

Jared Thomas thought he'd be known as a high school basketball player. However, things don't always turn out the way we expect.

By: Lauren Vivo

Jared remembers his Indianapolis childhood as one focused on academics and family values. He remembers being taught the Golden Rule and being taught to "be a good person and truly value relationships with other people ... (which will) get you a long way in life." The people who taught him those values were his family members. Jared grew up in a close family. Jared states that his mom and dad had a big impact on his future. His younger brother, Jordan, is now playing football at Cathedral High School, as Jared did.

But when Jared started high school, football wasn't part of his plan. His goal was to play high school basketball - he first picked up a basketball at the age of four - but his dad urged him to play a second sport in order to be a well-rounded athlete. Jared chose football as his second sport. His "fast feet" from basketball helped him in football and, eventually, he was being scouted by several schools.

A family friend, Rod Haywood, advised Jared that he needed a school that would fulfill a three-part goal. He decided on Northwestern because it had outstanding academics, a distinguished football program, and was close to his home and family. He also wanted to compete in a very "formidable conference," like the Big Ten. Jared was grateful to accept the scholarship so his family would not be burdened with his college expenses. In Jared's mind, family always comes first. He talks to his mom at least three times a week and Snapchats with his little brother every day.

When asked if it was difficult to balance football and academics, Jared admits that being a college athlete didn't really affect his schoolwork. He credits his parents, along with his education at St. Richard's Episcopal School and Cathedral High School, with preparing him well. He believes that you can get it done unless you let laziness prevail. "You have plenty of time to get your work done and still be an athlete, which is why you choose to play sports at the next level and come to a school like Northwestern: to have the best of both worlds. So, you have to conduct yourself that way," he said.

Not surprisingly, Jared attributes his success to his upbringing and family values. He is looking forward to the future, which might include the NFL, a sports talk show or even a General Manager position for a sports team.