

Kapri Bibbs made it out of Chicago and it made him

By Cameron Wolfe

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From feasting on a platter of fried chicken wings and fries drenched in hot sauce at Harold's Chicken Shack on the South Side, to taking a weekend trip to the Navy Pier on the North Side, a lot of times the good of Chicago outweighs the bad.

The grand allure of the towering skyscrapers and iconic presence of Wrigley Field establish the city's personality. Natives wear the pride of the Windy City on their chest like a medal of honor.

But it is one of America's deadliest cities. According to the Chicago Tribune, there had been 2,110 shooting victims in Chicago in 2016, through July 14. There were more than 440 in June alone.

A 3-year-old was shot and paralyzed on Father's Day riding in the car with his dad. A week later, a 4-year-old was shot in the jaw.

Deadly, devastating and disgusting as it is at times to Broncos running back Kapri Bibbs, Chicago is home. Not too long ago, he went to a family reunion with cousins ages 12 to 14, each with their own glock or .44 caliber magnum. There was nothing he could do.

"Everyone is a product of their environment. You can't escape that," Bibbs said. "You gotta be a certain way to survive because it is survival of the fittest."

There are two sides to Bibbs, both of which can be attributed to his family and city: one part fiery, second part jokester.

Bibbs loves Chicago, but at the first opportunity he moved far away.

There was no such thing as alone time growing up for Bibbs. He spent the majority of his childhood living with aunts and uncles in a three-bedroom house with 23 kids in Harvey, Ill., south of Chicago. Days filled with constant fun were mixed with the agony of not knowing when the next meal would come. They'd wait outside the porch for the Salvation Army to deliver their food for the day. More often than not, it would be bowls of Farina or Malt-O-Meal for breakfast and dinner.

The adults had one bedroom, so the 23 kids split the living room and two bedrooms.

"We slept like sardines," Bibbs said. "You might get some feet in your face; you just throw the cover over it and use it as a pillow."

At first Bibbs was filled with confusion, believing his mother gave up on supporting him and his eight siblings. Before living in Harvey and a short stint in Markham, they all stayed with his mother, splitting time between shelters and living on the streets.

Bibbs' mother, Stacey Griffen, didn't have a job at the time, but she got the most out of her food stamps — selling half the food stamps, getting groceries with the other half and getting the other stuff she needed on the side with the money — and braided hair for \$10 a head.

"We didn't have a lot of money," Griffen said. "But we were rich in love."

But they had too many kids to live that lifestyle, so they moved to Harvey when Bibbs was in kindergarten to a house with their uncles and aunties. His uncles were well-feared in the neighborhood. As a result, they never really had to worry about being victims of gun violence at home.

Despite the circumstances, they were a tight-knit bunch. They never hid their emotions and the kids always had each others' backs in school fights.

Bibbs started "roasting" classmates that talked down on his clothes. If someone wanted to talk about him wearing the same pair of jeans three times a week, he could point out a flaw in that person — such as a forehead that shined like Mr. Clean. It was a defense mechanism that he still uses.

If Bibbs wasn't a football player, he'd probably be an actor. Keith Bibbs, Kapri's oldest brother, remembers one day when they were riding scooters and Kapri pretended to fall and stop breathing. Keith went into a panic, attempting chest pumps and CPR.

"I was like 'No, no, no, please don't be gone,' " Keith said. Kapri jumped up laughing at the prank he pulled on his brother. That was just who he was.

Kapri remembers the day his mom drove up in a green Ford Explorer, told them let's go and drove them to a five-bedroom house. She had got a job, saved money and things were looking up. It didn't last long, nine months maybe.

But it was then that he truly started looking up to his mother. Griffen got her college degree and now owns a couple of businesses. She taught him how to work from the bottom to get what you want.

"Honestly, he's inspiring to me," Griffen said. "You can see the faith and determination and what you can do against all odds."

The Midwest was all Bibbs knew, and that impacted his college decision. He received two Division I offers out of high school, Colorado State and Illinois State, but he had no intention of staying in Illinois.

Because of low testing scores, Bibbs had to take a detour to junior college. He went to Snow College in Utah, and Front Range Community College in Fort Collins. Once he arrived at CSU, he broke single-season records in touchdowns (31) and rushing yards (1,741) in his one season, then left for the NFL draft early.

He left for two reasons. First, to avoid injuries; and second, because he didn't have the relationship with then-CSU coach Jim McElwain that he expected.

"The way he motivated his players were a lot different than I like to be motivated," Bibbs said. "Steve Fairfield was the players' coach. Coach Mac was the football coach and strictly that."

Bibbs has had his share of clashes at all levels of football, teammates and coaches can attest. He believes it helps him on the field, but it has led to punches, shoves and shouting matches during practices. It's a constant battle to keep it under control.

"It's like a tea kettle," Kapri said. "It pops and then I have to live with whatever decision I made."

"It's a no-nonsense thing," Keith said. "It was always defensive, never offensive."

That's why it's so important to know the city that made Kapri before you judge him.

He has seen up close a man shot in the neck with a 12-gauge shotgun from point-blank range after walking out of a candy store, his body flying 30 feet in the air after getting shot. It's easier to understand why an extra shove out-of-bounds quickly ignites fireworks. Being soft isn't an option.

Bibbs started the "Keep Letting Them Believe" foundation in Illinois and Florida to promote dreams. The background is the belief that most kids have been beaten down to the point where they don't even look up. He wants guns to be illegal for all civilians, and prays for gangs to be taken off the street. He has seen them do too much damage.

"I lost friends to gun violence, to gangs. Close friends, best friends, I lost my cousin, Chris, to gangs. I got one cousin incarcerated for gangs. My brother is locked up right now," Bibbs said. "People don't need that type of control over somebody else's life."

He rarely stays in the city when he goes back to visit, and he moved his immediate family to Orlando, Fla. A lot of his friends and family still reside in rough areas, and he fears for their safety.

There's little sign of improvement or change, but despite all the negatives, Bibbs wouldn't want to be from anywhere else but the city that made him — Chicago.

Kapri Bibbs: Zone-blocking scheme 'made for me'

By Allie Raymond

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Of all the changes the Broncos have implemented this offseason, the zone-blocking scheme has been one of the main focuses. But amid all the conversation discussing it, running back Kapri Bibbs can summarize it with one simple analogy to something you might have in your front yard.

“[Running backs] Coach [Eric Studesville] explained it like a picket fence,” Bibbs said. “You’ve got to find that one board that’s missing.”

Luckily for Bibbs, he’s got experience looking for the missing board. After working with a zone-blocking scheme during his time at Colorado State, Bibbs enters this training camp with something of an advantage over other running backs. In his one season as a Ram after two years at junior colleges, Bibbs broke CSU’s single-season records for rushing yards (1,741), rushing touchdowns (31), total touchdowns (31) and points (186). He finished his 2013 collegiate campaign ranked sixth in the nation in rushing yards and tied for No. 1 in touchdowns.

“I think this offense is definitely made for me,” Bibbs said. “It’s the second day in pads; we’ve got a long training camp to go. I’m looking to keep improving every day.”

Last season Bibbs split his time between the practice squad and the active roster, where he spent four weeks of his rookie campaign. This year he enters training camp not only with knowledge of Offensive Coordinator Rick Dennison’s offensive scheme, but also with specific goals in mind.

“I just want to be more decisive on my cuts and when I make those cuts, just get up into the hole and get my pads low and be able to break through those tackles,” Bibbs said. “Bounce off some of those linebackers that come through the hole. I think all the other stuff will just automatically come to me because I’m used to doing all that other stuff.”

Five days into training camp, Dennison is impressed by what the running back corps has done.

“I think they’ve done a great job,” Dennison said. “Three days ago, I really felt the urgency of their foot in the ground and going downhill. I thought their suddenness on the cuts, that’s when they made the turn the corner and they’re going to keep getting better at that. They’re feeling the soft spots, they’re understanding what we want done and I feel the surge into the line of scrimmage.”

But the running backs certainly can’t do it alone. They depend upon the offensive line to give them a lane. During this offseason, one of the biggest question marks for the Broncos was at offensive line. But so far into the preseason, Bibbs is happy with what he’s seen from Denver’s big men.

“I think the offensive line does a good job,” Bibbs said. “Somebody is winning every single time to give us that board that’s missing in that fence.”