

Why The Denver Broncos' Casey Kreiter Wears STEM-Inspired Cleats

By Max Rettig
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This past Sunday, when players across the NFL wore cleats dedicated to an individual cause they supported for the “My Cause My Cleats” campaign, Denver Broncos long snapper Casey Kreiter took a slightly different approach to his own shoes.

Instead of advertising his chosen cause in a fancy design, he simply had QR codes affixed to the shoes that link to special video messages for the kids at Children’s Hospital Colorado and the University of Iowa Stead Family Children’s Hospital.

@caseykreiter

Happy to represent @CMNHospitals tomorrow and STEM education. Scan the QR codes for a personalized message to my heroes at @Uchildrens and @ChildrensColo #ForTheKids #TackleSTEM #IowaWave #MyCauseMyCleats @ColoTechAsn

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“Throughout my career, I’ve always done a little work with the children’s hospital, both in Iowa City and out here in Colorado, so I wanted to represent the children’s hospitals because they do miracles over at those places,” Kreiter told SportTechie in a phone interview.

“And the things those kids have to go through, just it’s not fair that they have to go through it, and those kids are truly my inspiration.”

So Kreiter made a personal video for the children in treatment at the University of Iowa Stead Family Children’s Hospital — which has this season become famous for the wave shared by the kids and the fans at neighboring Kinnick Stadium. There was another for Children’s Hospital Colorado.

The idea, which came from someone in the Broncos organization, materialized over just two weeks.

Kreiter has a significant background in STEM. He was a substitute teacher at a school in Iowa City, where he previously played football for the University of Iowa Hawkeyes and earned a degree in science education. About a year ago, he used a BeamPro robot to remotely connect with his former students, and in March he helped students at a robotics competition at the University of Denver as part of a larger Broncos STEM effort.

“Before I became a Denver Bronco, I was still trying to make it in the league and had gotten my degree in science education, so I was substitute teaching at the Iowa City area in all kinds of classes, from foreign language to shop classes to math, English, really anything,” Kreiter said. “And then (I) ended up accepting a full-time science teaching job and my expertise was life sciences, so I was gonna teach biology and those courses, and then landed with the Broncos and the Broncos have a great STEM initiative that they put on. They call it Tackle STEM, and they put emphasis on it.”

Kreiter said his passion for STEM fueled his cleat design, but that teaching STEM to the children in the hospital was not a priority, although certainly a welcome byproduct.

“That wasn’t a main focus of mine, but inherently with the codes and what I did with the shoes, it’s going to do that, but I think that’s important,” Kreiter said.

As for future “My Cause My Cleats” drives, Kreiter intends to experiment with emerging technologies to see what he can do with a pair of kicks and a profound love of STEM. Kreiter wanted to use a 3D printing component in his cleats this year, but the timing didn’t work out: “We’re gonna start brainstorming much earlier for next year,” he said.

And when his playing days are over, he hopes to head right back to the classroom to teach the next generation of students the importance of STEM — with a bit of football mixed in for applied learning and good fun.

Casey Kreiter Q&A: Broncos' least-known player has an extraordinary story

By Nick Groke

Denver Post

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Casey Kreiter's locker in the corner of the room at Dove Valley seems like an afterthought, as if the janitor crammed in one more spot at the last minute. It seems to fit the Broncos' long snapper. He plays a position even hardcore fans don't notice.

But Kreiter's path to the NFL was extraordinary. After going undrafted in 2014, the former Iowa Hawkeyes snapper was invited to Dallas Cowboys training camp the past two seasons but didn't make their roster. So he returned to Iowa and started teaching high school and middle school.

Right before he became a full-time science teacher in Iowa City, the Broncos called for one more invite to training camp. And this time, Kreiter made the team. He played his first NFL game three weeks ago in the Broncos' season opener.

Do you have the best locker in the room or the worst?

Definitely the best. I get my own little corner here. You can do some fun stuff. Put pictures up. It's quiet. But sometimes it gets crowded, as you can see. Some of this stuff, I kept these boxes because that's like a foot rest there and that other one is like a desk. It's a little makeshift. But I'd say this is the best locker.

Is that your Harry Potter poster on the wall?

That started in camp. Britton (Colquitt, former Broncos punter) is a huge Harry Potter fan. I saw this at Target for like a \$1. And bought it. And we put it up and it stuck. Then we surrounded it with other pictures. We've talked about taking it down, but I think we just leave it because it's there.

Are all those snacks yours? You could use a mini-fridge.

We thought about a mini-fridge. During camp, my wife sent me a care package and it had some fruit snacks and my father-in-law makes deer jerky, so she sent a bag of that. And we ran out of all of it. And Mac (punter Brandon McManus) said, "We could use more fruit snack." So he went to Costco and got some fruit snacks and brought them in. They're kind of community snacks. The O-line is over here every once in a while taking some fruit snacks.

You could set up a commissary and sell snacks in here.

Like a convenience store. We could. But it's all love. Whoever wants some, it's fair game. (Offensive lineman) Dillon Day really liked the deer jerky. I had to shoo him away.

How has it been for you on the field so far?

It's different than what I'm used to this time of year. Just because I had been at home, substitute teaching and training, trying to get to this point. There are always things to improve on. And I've learned something every practice and every game, tricks of the trade.

I was in Dallas with L.P. (veteran long snapper L.P. Ladouceur), talking to him, he'd tell me some things. And I could tell he's played for a long time. Just little nuisances. He can see something happening before it happens, so he can adjust.

For me, it's trying to get to that point. I'm trying to set these two up for success (pointing to McManus' and punter Riley Dixon's lockers). It all starts with the snap and it's my job to set them up.

It's a strange position you play. Nobody notices you, until they do. Arizona Cardinals rookie long snapper Kameron Canaday was low on a snap in Week 1 and they missed a would-be game-winning field goal. Is it a different kind of stress?

For all three of us, it is (kicker, punter, snapper). You get one chance at it. Some people are surprised when they find out what I do and they feel bad they don't know my name. And I tell them, in my position, if you don't know my name, that's usually a good thing.

People back home will ask, "Do you talk to Mr. (John) Elway? Do you know him?" I just try to stay out of the light. It's a good thing if I'm out there and nobody knows my name. It's a little bit of stress, but there's stress on everybody here. You just handle the position. I've done it long enough to understand that. You cope with it. And you use it to fuel you. It can motivate you to do your job every time.

Teaching high school one day, playing in the NFL the next. That's a unique leap.

When I got called for the workout here, I was just finishing up my student-teaching. I had accepted a full-time teaching position for this year back in Iowa City. I love teaching. I'll teach at some point in my life, whether it's 10 years from now or whenever it is.

I subbed two years in the Iowa City school district. It's always fun subbing because I would take phone calls during class sometimes. And the kids by that point knew what was going on, my trying to get in the NFL. I'd come back in the room and they'd ask, "What team was it?!" They'd always ask if it was their favorite team. Up to that point, it was always my wife or somebody else on the phone. And the kids would be super disappointed. I still talk to a lot of the teachers at the school where I student-taught, Regina High in Iowa City.

Coming out of college, I had my degree in science education. And all I needed to get licensed was to finish my student teaching. But they do that at the very end of your degree. And when I came out of college, I kind of knew I might have a chance in the NFL. So I put off the student-teaching because Andy Schulze, who was the long snapper before me at Iowa, he tried training for the NFL and student-teaching at the same time, and it was way too much. So I put it off.

Two years ago, I focused on football. Last year, I still focused on it, but I was getting married and I need to think about my family and get a job, so the University of Iowa worked with me on the student-teaching and how to do both. It was awesome.

Do you grade on a curve?

I was pretty tough on the kids, to be honest. When I was subbing, I had no responsibility to grade kids or anything. So for me, it was more like, let's teach them something about life. I would bore them to death. I'd say, "OK, I see this going on in your school. Let's talk about it after we get our work done." And we would talk about life lessons that might help them down the road.

I felt bad for the other subs because it was so easy for me to walk into a school and say, "Hey, this is who I am, I played for the Hawks here in town and I was with the Cowboys in the NFL." And I had their attention immediately. But I would flip it on them. I'd say, "We can talk about football, but we have to get our work done first."

My mom was a teacher for 28 years. And right after she retired, she immediately started subbing. You teachers love teaching.

Subbing is different. You really don't have a lot of responsibilities except to make sure nobody dies or fights each other. And you get done what work you need to get done. I taught foreign languages that I had no clue how to speak, to foods to math and language arts. All of it. Subbing is awesome. I loved it. I loved the full-time stuff too, because you get to know the students a little better.

It's a challenge. But to literally see them learn something through a unit you put together, it's so rewarding.