9-pound, 14-ounce baby — finally arrived, his mother fell sick.

“When they tried to get her on antibiotics, I think the infection just started to resent the antibiotics,” Drummond says. “It wasn’t really a matter of getting rid of the infection, it was a matter of finding the right antibiotics. Eventually, they found one that worked.”

Drummond’s mother was still bedridden for another three months after the pregnancy, so the pair moved in with Drummond’s grandparents.

It was there that an interesting dynamic arose.

“I grew up calling my grandpa ‘Dad,’ and calling my grandma ‘Mom,’” Drummond said. “And, you know, I’d call my mom ‘Mom.’ It was kind of hard to explain to a lot of people when I was little.”

Drummond was in the hayfield before he was enrolled in kindergarten. Terry Fazee remembers his grandson rolling bales until he was strong enough to pick them up. The youngster also showed a natural gift with horses.

“He has a way with animals,” Fazee says. “I think he first started showing horses in diapers.”

No joke.

"I was riding horses from the time I was 8-months old," Drummond said.

By sixth grade, Drummond was competing with high school kids and he placed sixth in a national championship in St. Louis against older competition. His grandmother was a horse trainer, and he clearly had a knack for thoroughbreds, but another activity was also in his blood.

The start of his football path

When Drummond was 14 years old, he met his father for the first time. The man was a former tight end at Missouri, but his estranged son had only recently discovered athletics.

"Once I started to get into football, I said, 'Hey, that looks kind of fun,'" Drummond said. "The more I got into football, the less I got into horses, and now, I just bale the hay for the summer workout and help them clean the stalls."

A new era had begun. Horse shows went out the window. Football flew in. And Drummond had a chance to be one of the best young players for Hallsville's team, which began varsity play in 2008.

He played quarterback on the JV squad and then started turning heads as the starting varsity running back during his junior and senior seasons.

"He had some talent," said Hallsville assistant coach Jason Clark. "He was still an average-sized kid. But he had the mentality to work and get better. He developed a love for the weight room, which just brought him that much farther."

By his senior year, it was clear Drummond was the team's best player, and he was perhaps the best role model as well. During the team's annual run through town, he stayed at the back of the pack to jog next to a boy who had a mental disability.

"As long as you want to keep running, I'll stay here in the back with you," Drummond said to his running partner that day. "You just let me know if you're getting tired and want to quit."

The pair finished without a problem. Just another helping hand from Miles Drummond.

On the field, the Hallsville Indians sputtered to a 2-8 record, but there was an undeniable bright spot.

"He looked like a D-I player in high school, he looked the part," said former Hallsville coach John Morris. "Rushed for well over 1,000 yards senior year. He's just a natural football player. I knew that he could play if he found the

opportunity.”

But the small school had its disadvantages.

“Because our program was so new, giving these kids a shot at playing college football was pretty rough for a while,” Morris said. “It was a big drawback for Miles.”

Lincoln University in Jefferson City offered Drummond a scholarship, but no Division I schools wanted to bite. Drummond attended a camp at Missouri, where the coaches didn’t seem terribly interested.

“Send in your highlight tape,” said former offensive coordinator David Yost. “And we’ll see what we can do for you.”

Drummond seemed destined for Division II football at Lincoln until he was summoned to a surprise meeting with Nick Otterbacher, Missouri’s director of recruiting.

Lynn and Terry Frazee, John Morris and Drummond paid a visit to Otterbacher’s office on the second floor of the athletics complex, where he popped the question:

“Do you want to be a Missouri Tiger or not?” Otterbacher asked.

After taking the weekend to think it over, Drummond called Otterbacher to accept the preferred walk-on spot. Lincoln was out of the picture, and the running back from tiny Hallsville High had a chance to wear the black and gold.

“You can’t pass up a D-I opportunity,” Drummond said. “No matter how you get there.”

Being a Tiger

The path to a scholarship will be tough for Drummond. He admits there are plenty of things he needs to work on.

“My speed has always been an issue,” he said. “I’m not the fastest guy in the world. My top-end speed is pretty good, but I’m trying to work on being more explosive. Sometimes when I get the ball and I’m running downhill, I’m worried that someone is going to come get me in the backfield.”

But he’s been able to flash his potential on a few occasions, the most prominent being a 30-yard receiving touchdown in April’s Black and Gold Game. Drummond caught a pass, made a man miss and then sprinted down the sideline for the final score of the day.

“It was something really special,” he said.

While another touchdown might not come for a while — Drummond has yet to carry the ball in a game this season — the people of Hallsville know no difference.

The favorite son returned to the city to take in a high school game on Sept. 13 at the behest of the coaching staff. He spoke with the players and signed autographs for the fans.

Terry Frazee was in attendance that night, and one moment stuck out in his mind.

As Drummond signed autographs, a mother and her young daughter approached him. They wanted to meet the local Missouri Tiger. Drummond knelt down to get on the little girl’s level. After their talk, he stood up and shouted, “Does anybody have a camera?”

They found one. Drummond put his arm around the little girl and smiled for the picture, and Frazee could barely contain his pride.

“He made that girl’s night,” Frazee said.

His grandson, now a mature college athlete, was still the same Miles who got up at 3 a.m. to move the mare. He was the same Miles who gives countless hours to the Children’s Hospital and the Special Olympics. He was still the same high school football star who stayed at the back of the pack during that team run.

“He knows how lucky he is,” Frazee said. “But he doesn’t forget where he came from.”