Garett Bolles inspirational story of living with ADHD and making it to the NFL

By Rob Namnoum
KRDO
July 9, 2019

"I've been there when you cry yourself to sleep. I've been there when you're bullied or you're picked on or you fail a test and your classmates make fun of you or you don't want to read in front of the class because you are afraid you aren't going to say all the words correctly," says Broncos starting left tackle, Garett Bolles.

Garett Bolles understands what it's like for children who are struggling with Attention Deficit Hyper activity disorder or ADHD because he has been diagnosed with ADHD, " So I had ADHD my entire life. I'm not afraid to hide it in. I want to raise awareness," says Bolles.

Bolles says having ADHD can make learning difficult, " You know school was a lot harder for me. Having a learning disability because there was so much to do with reading, math and talking but with football it comes natural for me," says Bolles

Sure comes naturally but learning a thick, intricate NFL playbook can be overwhelming for any player especially one who is dealing with ADHD, "I'm a huge note taker.
If you look in my playbook, you look in my notes it's all color coded to what works for me. I know what I'm supposed to do and once I know what I'm supposed then I branch out and be like okay this is what the guard is going to do, this is what the center gonna do, the right guard, right tackle this is what the running back is going to do how the quarterback sees it so, I really just learn what I'm supposed to do and then I branch myself out slowly. Eventually it comes to me," says Bolles.

Bolles is a champion for children with any disorder, and he believes a strong, loving support system will help them go a long way, " Every parent out there that has a kid with that struggles you need love your kid and show them that you are there for them because they feel like nobody is there for them. Until you sit down with them and you give them a talk and there crying and you speak with them and you tell them I'm here for you no matter what I have you're the best interest there gonna trust you because kid's that struggle we don't trust a lot of people," says Bolles

Bolles has been able to live out his dreams despite having ADHD, " That''s what people need to understand is we're not dumb, we're not stupid, don't let other people tell you-you can't do things go out there and work for it and I promise you, your dreams will come true," says Bolles.

Denver Broncos left tackle Garett Bolles gives back to Monument community

By Evan Petzold
The Tribune
June 12, 2019

When Garett Bolles entered the south gate of Don Breese Stadium at Lewis-Palmer High School Friday, hundreds of overjoyed children sprinted toward him.

Bolles, a left tackle for the Denver Broncos, gave out high-fives to nearly every child and quickly began issuing instructions for his second annual football and cheerleading camp.

“The biggest thing I love is kids,” Bolles said. “You can be a role model for their whole life. You can make a kid smile, and that can go years and years of them being happy and turn their life around.”

Bolles partnered with Pikes Peak Pop Warner and South Colorado Springs Nissan to host the camp, which ran Thursday and Friday evenings, and was open to any child 5-14 years old.

Bolles didn’t accept a dime — a rarity for NFL stars that host camps. He said his only wish was to help children learn lessons that were absent early in his life.

After Bolles was kicked out of his father’s house as a teenager due to his behavior, he was picked up off the street by a family involved in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Bolles turned his life around, ditching the drug, alcohol, violence and gang activity of his past.

Straight out of Westlake High School in Saratoga Springs, Utah, Bolles did his LDS Church mission in Colorado Springs before going to college. Later on, he transferred from Snow College in Ephraim, Utah, to the Division I level at University of Utah as the No. 3 overall JUCO player in the 2016 class. He decided to forgo his senior year and enter the 2017 NFL Draft. The Broncos signed him to a four-year contract.

It was at that time Bolles understood his calling to give back.

“When everyone started to recognize me, and I got drafted into this wonderful state of Colorado, I knew I had to give back to the people that loved and cared for me,” he said.

The 2017 NFL draft first-round pick struggled with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder — more commonly known as ADHD — growing up, and still does to this day. He recalled being constantly picked on, teased and mistreated before becoming a big-time football player.

Bolles’ own trials with ADHD are the main reason why he invites children with special needs to his camp for free — to give them a safe haven to play, learn and grow freely.

“I understand what it means to not have everything,” Bolles said. “Challenger kids always have a special place in my heart.”

Pikes Peak Pop Warner President Sasan Sattari wore Bolles' jersey during the camp and helped with instructions for fundamental football drills. In his second year partnering with the camp, Sattari said he was again blown away by Bolles' desire to be there.

"It's the most generous thing I've ever seen out of an NFL player," Sattari said. "He's an extremely high-character guy."

Once each camp member went through stretches, Bolles called the group to the 50-yard line and gave a motivational speech about overcoming difficulties in life, loving everyone and uplifting the community.

Bolles also told campers to focus on details, and it was a message he said goes far beyond the football field.

"If your mom says, 'Hey, clean your room,' and you're going to stuff everything under your bed," Bolles explained to the kids, "but your mom wants you to fold your clothes and put them away. It's for a reason.

"Pay attention to the little things, and that's for life."

Even though Bolles fully enjoys the opportunity to step away from the field and give back, he said there's a feeling of excitement in Denver regarding the 2019 season, especially with new offensive line coach Mike Munchak.

Training camp begins July 17, and the first preseason game is Aug. 1. Just over a month later, Denver opens the regular season Sept. 9 at the Oakland Raiders.

Bolles' personal goal is to make the Pro Bowl.

"Kids look up to that," Bolles said. "If you're the best you can be and do everything right, the kids will follow you."

Munchak played ball for the Houston Oilers for 11 years (1982-93), spent time as the head coach of the Tennessee Titans from 2011-13 and, after a four-year gig with the Pittsburgh Steelers, is now in Denver.

Bolles said Munchak, a member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame, makes each offensive line position easier to understand. He specifically told his players to have a plan for every situation, which Bolles added is a new concept for most on the team — including himself.

"If you always have a plan, you never have to worry about anything happening," Bolles said.

As for Bolles' camp, he doesn't plan to stop anytime soon.

"I want to do this for as long as I can," he said. "As long as I'm in a Broncos uniform."

Broncos' Garett Bolles hosts second annual kids camp

By Staff
KKTV-11
June 6, 2019

The second annual two-day Garett Bolles Cheer and Football Camp kicked off Thursday evening. Kids from ages 5-13 came out to Don Breese Stadium at Lewis Palmer High School to run drills and hang out with Bolles.

"Southern Colorado always plays a special part in my heart. I love everybody here. I love the community, I love the people, everyone is so nice, so anytime I get to give back and come out here and be with the kids and see the parents and see how happy they are that I am out here working with them it's just awesome. It is a great community to be apart of and hopefully I am here for a long time."

The 2017 first round draft pick partnered with Pikes Peak Pop Warner Little Scholars and South Colorado Springs Nissan to assist in hosting his camp. Bolles who suffers with ADHD started these camps as a way to give back to the community.

"This is always awesome," Bolles said. "Anytime I can give back to the community of Colorado, the place that is home to me now. When I play for the Broncos and see kids all the time coming to our games and anytime I can give back to them, it's awesome, it puts a smile on my face for sure."

The camp consists of high intensity, hands-on instruction, fundamental football and cheer skills stations, contests, and non-contact competitions in a high-energy, fun, and positive environment.

Bolles biggest message of the day to the kids is just to walk away being able to do the little things but being able to do them well and when they are asked.

"Details. It is just details. Details is everything in your life," Bolles said. "If their mom or dad tells them to clean their room, they want them to clean their room and not throw everything under their bed. So it is the same thing out here. You can learn about details about doing everything right every single day and if you do that, your life is going to be great."

The camp will continue Friday, June 7, from 5-8 p.m.

Garett Bolles focused on eliminating mistakes, meeting expectations

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
February 27, 2018

The expectations for 2017 first-round pick Garett Bolles remain high. And even after a rookie season in which he started all 16 games, what's next is all that seems to matter.

Bolles showed his potential when he earned a starting role ahead of Week 1, and he began to provide a semblance of stability at the position as the season progressed. But he also led the team in penalties, 10 of which were offensive-holding calls.

The Broncos suffered in those situations — and Bolles knows he'll need to improve in that area as he heads into Year 2.

"Going into your second year knowing you have experience behind you and you can just learn from those experiences," Bolles said. "So those things that you experienced in your first couple games as a rookie, you're not really going to experience those because you're going to be more calm and prepared because you've seen those things before. Just staying calm and confident. [I'm working on] limiting the things that I struggled with last year and just going in with an open mind and eager to work."

Head Coach Vance Joseph was a little more specific about Bolles' to-do list when he spoke to reporters at March's NFL Head Coaches Breakfast about the Broncos' 2017 first-round pick.

"First of all, physically he has to get bigger and stronger," Joseph said. "That's his first issue. His second issue is technique. I think having Chris Strausser as his full-time coach is going to help that. I'm excited to watch him grow as a player. But as a rookie to survive 16 weeks at left tackle, that's going to pay dividends for him. I'm excited to watch him come back and get better and better. He's a talent that just needs time to grow into the position. He is going to be a very good player for us in the future."

Bolles said he's added the weight that Joseph is looking for, and that should begin to help him and the line better protect the quarterback.

"We didn't do a good job last year doing what we need to do to protect the people behind us," Bolles said. "All of us up front are eager to just stay focused and get the job done and let Case [Keenum] do his thing."

If the external expectations for Bolles seem lofty, just know his own goals are even more difficult to complete. He said he hopes to make a Pro Bowl in his second season and knows he'll need to play in a consistent manner in order to accomplish that goal.

"My goal is to stay focused the whole game, do what I have to do, and be the best at my position without worrying about what other people have got to do," Bolles said. "[I need to] do what I've got to do to be the best. Because if I'm the best, then everyone around me is going to be the best also." That would certainly satisfy expectations.

Broncos' Garett Bolles to be honored by the National Center for Learning Disabilities for raising ADHD awareness

By Nicki Jhabvala
The Denver Post
February 27, 2018

Broncos offensive tackle Garett Bolles will be awarded the National Center for Learning Disabilities' Distinguished Leadership Award at the organization's March 5 benefit dinner in New York City. Bolles partnered with the NCLD and has shared his personal experience with ADHD to raise awareness of the disorder and to try to reduce the stigma.

"I have ADHD like a lot of kids do, and it's not that we're not smart — we just learn differently," Bolles said in a release from the NCLD. "People picked on me and tried to bring me down because they thought I was dumb, but I tell kids who are in the same boat to use those insults to fuel their fire to succeed — and every time someone tells you that you can't do something, throw another log on and keep it burning."

Last season for the league's annual My Cause My Cleats campaign that allows players to represent an initiative or organization of their choice with custom cleats, Bolles chose to represent the NCLD.

"I was in special education all the way through college," Bolles said prior to wearing his custom cleats. "I just wanted to give back to those kids. One in every five kids has a learning disability. That's not something that we should just overlook. … I'm a testament to (the fact that) it doesn't matter that you struggle in certain things or struggle learning, writing speaking. You can always (achieve) your dreams if you put forth something higher."

Bolles will be honored alongside author and Washington Post contributor Sally Quinn at the March 5 dinner. He will also participate in the NCLD's "Ask the Expert, Be the Expert" event in which he meets with high school students transitioning to college who have learning and attention issues.

Broncos' Garett Bolles selected to PFWA's all-rookie team

By Nicki Jhabvala
The Denver Post
January 16, 2018

Broncos tackle Garett Bolles was selected to the Pro Football Writers of America's all-rookie NFL team for 2017. Bolles, the only Broncos rookie selected this year, started all 16 games at left tackle, becoming the first to do so for Denver since Ryan Clady in 2008.

The No. 20 pick in last year's draft, Bolles was named the starter in training camp, taking over for veteran Russell Okung, who signed with the Los Angeles Chargers after a year in Denver. In his first NFL season, Bolles played the second-most offensive snaps of any Bronco with 1,106 (behind Matt Paradis' 1,127) to go with 55 special-teams snaps.

"Obviously, playing left tackle as a rookie is a tough job in this league," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said. "He's faced some tough rushers. He's held his own. He's a fighter. He's athletic. He's going to be a great player. Being a young tackle, he's had some ups and downs. That's natural. But, moving forward, that's going to be a good player for us."

Kragthorpe: How did current Denver Bronco and former Ute Garett Bolles become such a monster player?

By Kurt Kragthorpe
Salt Lake Tribune
August 30, 2017

Garett Bolles was crying, with grass stains covering his uniform and his nose bloodied from competing against older, bigger players in his first season of tackle football in Utah County. His father offered him a chance to rest, but the fourth-grader was too angry, too driven to stop playing. He chased down the quarterback twice for sacks in the next series.

That sequence of plays captured the traits that would make coaches at every level of football marvel about his athletic ability and relentless effort, eventually making him a starting offensive tackle as an NFL rookie. Only 20 months removed from Snow College and having played one season for the University of Utah, Bolles will take the field Sept. 11 when the Denver Broncos host San Diego in a Monday night game.

“He’s a one-in-a-million talent,” said former Snow coach Britt Maughan.

So how did this happen? There’s an entire football side to Bolles’ story, seemingly lost in the portrait that has become almost a caricature. The comparison to “The Blind Side,” with Bolles in the role of homeless youth Michael Oher, who became a Super Bowl winner for Baltimore, is exaggerated in some media snapshots, according to people who know his background.

This part is true: Greg and Emily Freeman, who took him into their home at age 19, are significant influences. And others helped guide a difficult child with learning and behavioral issues, while channeling football talent that came almost naturally.

“The real story,” said Bill Fogt, a family friend, “is there were a multitude of people who tried to help Garett Bolles.”

Collectively, they succeeded. And now Bolles looks like a rising star in pro football as a 25-year-old rookie who became the No. 20 overall pick. Throughout his childhood, Bolles repeatedly heard his father, Grove, tell him, “Your best days of football are ahead of you.”

That remains true even in the NFL, as Bolles’ father reminds him about fundamental blocking techniques in phone conversations. Jim Harding, Bolles’ line coach at Utah, knows it sounds weird to say a first-round pick still is developing, but he believes it. “He hopes to be the best tackle that ever played,” Harding said. “He’s not ashamed to say that, and the nice thing is his work ethic backs that up.”

Bolles grew into a 6-foot-5, 297-pound body after an awkward phase in his early teens, while regaining the drive that has made him an unrelenting player. Even as a 10-year-old, he promised to make it into the NFL.

Bob Oates, his grandfather, said Bolles is “not getting enough credit for his own perseverance.”

Bolles' anger, the inherent meanness that's a valued characteristic of an offensive lineman, surfaced early. The episode that made his father realize he needed to match the boy against older, bigger children came in third grade, when Bolles plowed over three defenders during a 50-yard touchdown run — in flag football.

That play showed "how differently he was wired," Grove Bolles said. No penalty was called, unlike some plays in junior college, major college and NFL preseason games when Bolles' aggressiveness hurt his team. Harding often pleaded with Bolles to calm down, but he said, "I'd rather have to pull a kid back than say, 'Hey, let's go play, let's be physical.'

The Broncos agree. Denver coach Vance Joseph named Bolles the team's starting left tackle right after an Aug. 19 game at San Francisco where he frequently was penalized.

"I'm not going to stop playing my game," Bolles said. "Things happen, but I'm never going to change the way I play."

That's how he got to this point, after all. Genetics have helped him, with former college (and NFL, in the cases of uncles Brad and Bart Oates) offensive linemen on both sides of his family. Paul L. Kruger, a father of three defensive linemen who all participated in NFL training camps in 2013, once ran Bolles through an hour of drills as an inexperienced high school player. By watching the lineman's hands and feet, Kruger concluded, "Some kids just have it naturally, and Garett was one of those kids."

Kruger paused, chuckling. "All of a sudden, he's a superstar," he said. "I was right."

Fred Prescott, one of his coaches at Westlake High School, said, "I could see it in his eyes. He really loves the game of football."

Only when Bolles returned from an LDS Church mission, though, did the possibility of even playing college football re-enter his mind. After watching his son play in a recreational lacrosse league, having grown to 305 pounds and somehow become faster, Grove Bolles told him, "It's time to go play football again."

His career resumed at Snow, where Maughan promised the future NFL first-round pick a tuition waiver — if he made the two-deep roster. "We didn't really know what we were getting into," said Maughan, whose brother Rafe coached the Badgers' offensive line. Reviewing Bolles' two years in Ephraim, Rafe Maughan said, "All my stories about Garett involve him absolutely destroying somebody or being [like] a 12-year-old kid."

In a football sense, Bolles' childlike eagerness helped him. He was known to spend an hour in his line coach's office before and after practice, learning the game after having barely played on offense in high school. The coaches soon discovered what they had in Bolles. "People had to game-plan for our offensive tackle," Britt Maughan said.

Among the Maughan brothers' favorite stories: Snow's repeatedly using a routine, outside-zone running play against Scottsdale (Ariz.) CC and gaining 8 to 12 yards every time, and a play during a bowl game vs. Dodge City (Kan.) CC, when Bolles knocked down a blitzing safety, an end and a linebacker in pass protection. As Rafe Maughan said, "I can't coach that."

Just about everybody in major college football wanted to coach Bolles, including Alabama's Nick Saban. Rafe Maughan, who accompanied Bolles on his visit, remembers Saban being stunned when Bolles didn't immediately accept his scholarship offer. Bolles wanted "the best fit," Maughan said, and he found it at Utah, where Harding became the latest in a series of influential coaches in the player's development.

After one season with the Utes, Bolles was ready for the NFL. In April, attending the draft event in Philadelphia, Bolles marveled about his own journey.

"It happened," he told his father.

From Westlake to Utah to Denver: Garett Bolles heading into rookie season as Broncos starter

By Sean Walker
KSL.com
August 30, 2017

By a strict academic calendar, former Snow College offensive lineman Garett Bolles should be going into his second season with the University of Utah, preparing for the Utes' season opener Thursday.

But life comes at you fast.

After flourishing in his lone season on the offensive line, earning all-Pac 12 honors and playing 891 snaps in 13 starts for the Utes, Bolles declared for the NFL draft last April — and was selected in the first round by the Denver Broncos.

Now the Lehi native has found a home just over an hour away from where he served his two-year mission for the LDS Church in Colorado Springs, starting on the offensive line through three games of the NFL preseason.

"It's great to be here, where I served my mission," Bolles said after a 20-17 win over Green Bay last Saturday. "Being around the people I love and around my teammates is great. I just love being here; the state of Colorado is my home and it's always going to be my home. I'm grateful that I got to start my career here."

Bolles' rag-to-riches story took him from a troubled past to the streets of Lehi as a homeless 19-year-old to Snow College, then Utah, and finally the NFL. He's inspiring people every day with his redemption, and the people of Denver are growing to love him — as well as his infant son Kingston and wife Natalie.

"Being a father is something special," Bolles said. "It makes me wake up every day and take care of what I am doing. I'm grateful that I have the beautiful wife and son that I rely on every day when the hard days hit. They are there to support me, to give me life, and I'm grateful to have them here to support me."

Bolles' arrival in the Mile High City has helped refuel optimism for a Broncos team just two years removed from a Super Bowl appearance — but one that missed the playoffs in 2016.

Much of the enthusiasm comes from bringing in former Utah college standouts, too. Former Utah running back Devontae Booker injured his wrist to miss the preseason, but he's expected to be reactivated from the physically unable to perform list around the start of the season, and carried onto the 53-man roster.

"This feel was electric. These guys came off a Super Bowl, and then not making the playoffs, so I know they had a long offseason and are ready to get back," said former Utah State wide receiver Hunter Sharp, who is trying to make the roster as a free agent. "They're serious; all of the guys are serious about making plays and winning games.

“The culture here is great.”

Anchoring the line at left tackle, Bolles is in charge of protecting the blindside of quarterback Trevor Siemian, and paving the way for running backs like Booker, Jamaal Charles and C.J. Anderson.

It’s worked — at least in the preseason, where the Broncos are 3-0.

“I think we’ve definitely shown some potential,” Denver wide receiver Jordan Taylor said. “I think that you can see that with our starters in for a little bit, that we can definitely move the ball and do things well. It’s just going to be about being consistent and being able to do that for four quarters.”

Bolles admits to plenty of “rookie mistakes” as he prepares for his first NFL regular season. But head coach Vance Joseph has shown confidence in naming him the team’s starting left tackle, and he’s able to lean on veteran linemen like Max Garcia, Allen Barbre, Matt Paradis, Ron Leary and Menelik Watson.

“I have great dudes on the O-line,” Bolles said. “All of those guys are with me every single day. They help me, they love me, they know I can make this team better, and they are giving me everything possible to make me a better player.

“They’re my brothers, and I’ll always remember them the rest of my life.”

Right now, Bolles is focused on the upcoming NFL season, correcting those rookie mistakes and making the Broncos feel deserving of their first-round pick.

But he’s also keeping one eye on his alma mater; the Utes open the regular season Thursday against North Dakota.

“I am excited to see what they can do,” Bolles said. “My brother Jackson Barton is going to hold down that left side for me, and Tyler Huntley and Troy Williams are worms that will go after it.

“I love my boys, I miss them, and go Utes.”

Garett Bolles Quickly Getting Up To Speed At Left Tackle

By Pat Graham
Associated Press
August 23, 2017

Denver Broncos newly anointed left tackle Garett Bolles found a blitz he just couldn't block: Teammates with razors.

As part of the veterans' annual ritual for rookies, Bolles had his hair sheared on both sides, with a strip left on the top and a tail in the back.

"My wife," Bolles said, "thought I was scary." His play has certainly been a cut above.

On the day he named Trevor Siemian his starting quarterback over 2016 first-rounder Paxton Lynch, coach Vance Joseph slipped in this little nugget: Bolles, this year's first-round pick , had secured his starting job as Siemian's blindside protector.

Bolles isn't letting up, however. He's expected to play the first half with the rest of the starters Saturday night against Green Bay, and he needs to clean up the penalties that have plagued him.

"I still have a lot of work" to do before the opener next month, Bolles said after a steamy practice Wednesday. "Got other things to worry about, like making sure I'm playing the best I can, and protect Trevor with all my heart and for him to know I have his back so he can step in the pocket and make plays.

"I'm not saying I'm where I need to be. But I'm on the right track to where I want to be."

Bolles attributes his quick learning curve to going up against the likes of Von Miller each day in practice. The 25-year-old Bolles got an early indoctrination into just how fast life is for a tackle in the NFL.

"There are going to be some guys who may be a little bit faster, but I feel like I'm getting in my groove," the 6-foot-5, 300-pound Bolles said. "I feel like everything is starting to click."

He experienced some growing pains last weekend during a preseason game at San Francisco when he was called for three holding penalties and a false start in one half of play.

"Things happen, but I'm never going to change the way I play, and never going to change the way I bring my energy," said Bolles, who was first-team All-Pac-12 last season at Utah. "If I change, then I'm not going to be who I am. I'm here for a reason. I'm the player I am. I finish people."

Offensive coordinator Mike McCoy doesn't want to harness any of Bolles' fierceness. But he does want him to know there's a fine line between aggression and going overboard. Asked what that line was, McCoy simply said: "Don't hold."

Bolles is out to eliminate the flags without crimping his aggressive nature.

"The minute I stop being who I am is the minute I'm not going to be where I need to be," Bolles said. "I'm the person I am today because of the way I play, the way I hold myself, the way I do things. There are so many great people who continue to push me, and that brings me the fire and brings me the juice so I can get ready to roll."

He certainly rolled with the punches when all the rookies got haircuts from the veterans. Safety T.J. Ward started Bolles' haircut and receiver Demaryius Thomas finished it off.

"Just because you have a funky-looking haircut doesn't mean you can't come out here and compete and do what you need to get better," Bolles said. "I'm going to continue to work, fix the little things I need to work on and be more consistent and get ready to play."

NOTES: Joseph said Miller will make his preseason debut against the Packers but wasn't sure how much he'd play..... WR Emmanuel Sanders was involved in a car accident on his way to practice Tuesday. "He was checked out. He was fine," Joseph said. "He had a small headache and he practiced. He's fine. He's totally fine." .....Ward (hamstring) was limited at practice Wednesday, a day after returning to thefield.

Broncos' top pick Garett Bolles moves closer to starting position

By Nick Kosmider
Denver Post
August 7, 2017

Garett Bolles has the deepest voice in the offensive line room at Broncos headquarters. He's the bass in a choir of grizzled baritones.

His rumbling vocals give him a presence. But it's his play during training camp that has given the team's top draft pick an opportunity to grab a starting position at left tackle.

Bolles, the No. 20 overall pick out of Utah, was listed at the top of the rotation at left tackle when the Broncos released their first depth chart Monday morning. It was not a major surprise given that Bolles has been the first left tackle to take repetitions with the first-team offense as part of rotation that also includes Donald Stephenson and Ty Sambrailo.

Still, it's an encouraging step for a player upon whom the Broncos placed sizable expectations as they began an overhaul of their offensive line for the second straight offseason.

"We've watched the spring and we've watched the first two weeks of training camp and he's played well. In my opinion, he's earned the right to start the game," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said of the team's preseason opener at Chicago on Thursday. "With that being said, we're still competing there with Donald and Ty. But he's played well enough to start Thursday night."

The game against the Bears doesn't only represent Bolles' first taste of NFL action. It will also be the first time he has attended an NFL game.

"I always get butterflies, but once the whistle blows, it's just a game," Bolles said. "I block everything out and I'm just ready to put people in the dirt."

Garett Bolles discusses 'humbling' first Father's Day

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
June 18, 2017

The Broncos will celebrate Father's Day in a variety of ways, but one new addition to the team is just months removed from a new addition to his team. DenverBroncos.com caught up with Garett Bolles, who will celebrate Sunday with his son, Kingston.

Of course, many of the lessons Bolles shares with his son will be ones he takes from Greg Freeman, whom Bolles lived with following a rough stretch in his life. As a son and a father, Bolles shares his perspective.

Aric DiLalla: This is your first Father's Day with Kingston. What are you looking forward to?

Garett Bolles: Just hanging out with family. Probably going to go to brunch and church and just enjoy my day. It's a great opportunity. I love my son dearly, so this is a special time I get to share with my family. Father's Day comes once a year, and when you become a father, it sort of hits you, knowing that you are one. It's just an awesome opportunity.

AD: Is it a little bit weird to celebrate it for the first time?

GB: Oh, absolutely. Just like my wife said when she celebrated Mother's Day for the first time. She said it was weird, but it's good. It's something you've got to get used to. But being a father and a husband, it's awesome. It's a very humbling experience.

AD: What lessons have you taken from Greg that you're going to try to apply as a father?

GB: Just teach my kid how to work hard. That's what Greg showed me: to work hard and to never give up. And, you know, just be a person that your son can look up to every single day. When your son needs you, be there. When your son calls you, answer the phone.

That's what a father is. You've got to be there for your kid regardless. This world's too crazy not to be. Your kid can get down a deep path and may need you the most, and that's when you've got to love him the most and hug him and teach him the ropes.

That's what I plan on doing with my son, is just giving him the life that I never had and hope that he learns from my mistakes and becomes a better man than I am.

He’s Got Game: Broncos’ Bolles Shows Off His Lacrosse Skills

By Staff
CBS 4
June 18, 2017

In addition to football, the Denver Broncos No. 1 draft pick Garett Bolles played lacrosse growing up. On Saturday he got to take a few shots on goal with the Denver Outlaws.

Bolles was invited to be part of the ceremonial pre-game faceoff before the Outlaws game. The Outlaws

are owned by Pat Bowlen like the Broncos, and they play at Mile High.

They are the defending major league lacrosse champions.

“I’ve heard about the Denver Outlaws but never really paid attention to them, but it’s just good to be out here knowing that they’re here, they win championships. And that’s what we do here in Denver. Denver Broncos win Super Bowls and they win championships in lacrosse, so that’s how we do it in this town.

The Outlaws lost to Boston Saturday night but remain tied for first with Ohio.

Saturday also marked Bolles’ first visit to the stadium where the Broncos and Outlaws play.

“This is a special stadium for sure,” said Bolles. “I’m excited to see the sea of orange and all the fans. We have a great community here.”

Bolles Spends Time With Broncos No. 1 Offense

By Staff
CBS 4
June 14, 2017

First-round pick Garett Bolles looks like he's headed for the starting lineup — sooner rather than later.

Denver Broncos head coach Vance Joseph said he wanted Bolles to earn his spot on the first team at left tackle. And while the Utah product isn't all the way there, he's reached the point where he is splitting time with veteran Ty Sambrailo on the No. 1 offense.

"It's a tough spot to play as a rookie, and it takes a lot of football IQ to play that spot in the NFL," Joseph said. "When he knows what to do, he can block his guy. His talent shows. The ultimate issue is knowing what to do and how to do it, but he's a first-round pick for a reason. He's a talent."

His teammates can see it.

"He's got the right mentality and he's stacking some good days together," Broncos quarterback Trevor Siemian said. "I think that's important for all of us. That's what we really want to do. He's learning. He's not making the same mistake twice a lot of times, which is good. I think he's special and he's got a really bright future."

Rookie Garett Bolles making progress toward starting lineup

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN
June 13, 2017

The Denver Broncos open their mandatory minicamp Tuesday, and that three-day affair will formally close their offseason program.

When Thursday rolls around there will be the requisite missives tossed around about the “good work" that got done or how “we got better." That indeed happened in many ways, but the Broncos will still adjourn with questions to answer.

That makes the next three days the last look -- until July -- at some front-burner items like:

Where do things really stand at quarterback? Broncos coaches have kept a keen eye on what Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch have done since players returned to work in April, but the real on-field competition for the job will begin in training camp.

Though few inside the team's complex would publicly acknowledge it, Siemian is still ahead. He sees the field better, especially between the numbers, throws on time more consistently and does better work in between the big splash plays folks seem to notice more.

That said, Lynch’s arm and athleticism are intriguing to the team’s decision-makers and he carries that first-round selection with him. Around the league some competing personnel evaluators wonder if Broncos’ executive vice president of football operations/general manager John Elway, as well as the Broncos coaching staff, would want to jam Lynch into the lineup to make that first-round selection bear fruit sooner.

However, the Broncos have Lynch potentially signed for five years, if they eventually pick up the fifth-year option, so there is no real hurry there, and Elway has vowed “I don’t want to play him if he’s not ready." Quarterbacks win jobs on trust, and all of the athleticism in the world cannot push a quarterback into the starting lineup if the people making the decisions don’t believe that quarterback will make the right choices when it’s a little more than a middle-of-the-week 7-on-7 drill.

Will rookie Garett Bolles be the starting left tackle? The first-round pick is headed that way and his work in the coming days could even put him in position to open training camp with the starters.

The Broncos opened OTAs with Donald Stephenson at left tackle and then Ty Sambrailo moved in with the starters. In recent weeks the Broncos really like what Bolles has done -- he’s has stood up for himself quite nicely against one of the league’s best defenses -- and has shown the expected athleticism in pass protection.

Bolles has also shown the study habits, the wants-to-be-a-pro attitude coaches love to see. If he can show some consistency working out of a three-point stance in the run game, he could edge out Sambrailo for the starting job.

Will the Broncos defense stop the run? Look, they finished 28th last year, so there is almost nowhere to go but up there. That said, opposing offenses were able to essentially mute Von Miller down the stretch last season -- Miller had no sacks in the final four games -- because those offenses could run the ball largely whenever they wished.

The proof will always be in what happens when the pads go on, but Broncos look far more physical up front -- Domata Peko and Zach Kerr were quality additions. That should enable their linebackers, especially Brandon Marshall, to have a little clearer path to the ball-carriers.

Beyond Bolles, what other rookies figure to have impact? It's tough to fool your teammates if you're a rookie, especially in a locker room like the Broncos' that includes plenty of Alpha players. They're going to know who has put in the time and who hasn't, and patience will be hard to find for those who are more interested in telling people they're in the NFL rather than staying there.

To that end, second-round pick DeMarcus Walker has come in and quietly gotten down to work. He figures to be in the rotation, especially in some pass-rush situations.

Carlos Henderson and Isaiah McKenzie could well be the team's kickoff and punt returner respectively, while running back De'Angelo Henderson (a sixth-round pick) could have a more difficult time getting opportunities given a crowded depth chart but gives the team real speed and short-area quickness.

Unless there is unexpected progress over the next month or so, Jake Butt and Chad Kelly will open training camp on the physically unable to perform (PUP) list, given both are still recovering from knee surgeries. Kelly has a hand injury he's been getting treatment for as well.

Butt will move into the rotation at tight end as soon as he's healthy.

Rookie Garett Bolles has earned time with Broncos' starters

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN
June 13, 2017

When the Denver Broncos made tackle Garett Bolles the 20th selection in April's draft, they did so with an eye toward the rookie having what it takes to earn a starting job.

And as the Broncos opened their mandatory minicamp Tuesday, it's become clear that Bolles continues to climb the depth chart toward the first team.

"[He's made] a lot of progress," Broncos coach Vance Joseph said. "It's a tough spot to play as a rookie. … When he knows what to do, he can block his guy, his talent shows. … He's a first-round pick for a reason."

Bolles split time at left tackle with the starter Ty Sambrailo on Tuesday. It was Bolles' most extensive work with the first team in the offseason program. When the Broncos opened their OTAs in May, Donald Stephenson got the first look at left tackle. Then Sambrailo moved into a starting role, and now Bolles has edged his way deeper into the discussion.

The Broncos have two more days of their mandatory minicamp this week before they adjourn until training camp in late July.

"He's done a good job. It's tough," quarterback Trevor Siemian said. "We got him working at left tackle, and that's tough for a young guy, especially against the guys we've got. So he's doing a good job; he's got the right mentality and he's stacking some good days together, which I think as a young player … is what you really want to do. I think he's special; he's got a really bright future."

Bolles' work with the starters Tuesday was part of some juggling the Broncos did up front. Ronald Leary, who was signed in free agency and has worked at left guard through to the offseason program, was put at right guard Tuesday, and Max Garcia, who has been at right guard, was moved to the left side.

Garcia played at left guard last season but had been moved when the Broncos began their offseason work because Leary had played primarily left guard in his time with the Dallas Cowboys. Leary has said he didn't have a preference and would play "wherever they want me to.''

"Hopefully that's a better mesh for us," Joseph said after Tuesday's practice. "We think Max is more comfortable playing left and Ronald -- he doesn't care."

Garett Bolles listed among X-factors for 2017 season

By Zack Kelberman
247 Sports
June 5, 2017

He hasn't earned so much as legitimate practice snaps, but Garett Bolles possesses the power to shape the upcoming season.

This is the narrative of NFL.com writer Marc Sessler, who released a list of 13 people -- players and coaches alike -- he dubbed "X-factors" for 2017. Among them was the Broncos' rookie offensive tackle and first-round draft pick.

Via Sessler:

Coach Vance Joseph called Bolles a "true left tackle," and he had better be just that. Denver's season boils down to the offensive line jelling in a hurry after operating as a raging mess in 2016. You can write all you want about the quarterback tussle between Trevor Siemian and Paxton Lynch, but both are bound to start games and suffer if Bolles and his fellow blockers can't fend off angry pass rushers.

The Broncos made Bolles the 20th overall selection despite red flags surrounding his age (25) and relative inexperience. The team pulled the trigger with the future in mind; they love the towering blindside blocker's upside and feel, with some fine-tuning, he can start there for the long haul.

“We hope so,’’ general manager John Elway said shortly after he chose Bolles. “We feel we do. Obviously, we’re very high on Garett and think he’s a very athletic tackle, he plays on the left side, he plays with great passion and loves playing the game of football. We’re excited Garett was there and he’s now a Denver Bronco.’’

But draft status has no bearing on Bolles' job security, at least in the interim. Denver is making him earn a starting job the hard way -- winning it outright. Bolles is competing with veterans Ty Sambrailo and Donald Stephenson for the right to join the front-five.

Thus far, entering the third week of Organized Team Activities, Bolles is losing. Sambrailo and Stephenson both have taken reps with the first-string offense, while Bolles is typically relegated to running with the twos. Such is life for a rookie looking to break into a veteran group.

Bolles won't impact the Broncos' season while rotting on the bench. He needs to get on the field, and not just to prove offseason fluff pieces correct. At some point, he'll be expected to justify his employer's gargantuan investment.

'Grown man' Garett Bolles already impressing rest of OL

By Aric DiLalla
DenverBroncos.com
May 9, 2017

Garett Bolles passed his first rookie test.

During a recent conversation, guard Ron Leary asked Bolles a question about the Broncos' playbook.

Yes, the same playbook that Bolles just recently received after being drafted 20th overall by the Broncos on April 27.

He wasn't fazed.

Not even two weeks later, and the rookie showed he already has a jump on Offensive Line Coach Jeff Davidson's scheme.

"He's already in the playbook," Leary said Tuesday. "He impressed me. I said a play and he knew what the play was right away, so I was impressed with that."

That mental learning curve will be the biggest obstacle during Bolles' transition to the NFL, Leary said. Though much of the scheme carries over from college to the NFL, the naming convention is entirely different.

Bolles will have to cope with that while adjusting to a league in which "everybody's big and strong," Leary said.

If there's one thing working in Bolles' favor, though, it's his relative maturity compared to others drafted in the first round. He'll be 25 years old by the time the Broncos kick off the season against the Los Angeles Chargers in September, and Leary thinks that's an advantage for the first-year player.

"He's 25, so he's a grown man," said Leary, who called Bolles to congratulate him in the days after the draft. "He talks like a grown man. He approaches the game like a grown man. And he wants to play ball."

That grown-man mentality meshes with the goal that Head Coach Vance Joseph and Executive Vice President of Football Operations/General Manager John Elway have articulated throughout the offseason.

"He's real physical," Leary said. "I know that's what John and Vance were trying to do with the O-line, and I think he fits perfectly with that. I'm looking forward to getting him in here, having him mesh with the guys and just get to playing some ball."

Pretty soon, Bolles will get the chance to show that on the field.

And as he makes that transition, Leary, guard Max Garcia and the rest of the offensive-line room will have his back.

“He has us,” Garcia said, “and we’re going to do whatever we can. He’s one of us now, so he’s under our wing and under our supervision.”

Bolles may be a grown man, but that should be welcome news as the rookie finds his footing in the NFL.

The Garett Bolles' story through the eyes of the only two people who believed

By Ryan Koenigsberg
BSN Denver
May 4, 2017

"Absolutely not," said a gracious Garret Bolles last Friday afternoon when asked if he would be where he is today without the Freeman family.

"They're here with me today and I love them dearly," he added. "I get emotional when I talk about that family because they mean the world to me. When they picked me up off of the streets in August of 2011, it was the best thing that even happened to me. I realized what a family is, what love is, how a structured family looks and how I want to raise my son… I love them dearly so much; I give them so much credit for helping me to reach my dreams and to be standing here today."

(For our story on Garett's rise from his perspective click here)

A few feet away, the eyes of Greg Freeman began to fill with tears. The troubled kid he and his wife had taken a chance on years ago, the kid who was more likely to end up in jail than on a podium at Denver Broncos headquarters had achieved his dream.

"A lot of gratitude," Freeman said later of his feeling in that moment, now unable to keep the tears in the wells of his eyes. "God does amazing things. It wasn't Emily and I; it was God and Garett figuring out who he needed to be. I give all of the credit to Garett."

They say pit bulls are not inherently aggressive, that they simply more susceptible to bad influences. They also say a properly raised pit bull can be one of the most loyal and loving breeds.

The Freeman family saw the good in Garett "Pit" Bolles.

Greg and Emily didn't see the kid who was known on the first-name basis by the Lehigh Police Department, expelled from multiple schools, the kid who had spent nights in jail; somehow, someway, they saw something else.

"It doesn't take long when you start talking to Garett to see that heart," Emily Freeman told BSN Denver. "It's such a big heart, and you just fall in love with him… You just can't help but love him; he's got this heart, it's such a great heart… He was a kid who just didn't really know where he was going but had a really good heart; he always had a great heart."

The story of Garett Bolles is the ultimate validation of second chances, the ultimate validation of gut feelings. Something inside the Freeman's told them to put aside Garett's past and the fact that they already had four children of their own, something told them to bring in a troubled kid who may just need a second lease on his life.

They were right.

What they found was that with a little bit of TLC, that heart of his was easily uncovered. What they found was that when given clear and specific guidelines, Garett would follow them, what they found was that along with that big heart, Garett had big dreams.

“From eighth grade on, Garett always believed that he was going to ‘play in the league,'” Greg said. “Emily and I were probably the ones that always said, ‘Oh come on, Garett. School is not your thing.'”

“He’s been talking about this dream as long as I’ve known him,” Emily added. “For the first years, I would tell him, ‘We have to find you a new dream. I don’t think this is going to work out.’ He wasn’t NCAA eligible—I don’t know a lot about football—I kept telling him, ‘We have to get you a new dream,’ and he just never let it go. He never let it go.”

As he grew up and grew out of his troubled youth, Garett Bolles began to develop a knack for proving people wrong.

According to his non-biological mother, he heard it all. “You’ll never graduate from high school.”

He did.

“You’ll spend your life behind bars.” He didn’t.

“You won’t succeed at the junior college level.” He did.

‘You’ll never play D-I football.'” He did that too.

Interestingly enough, the last two people the 6-foot-5, 300-pounder had to prove wrong were the only two people who believed in him from the start.

On April 27, 2017, right around 8:25 pm, he finally did.

“When that phone rang,” Mrs. Freeman said, referencing John Elway’s call to Garett. “I looked at him pick it up, and I thought, ‘Oh my heck, he’s gonna do it, he’s gonna live his dream.'”

“It’s been a wild ride, a great ride,” Greg Freeman says, the tears coming back to his eyes. “I’m really proud. The first game at snow college, [I had tears in my eyes]. The first game when he ran out of the tunnel at the University of Utah, I got a little emotional, and last night I started feeling that intensity.”

Garett Bolles has done it; he’s risen from the ashes, and—against all odds—gone from a jail-bound teenager to a first-round NFL draft pick.

So what's next? Well, there were plenty of people who felt the Broncos should have gone a different direction.

"You look back and all along Garett's life, what he'll tell you has been consistent is the people who told him he couldn't," Said Emily Freeman. "He's been determined to prove people wrong since the very beginning; there's a fire in the back of his head."

"He's going to do it; he's going to live this dream."

Garett Bolles joins Broncos family, nearly six years after the Freeman family gave him another chance

By Terry Frei
Denver Post
May 1, 2017

In August 2011, Greg Freeman was in his company truck in Lehi, Utah, about 30 miles south of Salt Lake City.

The owner of a garage door installation and service company who dabbled as a high school lacrosse coach, Freeman spotted a teenager he had known for years, first coaching him in lacrosse as far back as seventh grade; and then as his own children and wife, Emily, helped tutor the kid through high school.

Garett Bolles, who had just turned 19 and had graduated from Westlake High School two months earlier, was at the side of the road near his family home, carrying garbage sacks and duffel bags full of his belongings.

Garett's father, Grove, fed up with his son's propensity to get into trouble at the wrong place, at the wrong time, with the wrong people, and with the wrong things, had kicked him out, saying that for the good of all, Garett needed to find somewhere else to live.

Freeman pulled over. He spoke with Garret and got the story. He called Emily. He explained the situation and asked his wife: "What do you want me to do?"

At the Broncos' Dove Valley headquarters Friday, Emily Freeman, 47, recalled her reaction.

The Freemans had four children of their own, two boys — including a son, Josh, in the same graduating class as Garett at Westlake — and two girls. They both knew Garett fell far short of qualifying for a halo. Yet they were about to add a third son.

"I hit my knees and prayed," Emily said. "I thought, 'God will know. He'll know what's right for Garett, he'll know what's right for our kids.' … It was clear as day. 'Bring him home.' I said, 'Greg, put his stuff in the truck and bring him home.' "

On Friday, Greg Freeman, 49, was only a few minutes removed from being teary-eyed as the Broncos' 2017 first-round draft choice, Utah tackle Garett Bolles, thanked the couple he now calls his parents at his introductory news conference at the team's headquarters. Bolles was the NFL's No. 20 overall choice, the first offensive lineman taken. And this was all less than six years after he literally had nowhere to go … and ended up with the Freemans.

"He was struggling with growing up," Greg recalled. "He was known by the city police and things of that nature by first name and he knew them by first name. He did have an issue with vandalism and spent the night in the jail, and so, yeah, he was a wayward kid needing some love and guidance."

Said Emily: “Even behind all of the hard things that were going on at home and with the law, and everything he was facing, you just saw inside there was a kid with so much potential. He just needed someone to tell him it was there.”

Grove Bolles works in real estate financing and has remained in Garett’s life since that night, and attended the draft in Philadelphia on Thursday as part of Garett’s entourage. The one thing that can’t be doubted: This worked out for the best after Garett, always a handful, was adrift following his high school graduation.

“He had a pretty good senior year in high school football,” Grove said Saturday. “Not quite good enough to be a college player, but you could see that that talent and the future was there. He kind of struggled with not having a landing board out of high school. His two older brothers, Kyle and Weston, served LDS missions and he wasn’t quite sure if he was ready for that on the maturity level. He wasn’t quite sure he was ready for the workforce and what he wanted to do.

“So he decided to start partying. It got pretty out of hand.”

Grove and his wife had split up the year before and as a single father, Grove still had Garett and his two younger brothers and sister in the household.

“I’m a real hands-on dad,” he said. “I’ve been an integral part of his life, his whole life. I’ve probably spent more time with him than any of my other children because he needed it. We’ve always been very close in that regard. When he started spinning out of control, we had a lot of talks about maturation and focus and direction and being patient in life’s process and understanding he was going to have to find himself and be more disciplined in his choices. Well, he chose to hang around a bunch of knucklehead kids who were pretty bad kids.”

Grove said he felt as if he had lost control of his son.

“I wouldn’t say his partying was exceptional or extraordinary,” he said. “Typical things of young boys trying to find themselves in life. Drinking, a little bit of drugs. But his disrespect at home had gotten off the charts. … It was understandable what he was doing, but it certainly wasn’t acceptable. Finally, one day I came home on a Saturday morning and there were three of his buddies in his room who were forbidden to be in my house. Two of those kids went on to prison and jail.”

Grove said he told Garett’s buddies to get out of the house. Then he turned to Garett.

“I said, ‘I’m going to give you four hours to get your stuff out of the house, and when I come back, if you’re here, I’m going to get you arrested for trespassing.’ He said, ‘You’re kidding, Dad.’ I said, ‘No, this has come to an end. You need to get out of the house. I’ll still keep being your dad, still love you, still going to support you, but you can no longer live here. You’re upsetting the household, you’re not helping, your brothers and sister don’t like you being around right now, you need to find someplace else to live. I’ll be there for you, but you can’t live here.’”

Grove said he emphasized that if Garett got his act together and showed he could be respectful long-term, he could return to the family’s home. But not until then.

Finding a new life

When Garett moved in with the Freemans, Greg and Emily declared there were three rules. Garett would attend weekly services at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he would tithe 10 percent of any income he made to the church, and he would turn off and turn over his phone every night.

“Garett and I have a real interesting relationship,” Emily said. “He’ll tell you he’s scared of me, which is funny, my kids laugh so hard. But he knows when I tell him something, I’m serious about it. When he came in, I said there won’t be any warnings. I said, ‘You break one of these rules and we’ll help you find somewhere else to live.’ I wasn’t going to leave him on the street. He never did break them. He went to church every single Sunday. He paid his tithing. None of the kids that worried me came around. There were other battles along the way that we would go through and work out one by one.”

As Grove Bolles spoke Saturday, he was very enthusiastic in his praise of the Freemans and while expressing gratitude for what they have done with their rules that Garett accepted in reassessing his life.

“Garett would call me frequently, sometimes several times a day and say he was adjusting to a new household, new rules, a new environment,” he said. “I said, ‘That’s Emily and Greg’s house, I know what kind of household they have, it’s a great place, you need to adjust and abide by their rules. But you can’t come home.’ I said, ‘I’m here for you, I’m still your dad, I’m still going to love you, that’s where you need to be right now.’

“I think it’s a classic example of what a mother- and father-run household can do as compared to a single-parent household. … I was completely involved in his life and all his activities. I want to focus on the positive, what’s Garett’s made of his life and how Greg and Emily have helped. I’ve been there supporting him unwaveringly the whole time. I didn’t abandon him. I didn’t disown him. If anything, I was more involved in his life than ever. But I had to support Greg and Emily in their efforts because that was his last chance. I saw that and he saw that.”

Greg Freeman noted: “His real father put him out for lessons of good love. Grove is still a good friend of ours. At that point, Garett needed a different direction, and I happened to be there.”

The lore is that, before all that happened, Garett was “kicked out” of five schools as he was raised in Lehi. That’s misleading because it treats suspensions as expulsions.

“I just fought a lot,” Bolles said in a conversation in the lobby outside the Broncos’ position meeting rooms Friday. “I had a lot of anger, because there was a lot of turmoil at my house.”

Struggling at times because of attention deficit disorder with hyperactivity (ADDH), Garett transferred from Lehi High to the new Westlake High during his junior year. At Westlake as a senior football player, he got caught up in that vandalism incident at Lehi — his former school.

“I spray-painted my archrival high school,” Bolles said sharply. “Whatever you want to think of that, you can. I was just a high school kid playing a high school prank that went wrong so I don’t really think about it. That stuff’s in the past. I’m going to bury it and never bring it back up. I’m a Denver Bronco and that stuff’s behind me. Now I have to work with a team to make them better and make me better.”

Michael O'Connor at the time was, and still is, the athletic director at Westlake.

"He can be a character at times, as everyone knows," O'Connor said of Bolles. "All the things he went through and all he's done to make his life better, it shows a lot about who he is. But he and a couple of kids obviously didn't make the right decision then and they spray-painted (Lehi's) turf field. That was at the very beginning of the season, so he ended up having to sit out a few games. That flustered him, and he's a passionate kid. He's emotional, and everything comes from his heart right away. I know they got fined and the kids had to pay for it. There were three or four of them, all suspended.

"He wasn't on track to graduate. But something sparked right after football season. … He got his work done and then some and he graduated. We could have given up on him. We didn't give up on kids."

Dream of NFL forms

As he played football and lacrosse and also met the Freemans and others for tutoring during his high school years, Bolles talked about someday playing in the NFL. (Westlake didn't have a lacrosse program. Freeman was the lacrosse coach at Lehi. So even after Bolles transferred to Westlake, he played high school lacrosse for Freeman at Lehi.)

Emily Freeman, among others, reminded Garett that academically he wouldn't pass the NCAA's muster to receive a scholarship. He was a decent high school football player, but lanky and immature physically. His NFL talk seemed complete fantasy.

For the next 18 months, after moving in with the Freemans, Garett worked for Greg as a garage-door technician. He not only liked the work, he became very good at it. "It's my passion," he said. "It's something I love to do. Anyone out there that needs help with their garage door, call me, I'll be there."

Said Greg: "My thought was this guy probably will take over this business and be in the garage-door business his whole adult life."

Starting in early 2013, Bolles also spent nearly a year on an LDS mission to Colorado. He officially was based in Colorado Springs, but spent much of his time in Pueblo.

"I loved Pueblo," he said. "They're great people down there. The food's outstanding; they put the green chili on the burgers and they smother burritos. Fat food for offensive linemen like me. I loved them; I have so many friends and friendships that always will play a big role in my life."

Returning to the Freeman home in early 2014, he again worked with Greg's company. But by then, he had grown and gained a lot of weight. As he played on an adult team in a summer lacrosse league, with Greg as a teammate, he displayed eye-popping speed and athletic ability for a big man.

With encouragement from Grove, who did some checking with a football coach friend, and from the Freemans, Garett and Emily Freeman ended up meeting with a Brigham Young University assistant coach in Provo. The coach summoned Snow Junior College coach Britt Maughan to meet Bolles, and Maughan invited him to attend the start of preseason practices on what amounted to a tryout.

The Freemans told Garett, OK, if he earned a scholarship at the junior college program in Ephraim, Utah, great. If he didn't, it was back to the garage-door business.

“My mom told me, ‘If you have cleats on you, you’re the first one on the field and the last one off, you run everywhere,’ ” Bolles said. “That’s what I did. I kept running and doing what I needed to do to make myself successful.”

He got that scholarship, and after his freshman season, it was obvious he was capable of playing at the major-program level. In March 2015, he attended Snow’s “True Badger Night.”

“It’s a dance, and then you go into the bell tower and it’s a big kissing frenzy,” he said. “I had a warm feeling to go and there she was, and I told her, ‘Let me show you how a real man kisses.’ That’s what happened.”

“She” was Natalie Williams.

“She gave me her phone number and I thought it was one of those when girls give you fake numbers, but it was the right number,” Bolles said.

Now Natalie Bolles, she also was at Dove Valley on Friday.

“The first night we hung out, I asked him about his life because it was my first time meeting him,” she said. “He just told me his life story. Like everything. I just saw the passion and the caring person that he is. I cried when he told me his story. I said this guy is so sweet, he’s so nice, he’s a guy I would like to keep hanging out with.”

He even told her about garage doors. Really. “He loves to talk about it,” she said. “That was one of his favorite things. If you ask him anything about a garage door, he’ll tell you how to fix it, where to get it, how long it will last.” She added something that’s especially interesting in light of his ADDH struggles. “Once he retains information, it’s there,” she said.

They were engaged in June 2015, married in December 2015 and now are the parents of 4-month-old son Kingston, who was in “Lion King” Garett’s arms when the Broncos’ top draft choice joined NFL commissioner Roger Goodell on the stage in Philadelphia on Thursday. Kingston also was with his parents at Broncos headquarters Friday.

As a sophomore at Snow, Bolles was the Western States Football League’s offensive player of the year. As a tackle.

Once planning to attend BYU, he decided to consider other options after he became one of the most highly sought junior college players in the country. Sifting through offers from power five programs, he chose the backyard school, Utah, and was an all-Pac-12 choice as a junior last season before declaring for the draft.

“He had a strong desire to be the best and is willing to put in the time afterwards,” Utah offensive line coach Jim Harding said. “If we would have an individual period, and he maybe didn’t feel like he got the technique down, he would grab me after practice and ask to work that technique again.”

@NFL
After being drafted by the @Broncos, @gbolles74 was surprised with a heartfelt video message from his family.
So many feels. #NFLDraft

Did he see any of the troubled kid that Bolles once was?

“No, I didn’t, and that’s what I told the scouts,” Harding said. “I can’t say that about every kid I have in the offensive line, but on Friday and Saturday night, I’m not wondering what Garett Bolles is doing or if he’s doing the right thing. Nothing that is in his past ever showed up when he was at Utah. … He got married when we were still recruiting him, and he’s been with Natalie ever since he came to campus, and that’s a real stabilizing influence for him.

“The Freemans are a tremendous positive influence on him, and I think it’s tremendous where Garett is going because it’s the closest place it could have been to Utah. Emily and Greg have done wonders for him.”

It’s a story that doesn’t need to be made up.

Garett Bolles knows moment he learned to dream about NFL

By Jeff Legwold
ESPN
April 28, 2017

He held a jersey, posed for pictures, stood with the commissioner, held his son up for the world to see, and it all meant Garett Bolles had a dream come true the moment he became the Denver Broncos' first-round draft pick on Thursday.

And while some may not be able to point to the moment when all they have imagined actually became possible, Bolles said for him it was a hot August day in 2011. That's when Greg Freeman piled Bolles and the small collection of things that were Bolles' earthly possessions into a truck and took the troubled young man into his home.

"When [Freeman] picked me up off the streets ... it was the best thing that ever happened to me,'' Bolles said Friday as the Utah product was formally introduced as the Broncos' budding left tackle.

Bolles' story became fairly well known in the pre-draft swirl. He said he was "a lost kid'' at that time, thrown out of his home by his father, tossed out of multiple schools for his behavior, plagued by drug use and even some jail time. And then Freeman, who had been Bolles' lacrosse coach, saw Bolles walking on that August day, with the limited belongings Bolles could carry, and changed everything. On Friday, Freeman talked about that moment, when he decided to bring Bolles into his family.

"Instantly, I knew when I was putting his stuff in my truck,'' Freeman said just after Bolles had posed for photos with Broncos executive vice president of football operations/general manager John Elway and coach Vance Joseph.

"I did call my wife [Emily],'' Freeman added. "And she said, 'You've got to be kidding me.' Then she said, 'Let me hurry and go pray,' and I thought, 'Garett, you better go pray too because whatever the lady says, I do.' But she literally called back even before we got to the house, which was a mile and a half away, and she called and said, 'OK, I feel good about it.' And at that point, it was us.''

That was the beginning of the transition for Bolles. Many late-night conversations followed, even more tears shed along the way. But as Bolles stood on the doorstep of what will become of his NFL career Friday, he was quick to point out how he got there.

Asked if he would have been standing at a podium inside an NFL team's complex if the Freemans hadn't taken him in, Bolles said, "Absolutely not.....I get emotional when I talk about that family. They mean the world to me.''

Bolles' wife, Natalie, and son, Kingston, were seated just a few feet away when Bolles was introduced by the Broncos, and the Freemans had two seats on the aisle in the second row of the team meeting room.

The Freemans, Bolles said, had given him structure, shown him love, taught him how to be part of a family. The Freemans said Bolles did his part as well, following the rules, responding to what was asked of him and making the changes he needed to make.

Bolles worked for two years in Freeman's garage-door repair business, spent hours in the truck with Freeman "all over Utah," discussing all things in life along the way. Freeman said there was only one volatile moment, and even that passed quickly.

"I do have to say we lost a state quarterfinal lacrosse game,'' Freeman said. "And after that game, yeah, he gave me the finger and walked off before I did the [postgame talk] after losing -- we lost handily. That was the only time I've ever seen him [do that]. The next year, I suspended him the first three games. ... I've never seen him raise his voice in my house ever.''

There is plenty of football work to be done by Bolles in the weeks and months that will follow. He talks of technique issues he wants to fix in pass protection to go with cutting down on the penalties that have come with his fiery playing style. But as a person who hopes to have a long career in the NFL, Bolles already has covered plenty of ground to get where he once he may have thought he never could be.

"No question. But if y'all need your garage doors fixed, just call me,'' Bolles said with a smile. "Me and Greg Freeman, we just talked about life. ... I love him dearly; he plays a special role in my life..... I won't let them down.''

Garett Bolles is the face of the Broncos draft. His family stole the show.

By Cameron Wolfe
Denver Post
April 28, 2017

Garett Bolles, clothed in a sharp blue suit and white Broncos cap, commanded the room with a bass-filled voice. The 6-foot-5, 297-pound offensive tackle is the face of the Broncos draft after being selected 20th overall. Yet his family was the main attraction at Friday afternoon's introductions at Dove Valley.

The Freeman family, Greg and Emily, whom Bolles calls his parents, arrived alongside Garett's wife, Natalie. Emily held Garett's four-month-old son, Kingston, who has become the most-photographed newborn over the last 24 hours. When Bolles mentions family, it's these people, his adopted family, who he said saved his life. He said he wouldn't have been in Denver on Friday without the Freeman family. It's their love that has paved the way for how he raises Kingston.

"I just want to be a great father. That's what it comes down to," Bolles said. "I want my son to know I'm a hard worker and that I put my family first in everything I do."

The emotion in the room was raw. Although Bolles' story could likely be a best-selling movie, everything about his life and this moment was authentic. He often refers to himself as 'lost' and the Freeman family found him. Friday, he got to share a moment he had been planning for since the sixth grade with them.

"I'm a very structured person," Bolles said. "This is why I got called here because the good Lord knew I needed structure. And Mr. Elway does a great job of structure."

It's easy to see why Broncos general manager John Elway, who couldn't stop smiling throughout the Bolles news conference, made it a priority to target the 24-year-old offensive tackle.

"Athletic, tough, tremendous want-to, great competitor," said Elway, describing why Bolles was the pick, before raving about his character.

But Bolles will ultimately be judged by his ability to be football.

He plans to weigh between 295 to 305 pounds, light for left tackle standards, but Bolles is confident his athleticism, speed and physicality will make up for it. He was excited to receive a team welcome from guard Max Garcia and outside linebacker Von Miller, among others.

His friendship with 49ers tackle Joe Staley and guard Zane Beadles has helped him progress as a football player. There's still growth to be made as a pass protector, and being more disciplined, he said.

Bolles values his relationships with people more as a core pillar along with faith, family and football. It's why it wasn't out of character for Bolles to tell Elway he loves him after receiving his draft call Thursday night.

“I’m a big teddy bear off the field,” Bolles said, who said his switch turns to nasty on the field. “I definitely love Mr. Elway. He took a chance on me when a lot of teams passed me up. He believed in me. All I needed was one team to fall in love with and that’s exactly what the Broncos did.”

Scouting report, 5 things to know about Broncos new left tackle Garett Bolles

By Cameron Wolfe
Denver Post
April 27, 2017

The board had many surprises, but the Broncos' target didn't change much. They selected the man they considered the best offensive tackle in the draft, Garett Bolles, to fill their biggest need, left tackle. They also hope he brings the physicality and nastiness they are looking for.

Size: 6-foot-5, 297 pounds

College: Utah

Age: 24

Five things to know about Bolles

– Bolles grew up in Lehi, Utah amid an atmosphere of alcohol and drugs, violence and gang activity. He was kicked out of his home by his father. Bolles overcame a learning disability. He refers to this period of his life as "old Garett."

– He was taken in by the Freeman family, found newfound faith as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and spent a two-year mission trip in Colorado Springs after high school, which he believes changed his life. He calls this phase "new Garett."

– Bolles has a four-month-old son, Kingston. His wife is Natalie. He consistently calls them the love and joy of his life.

"When I'm on the field," Bolles said, "I want to put people in the dirt. That's what I'm here for. And when I come off the field, I love my family. I just learned how to turn the switch to go back to the new Garett."

"I love Colorado. I have a heart there, because those are the people who I taught on my mission."

– Bolles worked with San Francisco 49ers left tackle Joe Staley when he arrived at Snow College in Ephraim, Utah, to restart his football career, and they have remained friends. Bolles' impressive season at left tackle for Utah led to all-Pac-12 honors last fall.

– Big-boy football fits Bolles, just put on the tape. The former five-star recruit has impressive athleticism and amazing feet. He ran the 40-yard dash in 4.95 seconds at the NFL combine and tied for the fifth-best broad jump by an offensive lineman since 2006 (leaping 9 feet, 7 inches).

@CameronWolfe
Garett Bolles is here to deliver the pain.

The Denver Post scouting report on Bolles

Strengths: Rare athleticism, glides to second level and on pulls. His nastiness shows up in the run game. Great feet and comfort against speed rushers. He tested off the charts at the NFL combine. He has the build to put on weight. Pro Bowl potential.

Negatives: He's under 300 pounds and was popped by stronger defenders. He falls and reaches when facing power. He will be 25 in May and his technique needs work. He got in trouble with the law often as a teen, but promises he's "new Garett."

Broncos select LT Garett Bolles with 20th pick in the NFL draft

By Mike Klis
Denver Post
April 27, 2017

John Elway didn't overthink this.

The worst kept secret in the NFL was the Denver Broncos were in desperate need of a left tackle. With

their first-round selection, No. 20 overall, in the NFL Draft on Thursday, Elway took a left tackle.

Christian McCaffrey was a possibility entering the draft, but the Broncos never gave him much serious thought because they believed, correctly, he would be out of reach. McCaffrey went to Carolina with the No. 8 pick.

The Broncos took Bolles at No. 20.

"The bottom line is we had to do what's best for the Denver Broncos,'' Elway told 9News. "Obviously, we got a lot of phone calls at 20, a lot of people wanting to move up but we felt the value wasn't there and we didn't want to get cute with it.

"We knew Garett was our No. 1 guy and if he was there, unless we got a smoking deal we were going to take Garett. We're thrilled we got Garett. We think he has the ability and the want-to to be a cornerstone for that offensive line for a long, long time. Left tackles are hard to find and we hopefully we found one and we believe we have.''

Elway and the Broncos had been targeting Garett Bolles since his impressive sitdown interview, and workout at the NFL Scouting Combine in early March.

They stayed with him until they got him. Bolles is the Broncos' starting left tackle from Day 1. And even though he turns a relatively advanced age of 25 next month, the plan is for Bolles to be the Broncos' starting left tackle for years to come.

"We hope so,'' Elway said. "We feel we do. Obviously, we're very high on Garett and think he's a very athletic tackle, he plays on the left side, he plays with great passion and loves playing the game of football. We're excited Garett was there and he's now a Denver Bronco.''

There are two concerns. One is Bolles' age. He turns 25 on May 27 – one month from draft day. He's two to three years older than most first-round picks.

"It's not a concern for me,'' Elway said. "At 25, he should be going right into his prime. Obviously, he's a guy who went on a mission, he's mature. You saw him up there with his child, which was great. So 25 is not a concern at all.''

The other concern is Bolles' checkered past. He was a troubled youth. The story goes that he mixed up in drugs, his father kicked him out of his home. But Bolles got his life together thanks to a coach, a mission trip to Colorado Springs, and renewed passion for football by proving himself first at the junior college level, and then last year for the Utah Utes.

"We covered all those bases,'' Elway said. "We had him in here for a day and had a chance to talk to him. Talked to all his coaches, we had him on the board. We had a chance to dig deep down inside and what we found is a real quality person. A lot of times young people have a tough time early in their career and he's really turned it around and we feel like where he is, we felt his maturity level was where it needs to be and he turned his life around and will be a great Denver Bronco.''

Garett Bolles' difficult journey to the NFL draft gave him something teams can't ignore

By Thomas George
SB Nation
April 27, 2017

Slap a beret on his head, dress him in a gold-buttoned, decorative medaled jacket, and Garett Bolles would easily pass for a brazen army sergeant. The 6'4, 295 pounds he effortlessly carries, the 34-inch arms, would help seal it. His bruising, booming voice would provide extra conviction.

But he is a football player, a left tackle from the University of Utah. The son of a Navy veteran. A literal

prodigal son.

His dad, Grove, kicked Garett out of their Utah home when he was 19. Disrespect? Drugs? The wrong

crowd?

"All of that — and much more,'' Bolles said. "I was a lost kid.''

The lacrosse coach at his Saratoga Springs, Utah, high school, Greg Freeman and his wife Emily took Bolles in off the streets. They gave him strict rules, lofty challenges.

Emily told the Salt Lake Tribune late last year that she thought Bolles would last a few weeks before they would have to kick him to the curb, too. She said Greg thought Bolles would last three days.

* * *

But something clicked for Bolles. "God changed me,'' he said.

From what to what, he was asked?

"From old to new,'' he answered. "From someone I don't even recognize anymore. My life was crazy. Adversity changed me.''

After moving in with the Freemans, Bolles traveled for missionary work, enrolled at Snow Junior College in Ephraim, Utah, where he played football, transferred and starred at Utah for one season, married Natalie, had a four-month-old son Kingston, patched things with his father and is here at the draft, a prime, practical, likely first-round pick.

Since his first position in football was defensive tackle, he has a defensive-minded approach to playing left tackle.

"My thing is to knock those guys out,'' Bolles said.

He was asked the difference between NFL coaches who scorn rookies and NFL coaches who embrace them?

"If you come in and you have a big mouth and not work, they're not going to like you,'' he said. "If you shut your mouth and go in and work hard and get better, they love you.''

Spoken like a sergeant, a prodigal son, a changed man.

"I met with Garett Bolles at the combine and I was so blown away with him that we had him in for a visit afterward,'' one NFL head coach said, requesting anonymity. "We had no initial plans to do the follow-up. But he left us no choice. And he came in here and we saw more of what we first saw. This is what you want in a football player, a guy who's been through some things who is tough. I am a total believer in his change and in his ability. I don't know if he is going to fall to us, but we have our radar way up for him in this draft.''

Several teams do.

It's the athleticism — he ran a sub 5.0 in the 40-yard dash at the combine, a fast time for any linemen. He employs nifty angles on his blocks and he should be a premiere NFL talent on sweeps and movement plays.

Some scouts question his core strength.

Can he simply be bull-rushed, bulldozed, run over? "Who said that?'' he asked.

NFL scouts say it, he was told.

"Well, one day three or four years from now the club that said that, the scout that said it is going to wish they would have grabbed me.''

* * *

He is all Michael Oher and the movie of his life, Blind Side, the adoptive kid who rises from struggle and reaches the NFL, Oher with the Baltimore Ravens in 2009, a first-round pick at No. 23 overall. Or is he?

"I respect him,'' Bolles said. "He has his own story and I have mine. He found a way to make a way from trouble as a youth and so did I. Someone reached out to help and him and that happened for me. I guess you could say we are two testaments. All I know is a year and a half ago I was at Snow College and today here I am.''

He was at Children's Hospital on Wednesday morning on this city's North Side visiting with patients along with other draft prospects. Bolles brought his own small, white plastic helmet. He had the children sign it. He wanted them to know that their autographs meant more to him than giving any. He said he will keep the helmet, filled with kid signatures, forever.

Garett Bolles is one of those rare draft prospects whose deeply checkered past is already covered by maturation and growth before his name is called.

He tells all NFL teams that the one that selects him gets a changed man, a new soul, a husband, a father, a 24-year-old who is wiser and on the edge of football greatness. He believes it.

The stunner is how much NFL teams do, too.

"If I walk across that stage on Thursday night and I am drafted in the first round, it is going to be an amazing walk, an amazing journey,'' Bolles said. "If it happens Friday night and I'm in the second round, it still will be. Sure, you want to go in the first round. But I can honestly say the meaning, the experience, the achievement, none of it will feel any different or mean anything less to me on Friday night. Either way, I'll be on my way.''

Garett Bolles is one of few players who have ever said that while oozing truth.

Garett Bolles gives Broncos much-needed offensive line help

By Christian D'Andrea
SB Nation
April 27, 2017

Garett Bolles' football career has followed an unconventional path. Before becoming an All-Pac-12 offensive tackle at Utah, he first served the Church of Latter Day Saints by doing two years of missionary work and then spent his first two undergrad years at tiny Snow College.

One transfer and one dominant year of pass protection later, he's jumping to the NFL. The Broncos selected Bolles with the No. 20 pick of the 2017 NFL draft, the first offensive lineman off the board.

The offensive lineman drought was something we hadn't seen in 35 years.

@AndrewSiciliano
Per @NFLResearch, this is the first time since 1982 that an offensive tackle wasn't taken in the top-15.

Bolles will have to prove a 25-year-old tackle with just one year of NCAA experience is worth a premier pick. The raw prospect has the athleticism to be a Pro Bowl blocker, but he'll have plenty of hurdles to overcome first. After turning his life around and putting the disciplinary issues that had him suspended or kicked out of five different high schools behind him, one thing is clear — Bolles is resilient enough to make it work.

"God changed me,'' he told SB Nation's Thomas George. "From old to new. From someone I don't even recognize anymore. My life was crazy. Adversity changed me.''

What does he bring to the Broncos' offensive line?

Bolles is an aggressive tackle with nimble feet and upper-tier athleticism. He dazzled at the NFL Combine, ranking among the top offensive linemen in the agility drills and rattling off a 4.9-second 40-yard dash at nearly 300 pounds. He moves well laterally, potentially better than any other prospect in 2017.

That quickness keeps speed rushers in front of him, where he engages defenders aggressively. While he's solid in pass protection, his aggression really surfaces in the run game, where he'll take tacklers out of the equation entirely. Bolles uses his athletic gifts to finish blocks and frustrate defenders by bullying them all the way back to their sideline.

He's also a dynamic force in screen passes and misdirections. He clears space well to engage linebackers at the next level, and he rarely whiffs on blocks where he's tracking a moving target downfield.

What are Bolles' weaknesses?

His two-year LDS mission and subsequent time in junior college made him an older prospect with limited reps against elite competition. He played only one season against FBS opponents but will be 25 when

the 2017 season begins. He'll face the same learning curve as a 22-year-old prospect, but he will have three fewer years of peak performance as a pro.

He's also undersized as a tackle. Bolles weighs less than 300 pounds, and though he's got room to bulk up, he doesn't have ideal arm length to tangle with defensive ends, either. His pass blocking wasn't elite in his sole season with Utah — he allowed three sacks and 16 QB hurries for the year — though that can be chalked up to the learning curve of going from junior college to the Pac-12. He's still got a lot of growing to do, and while his limited resume suggests he'll be fine, his status as an older rookie does raise questions about how well he'll be able to adjust.

NFL Draft: How Garett Bolles turned his life around

By Bob Glauber
Newsday
April 26, 2017

A day before he probably will hear his name called in the first round of the NFL Draft, Garett Bolles stood outside an auditorium at the Shriners Hospital for Children, holding a miniature white helmet with several names written on it.

Cassidy . . . Greg . . . Nidhi . . . Ann . . . Rob . . . Ivanna.

They are patients dealing with orthopedic conditions, burns and spinal cord injuries, and Bolles was one of several top prospects meeting with them Wednesday morning to help lift their spirits.
Bolles felt inspired by them.

“I got these kids’ autographs on this helmet because those are the true heroes in life,” said Bolles, a 6-5, 297-pound tackle from Utah. “These kids are something special, and I want to tell every kid about my story, that you can go through adversity and change things around.”

Bolles feels great empathy for any young person who experiences difficulty, whether through a devastating injury or emotional wounds. He lived his own nightmare growing up in a dysfunctional household and acting out. He got involved with drugs and was jailed for vandalism. He was kicked out of high school, then kicked out of his house by his father in 2011. At age 17.

Had it not been for Greg and Emily Freeman, Bolles doesn’t know what might have happened to him.

Greg Freeman was Bolles’ lacrosse coach at Westlake High in Lehi, Utah, and after the troubled teen was told to leave home, he adopted Bolles. Freeman and his wife, Emily, helped Bolles transform himself from a misbehaving teen into a fully functioning adult who faces a bright future as a highly regarded NFL prospect.

Among the teams who have studied Bolles closely are the Giants, who brought the bruising left tackle in for a visit during the offseason.

“New York, it’s the Big Apple,” Bolles said. “That’s a great organization. If I go there, I’m going to get ready to work and protect Eli (Manning) with all I’ve got.”

Regardless of where he goes, Bolles always will remember the difficult path he took to get this far. “I

always share my story because I want people to learn from it,” said Bolles, who credits his deep religious faith with helping his turnaround. “It doesn’t matter where you start, it’s how you finish. I just want to reach out to those kids that struggle with a learning disability or whatever they have. Don’t let anyone tell you that you can’t do something, because you can always go forward and change your life. You may make mistakes, but what happens after those mistakes is what counts in life.”

Bolles hopes to form a foundation to help troubled youths.

“I want to get these kids in homes where they can go and feel safe, or do homework, or have a dinner,” he said. “I want to show them the love that I needed in my life. That’s what the Freemans showed me. They showed me love. With love, anything can change.”

He’ll also keep working tirelessly to become a big-time left tackle. Despite entering the draft at the unusually late age of 24 — he went on a Mormon mission and played two years at junior college before going to Utah — he believes he has what it takes to excel in the NFL. Just like another tackle, Michael Oher, who endured a difficult childhood before being adopted and serving as the inspiration for the movie “The Blind Side.”

“Michael Oher was a hero for me, because you look at people that can turn their lives around, you’re like, ‘I can do it,’ ” Bolles said. “Anybody that turns his life around, I give them credit, because it’s not easy.”

So he’ll keep that miniature helmet autographed by the kids at Shriners Hospital, another reminder of what it takes to overcome challenges. Another reminder of all he has overcome in his own life.

With Tough Past Behind Him, Garrett Bolles Is Ready For The NFL

By Jake Kring-Schreifels
Redskins.com
April 19, 2017

While Garrett Bolles had some troubled teenage years, the offensive tackle has redirected his life and turned heads last season at Utah.

It has been a long road, filled with adversity, to get to the NFL Draft for offensive tackle Garrett Bolles.

The 6-foot-5, 297 pounder was suspended throughout high school and had some troubled teenage years, at one point living with his Lacrosse coach to get on the right track. Then he embraced religion, and started a two-year Latter Day Saints mission before returning to play football for two years with Snow College.

He latched onto the Universiy of Utah last season, starting 13 games and earning first-team All-Pac-12 honors, and will be a 25-year old rookie once he reaches the NFL.

“My mission was the greatest thing to ever happen to me,” Bolles said at the NFL Combine. “I became the man I am today because I’ve learned. I grew up, I became more mature, I became the man I am. I know what it takes to hard work and wake up and follow a schedule, and that’s exactly what you’ve to do in this business. It’s a business and you’ve got to follow the schedule to be successful, and that’s what I plan on doing.”

As he met with teams in Indianapolis, and subsequently throughout the draft process, questions have been understandably raised about his teenage years. Bolles has told them the truth.

“They just really want to see what type of man I am, and if I will fall back to my old self,” Bolles said. “But you know, I know where I’m going. And I have a plan, I have a mission. When you become a husband and you become a father, you have to sort of grow up and you have to become the person you want to be. And I plan to do whatever it takes. And I don’t even know the old Garett, in case you guys were wondering. I don’t even know who that old Garett is. I know the new Garett. I know exactly what I want to do, and I’m just grateful to be here. It’s a great experience and I’m really looking forward to living my dreams someday and playing in the National Football League.”

What excites teams about Bolles is his athletic ability and footwork, which don’t seem to be attached to a body as big as his. He moves like a tight end – a 4.95 second, 40-yard dash – and showed off great acceleration in his second and third-level blocks at Utah.

Much like Redskins right guard Brandon Scherff, Bolles prefers to punish his opponents by driving them into the ground and engaging in some extra-curricular play after the whistle.

“When I’m on the field, I want to put people in the dirt,” Bolles said. “And that’s what I’m here for. As an offensive lineman, you want to be the nasty prick that you can be. And whoever’s in front of me, I want

to drive them and put them in the dirt. So I'm just going to try to be that every single day. And when I come off the field, I love my family. I just learned how to turn the switch to go back to the new Garett."

Bolles made a big impression in his one year at Utah and showed he could be a dominant left tackle for a team willing to take him. The only concern is his experience, something Bolles hopes will be spun into a positive.

"I think that's a positive thing for me, because that's just less wear and tear on my body," Bolles said. "I've never been cut open, I've never had a surgery, I've never had a major injury. You've got to knock on wood because football is rough game. But I'm here to compete, I'm here to do whatever it takes to win and I'm just … one year or three years makes no difference. I have so much upside, like I said, and I'm just trying to be the best tackle that I can be."

While Bolles continues to face obstacles through this process and have his age, athleticism and background questioned, he knows what he can provide based on what already has in the last few years of his life.

"Many of you guys know my story," Bolles said. "I'm a changed man, and I know exactly what I want and where I'm going. I just got married a year ago. I have a son, so I've got to take care of them and show them what I'm going to do."

Broncos to host Utah OT Garett Bolles on pre-draft visit this week

By Nicki Jhabvala
Denver Post
April 16, 2017

The Broncos will get another face-to-face with a player who could be a viable and coveted option for them in the first round of the upcoming NFL draft. According to a league source, the team is scheduled to fly in former Utah left tackle Garett Bolles for a visit this week.

Bolles met with the Broncos at the NFL combine in Indianapolis and is widely regarded as one of the top three tackles in the draft, along with Wisconsin's Ryan Ramczyk and Alabama's Cam Robinson, the latter of whom met with the Broncos last Wednesday.

Bolles (6-foot-5, 297 pounds) played two years at Snow College, about 100 miles south of his hometown Saratoga Springs, Utah. It was at Snow that Bolles, a two-time junior college All-American, continued to turn his life around after a difficult childhood that included multiple school suspensions, run-ins with the law and jail time, and drug use.

"Many of you guys know my story," Bolles said at the combine. "I'm a changed man, and I know exactly what I want and where I'm going. I just got married a year ago. I have a son, so I've got to take care of them and show them what I'm going to do."

Part of his turnaround, he said, was due to a mission trip in Colorado Springs before he went to Snow. Potentially returning to Colorado as a Bronco is an opportunity he said he'd welcome.

"I love Colorado. I have a heart there, because those are the people that I taught on my mission. So if I end up going there, I'd be just fine," he said. "But I don't care where I go. Wherever I end up, I'll be happy."

Bolles transferred to Utah in 2016 and in his lone year of FBS football was named a first-team All-Pac 12 selection as the Utes' starting left tackle. Now he figures to be among the most sought-after players in the draft.

Although the class of 2017 is said to be relatively weak in tackle talent, Bolles has stood out for his athleticism and quickness, two things high on the list of Broncos head coach Vance Joseph.

Bolles flashed both at the combine with a 4.95-second 40-yard dash and 115-inch broad jump that ranked second and first, respectively, among participating offensive lineman.

"We have to go into the draft with an open mind as far as taking the best player for our needs," Joseph said. "It's a combination of both. It's not only the best player, but it's your need. If there is a tackle there that has a first-round grade from us, that's awesome."

The Broncos acquired guard Ron Leary and tackle Menelik Watson in free agency to bulk up the line, and then they restructured the contract of tackle Donald Stephenson. Along with Ty Sambrailo and Michael

Schofield, the Broncos have four veterans who can play the edges, but no clear starter for either side. Yet.

Denver's offensive line was its biggest weakness last season, with the tackles causing the most problems, especially in protection. With Russell Okung's departure, filling the left side has been a priority, but Joseph has made it clear he wants to find a pair of starting tackles equal in ability.

"We need to acquire tackles who can block speed," he said. "In our division, every team has two (rushers) so it's a concern for all of us in the division blocking edge rushers. Left or right? Not concerned. I want two guys who can block speed rushers."

Bolles could be one.

2017 NFL draft prospect countdown, No. 38: Garett Bolles, OT, Utah

By Chris Burke
Sports Illustrated
March 20, 2017

What you need to know: Bolles was a National Junior College All-America in 2015 at Snow College (Utah), before transferring to Utah for his final collegiate season season. That barely scratches the surface of his story, though. He was suspended as a high schooler, then wound up living with his lacrosse coach before embarking on a two-year Latter-day Saints mission. Eventually, he returned to football, playing two years at Snow, then one with the Utes. As a result of that long and winding road, Bolles will be a 25-year-old rookie once he reaches the NFL. Bolles started all 13 games at left tackle for Utah last season, earning first-team All-Pac-12 honors.

Strengths: Bolles moves like a tight end playing offensive tackle—his 40-yard dash, short-shuttle and three-cone times all were at or near the top of the combine's O-line group. It's easy athleticism that works in all situations, as well, because Bolles displays just as much comfort exploding to the second level as he does attacking laterally. On pass plays, he uses quick steps to get into his protection, then slides to mirror the rushing defender.

He seems to walk the tightrope between aggression and penalty-filled play, which comes with both pros and cons. On the plus side, he wants to punish his opponents. He'll drive them to the ground when he has the chance, and he'll scrap after the whistle. When he doesn't have a one-on-one assignment on a play, Bolles goes hunting—if a teammate has someone on the ropes, Bolles loves to deliver that final blow.

Bolles could be a nasty NFL tackle, with the footwork required to drop into a zone-heavy offense.

Weaknesses: Bolles chalks up the blocking “W” on most snaps, but when he doesn’t he usually winds up either a) on the ground, or b) turned 180° and locked on to an opponent while facing his own backfield. The issue with the first outcome arises when he lowers his head and lunges, which tends to be on those second-level blocks.

He is not going to dominate many (any?) NFL edge defenders with his strength. Bolles can drive defenders back on run plays, and he does finish his down blocks, but those aforementioned pancakes come more from persistence than power. If he winds up on a team that wants to emphasize a man-blocking scheme, the question will be if Bolles can clear enough space to be a force there.

His background, and his age, cannot and will not be overlooked by NFL teams. Even if Bolles has matured beyond his troubled high-school days, he is almost too old to be considered a “prospect” at this point. To wit: Rams lineman Greg Robinson, the No. 2 pick in the 2014 draft, is several months younger than Bolles. Despite having just one year of FBS experience to his credit, Bolles has to be ready to play early.

Player comp: David Bakhtiari

Utah OT Garett Bolles harnesses his past anger into football: 'I want to put people in the dirt'

By Eric Edohlm
Yahoo! Sports
March 3, 2017

The name is Garett Grovsner Bolles. That's one R in Garett, two Ts and an endless supply of inspirational quotes that draw you to wanting to know more about the incredibly gifted player who almost threw it all away before he ever had a chance.

Bolles is not your typical NFL draft prospect. And he doesn't have your everyday story, either.

The Utah offensive tackle played only one year of Division I ball, turns 25 a month after the draft and has taken — you could say — the long road to success. That road included being suspended or kicked out of five schools during his rough teenage years, using drugs, spending time in jail after multiple run-ins with the law and eventually getting kicked out of his house by his father, left to live on the street with his possessions in trash bags.

Now Bolles — on the verge of his NFL dreams as a high-round talent — says he is "a changed man, and I know exactly what I want and where I'm going. I just got married a year ago. I have a son, so I've got to take care of them and show them what I'm going to do."

None of that was clear a few years ago, before he cleaned up, was pulled off the streets by his surrogate family and before serving a two-year LDS mission. He spent time working on cars at a garage, adhered to a strict up-early, asleep-early regiment and cut out the bad influences and people from his life. Without that, Bolles isn't coming close to any NFL fields without a paid ticket. Now he could be a starting left tackle in time.

Bolles played two years at Snow College (Utah) and then a year at Utah, flashing incredible athleticism and a mean streak that stands out on tape. He's been able, he says, to harness all that anger he had from a tough childhood and funnel it onto the football field, taking it out on his opponents.

"When I'm on the field, I want to put people in the dirt," Bolles said Thursday. "And that's what I'm here for. As an offensive lineman, you want to be the nasty prick that you can be. And whoever is in front of me, I want to drive them and put them in the dirt. So I'm just going to try to be that every single day. And when I come off the field, I love my family. I just learned how to turn the switch to to go back to the new Garett."

How do you not love that? Bolles alternates spitting fire about football and spending time reflecting on the love of his life and how she has helped change him for the better.

"Being married is a wonderful thing," he said. "You get to work together as a companionship and you get to conquer this world together. And that's exactly what we do. Every time I come home, I give my wife [Natalie] a beautiful kiss and I hold my son and we just sit there together as a family. And I'm just beyond blessed that I get to live these experiences with them."

You get the sense, listening to Bolles, that none of this is contrived. He spoke with passion and intent. He spoke as if this was a second chance in life he's not about to blow. Football for Bolles is both his outlet and his therapy, it turns out.

"Football is the greatest game that anyone's created on this earth," Bolles said. "It's a game where you can literally beat somebody up and get away from it."

Memo to the team that drafts Bolles: Never let him get too far from a microphone. He speaks with the voice of Ivan Drago, maybe if you marinated it in something Cajun. You could spend hours listening to his colorful phrases, yes, but you might spend just as much time trying to figure out his accent. Best yet: You get the sense that everything he says it earnest, not a bit of it contrived.

He's not a perfect prospect — not at a few years older than most of the players in this class, not weighing in a few pounds short of 300 pounds at the scouting combine, not with so little football in his background. But Bolles tries to spin all this as a positive.

"My age is a positive," he said. "I do not hold my age at all. I'm 24 and I've only played football for three years, and that's what I want people to know. I have so much upside, and I have so [many] things to improve on and get better. My better days are ahead of me, and so I know I can just continue to learn football in general and just continue to work hard."

Also working for him: A strong combine workout that included a 4.95-second 40-yard dash and a 115-inch broad jump.

He has spent time refining his craft with San Francisco 49ers tackle Joe Staley before and has come a long way with his technique. Bolles might be the most athletic tackle — one evaluator predicted he'd set the 3-cone drill record at the combine — in what's viewed as a weak crop of talent at the position, so it would be a surprise to see him falling out of Round 2, even with his flaws. Bolles even could crack Round 1 if he continues trending upward. That's how special he has become in a short period of time.

And after a lot of distractions that derailed his life early on, Bolles is back on track and not about to blow his chance at something special.

"I have the dog inside of me," he said, "and that's what I believe I have going for me. I have the dog and I know exactly what I want to do."

Springs helped steer Garett Bolles to possible NFL career

By Woody Paige
Colorado Springs Gazette
February 19, 2017

When Garett Bolles showed up on the doorstep of Colorado Springs in 2013 from Lehi, Utah, he was a lost young man on a mission.

Over the next year and a half "I grew mentally, physically and spiritually," he says. "My time in Colorado Springs was so very important in my life, and I'm so thankful to the people there. It's like my second home."

Now, back in Utah, Bolles is matured, married and a new father. He attended Snow Junior College in 2014-15 and spent 2016 at the University of Utah, where he became one of the three best offensive tackles in college football.

And he could return to Colorado in 2017. Bolles is listed in several NFL mock drafts, including the most prestigious, chosen by ESPN's Mel Kiper, as the Broncos' potential No. 1 pick.

It's been quite the unusual journey for the former juvenile miscreant who was suspended by, or kicked out of, schools five times, became charmed with drugs, alcohol, gangs and petty crimes, went to jail, gave up on football after playing four defensive positions for his high school team and worked for almost two years in a garage door repair shop.

Raised in a dysfunctional home, Bolles was kicked to the curb by his father his senior year in high school. A neighbor and Bolles' former lacrosse coach, Greg Freeman, happened to drive by and saw Bolles with two bundles of clothes on the street. Freeman called his wife, Emily, and they agreed to shelter Bolles despite his troubled past.

The Freemans gave Bolles a strict set of rules: No cellphone use at night; he was to avoid shady friends and any hint of trouble; he had to attend church with the family (there were two other kids) and tithe (requiring that he secure a job).

Bolles began working at Freeman's shop, developed a deeply religious belief and joined the Church of the Latter-Day Saints. Emily and Greg became "mom" and "dad," and several neighborhood women tutored Bolles so he could graduate.

Two years later, he decided to go on an LDS mission. "Several of my friends were sent to foreign countries, but I was shocked to learn I would be going so close to home - Colorado Springs."

Staying at church members' homes, he "helped those in need and poverty and looking for God in their lives" from Castle Rock to Parker to the Springs. "I was talking to kids about how you can accomplish anything if you believe in yourself and the Lord, and you can get a second chance like I did after my rough childhood."

He'd always wanted to play college football, but that dream was impossible - he was tilting at windmills - when Bolles was 21 and in the Springs. When he arrived he was 6-foot-4 and about 220 pounds, "but I started growing into my body." He returned to Utah "mostly out of shape" at 6-5 and almost 300. "I

planned to go back into the garage door business.

While in the Springs, Bolles became a fan of Peyton Manning and the Broncos.

Because of his size, Bolles was recommended to coaches at BYU. He didn't have the academics, but, impressed by his attitude and his size, they helped him obtain a scholarship to Snow Junior College. There, he was transformed into an offensive lineman. "I didn't even know how to get into a three-point stance. But they gave me a chance and stuck with me, and I got to be pretty good."

As in Junior College All-American at left tackle - after being away from the game for three years. "I couldn't believe I started getting letters from major colleges - Ole Miss to Georgia to Oklahoma and others." At Snow he also met his future wife - Natalie. And they had son Kingston two months ago. "Family, religion, football," he says.

He chose to stay close - Utah. He had been studying the career of Zane Beadles, a Utes offensive lineman who was drafted by the Broncos. "It's been an honor the past few days to work out with Zane," he said. "He was kind of a model for me."

Last season, as a junior, Bolles joined Utah's summer practices, uncertain about what to expect. He was put on the first team the first week, and by the final week, he was named all-Pac-12 and second-team All-American, with one year of big-time football. He dominated defensive linemen and blew up linebackers. Check his highlights on YouTube, and you'll know why. "He's got the whole package," Utah coach Kyle Whittingham told The Salt Lake City Tribune. "He's got the height, the length, the feet, the hips. He's flexible; he can bend; he's strong; he's athletic. He lacks nothing."

According to scouts, he does lack experience. Still, though, Garett is considered a first-round draft choice. The Broncos, the Seahawks and the Texans seem most interested, and their people have talked to his agents.

"I served the Lord," Bolles said, "and he has blessed me."

The next step is the NFL combine next week, "and I've worked as hard as I could to get ready and do the best I can and see what happens..... I'm looking forward to meeting Mr. (John) Elway and all the other football people. It would be something if I could play for the Broncos, but I'll just be happy to be anywhere in the NFL.

"Oh my goodness, who in the world could believe I've gotten this far?" Believe.

Utah football: 'A lost kid,' five-star recruit Garett Bolles picked himself up

By Kyle Goon
The Salk Lake Tribune
August 13, 2016

They met for the first time last March, minutes before midnight.

Garett Bolles, a lumbering 6-foot-5, 300-pound goliath of a man, approached Natalie Williams and asked her for a kiss. It was True Badger Night, an annual tradition at Snow College in Ephraim when such bold requests are not just innocent and part of a campus ritual, but charming.

She accepted. He had a wide, goofy smile. His baritone sounded like the earth rumbling from some deep, secret place. They kissed, and made plans to meet later that week.

At that time, Natalie didn't know much about Garett — not that he was an offensive lineman for the Badgers, on his way to becoming a five-star recruit who would play at the University of Utah the next year. She decided to Google him.

The first picture that came up was a mugshot.

On their first date, she asked Garett about his life, hoping an explanation would arise. Over the next hour and a half, he told her everything — making her weep and changing both their lives forever.

'The whole package'

To look at Bolles is to see his potential. He's tall, wide, strong — everything anyone could want physically out of an offensive tackle. From his second day in Utah fall camp, he's taken repetitions with the first-string offense and not looked back.

"He's got the whole package," coach Kyle Whittingham said. "He's got the height, the length, the feet, the hips, he's flexible, he can bend, he's strong, he's athletic.

"He lacks nothing."

His gifts were evident when he was growing up in Lehi, a fast-growing football and lacrosse player.

But a troubled and stressful home life from a young age translated to problems for Bolles, who was suspended or kicked out of five schools as a teenager. His lacrosse coach, Greg Freeman, formed a group of neighborhood families who would host him and help him finish classwork.

As Garett got older, his habits and problems got worse. He used drugs, cut class and ran afoul of the law. As a senior at Westlake High, he was arrested for vandalizing Lehi's campus in 2010, and as an adult, he had to spend time in jail.

"I was a lost kid," he said. "I was confused, angry, like 'What am I doing in here? This isn't who I really am.'"

It came to a head in 2011, when his father, Grove Bolles, kicked him out of the house. He was on the street with a few bags of clothes to his name when Freeman found him and picked him up.

The Freemans, Greg and his wife Emily, laid out strict rules for Garett to live under their roof: He couldn't hang out with his old friends. He had to go to church. He had to pay tithing (and therefore had to work). If he broke any rule, he could be kicked out without warning.

"I remember going to bed that night, and my husband and I talked about it," Emily Freeman said. "I thought he would last a few weeks. Greg thought he would make it three days."

Honest work

For about two years, Garett was in the garage repair business. He still likes the idea of tinkering on garages to this day.

But what he really loved were the car rides he had with Greg. While he usually slept through them in the mornings, they talked a lot during the year-and-a-half when they worked together.

"We talked about life, how to be better person," he said. "I'm just super grateful and honored that I had him and my mom [Emily] in those years as mentors. I miss that job."

He took a break from the working world to serve an LDS Church mission in Colorado Springs, which he credits with steeping him in his faith. Coming back to Utah, he wanted to give football another shot, and he found one at Snow College.

Emily said she worried at how Garett would take to college — would he cut corners in classwork and lose himself again? But she was relieved when coach Britt Maughan, in one of his first meetings with Garett, laid down the law.

"He said, 'This is not whether you can play football — this is whether you can cut it at college,' " she recalled. "He said school was going to come first."

For the first time in his life, Garett took school seriously. He pasted up posters of Michael Oher, the hero of "The Blind Side," as an idol, and took the same spirit to his school work. He went to class, and was spending late hours at the library.

"I had to do those things," he said after a recent practice, "otherwise I wouldn't have been able to be here."

Coming around

After learning about Garett's life, Natalie was taken with the big-hearted giant who had laid out his flaws on their first date. It took nine months from their first meeting to their wedding day, but "when you know, you know."

He structured their courtship carefully. Though Natalie noticed that football coaches called him constantly, Garett set up blocks of time just for school, and just for her. Though he was nasty on the football field, he was gentle when he was around her. He made her feel safe.

Shortly after getting married in December, Garett made his decision to come to the Utes in January — the highest-rated recruit in Utah's class, and less than an hour away from his hometown and both his families: the Bolles and the Freemans.

Through time and lots of difficult conversations, Garett, now 24, said he's repaired his relationship with the father who once kicked him to the curb. Grove now is a regular guest of Garett and Natalie's, and a frequent presence at Garett's games.

And yet, he holds the Freemans close, and calls Emily Freeman his mom. They gave him a chance when he was a troublesome teenager, gave him guidance, beckoned him to the church, and celebrated the painstaking steps he took to get to Utah.

He writes a number of sayings and inspirational phrases on his cleats in black marker, among them: "Bolles and Freeman — Family Forever." Whenever he looks down, he's reminded of their bond.

He couldn't be more excited about another generation to come: He and Natalie are expecting a son to arrive in January, which Emily proudly calls "my first grandbaby."

The Freemans still worry at times. Is there any chance that Garett could revert? Could he stumble back into his old, bad self, and make a mistake? But even if he does slip up someday, Emily said, Garett's capacity to better himself gives her hope.

"A champion picks himself up everytime he falls," she said. "Every single day I worry for that kid, but I don't worry that he won't pick himself up."