

Dalton Risner helps local kid boost grades in exchange for Broncos tickets

By Courtney Fromm

KDVR

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Denver Broncos player Dalton Risner stepped in to help a local 12-year-old going through a tough time after his stepdad died by suicide this summer.

“I feel like Dalton is a role model for me,” Jaidden Gibbs said.

Jaidden attended a football camp through the nonprofit organization “A Precious Child” back in June.

“A lot of these families don’t have the money to go to football camps. When I was a kid I didn’t have that opportunity either,” Risner said.

Risner was one of the NFL players hosting the camp and said right away he knew Jaidden was a special kid.

“There was one kid out there, who stood out to me the entire time. He was nice to everyone and a complete stud on the field,” Risner said.

After the day at camp, Risner was able to meet Jaidden’s mom and siblings.

Risner said something in him pushed him to ask Jaidden’s family to dinner.

“He picked Texas Roadhouse. So we went to Texas Roadhouse,” Risner said.

While at dinner with Jaidden’s entire family, he learned that Jaidden’s stepdad had killed himself just weeks before.

“I thought he probably needed a mentor in his life. A good male role model,” Risner said.

So before leaving dinner, to help distract Jaidden from the recent tragedy, Risner challenged him to step it up in school.

“He told me if I got good grades he would take me to a football game,” Jaidden said.

Sure enough, by the end of the semester, Jaidden had all As and Bs.

So Risner followed through with his deal and got Jaidden and his mom tickets to Sunday’s Broncos game against the Detroit Lions.

Jaidden and his mom will also be able to meet the players before the game.

“Actually we both have never been to a football game let alone the Broncos,” Monica Green, Jaidden’s mom said.

Both Risner and Jaidden’s family agree this isn’t a one-time thing. They are now friends for life.

“I think it’s important it’s not Dalton Risner becoming a part of their life. Jaidden and his family have become part of my life and I hope to have that forever,” Risner said.

Broncos' Dalton Risner thanks family that allowed him to impact life of son battling childhood cancer

By Jeff Kerr
CBS Sports
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Dalton Risner wanted to use football to do good for the world. A simple man who didn't need much to be happy, Risner grew up on a farm in the small town of Wiggins, Colorado, impacting lives of friends and the people in a town with a population of just 800.

Risner was beginning to find out the type of person he wanted to be as his NFL career was becoming a reality. He was meant to help others on the days he wasn't punishing defensive linemen in the trenches as the Denver Broncos' starting left guard.

"I was in the process of creating my foundation (RisnerUp) and the impact I was able to make, it was making me feel good," Risner told CBSSports.com. "This is what I wanted to do. This is what makes me happy. I want to make people happy by having a positive impact on their life."

What Risner didn't expect to find was a family. Enter the Hamptons.

In college, Risner got involved with Camp Hope, a summer camp that gave children with cancer a safe haven to be kids -- allowing them to forget about the battles they face every day. Risner wanted to do more.

"I reached out to Kansas State asked if they could do some research on any child that was battling cancer. I wanted to be a big brother to that person and become a positive impact on their life," Risner said. "I was on the board on Camp Hope and helping those kids battling cancer and putting a smile on their face became a passion of mine."

The Hampton family in Topeka (about an hour away from Kansas State) became a match. Will and Steph Hampton worked multiple jobs to make ends meet and support their three children (Tobias, Ella, and Kayden). Kayden was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia and was paralyzed at age 3, but was able to walk again at the age of 4 as his parents were fighting to save his life.

Just a junior at Kansas State, Risner was hoping to help. The Hamptons had no idea who the All-American lineman was.

"They weren't just going to let anyone into Kayden's life," Risner said. "They wanted to make sure someone was getting involved with them for the right reasons."

A trip to Golden Corral was all the Hamptons needed to know Risner was full of love.

"Their family didn't eat out, they were making ends meet wherever they could," Risner said. "They didn't have the money and worked two jobs apiece. I had about \$183 in my account and I paid for the \$100 dinner. They were so grateful and our relationship blossomed from there."

Risner did everything he could to see Kayden and brighten his day as the young man was fighting for his life. Just coming down to Topeka and taking Kayden out for ice cream was enough for Risner to be welcomed into the Hampton family.

"I made a promise to Kayden wherever I went to the NFL, I'd come back to see him," Risner said. "Through the RisnerUp Foundation, I go see him. He's one of the special people in my life and he has become part of my family."

A special gift for the Hamptons

Kayden Hampton went into remission by age 6 and Risner was with the Hampton family for his last bloodwork. Now 9, Kayden has been in remission for the past three years. Risner couldn't believe all the sacrifices the Hamptons made for their children, never asking him for help even after he was with the Denver Broncos.

"They were willing to do anything for their children, and anything to make ends meet," Risner said. "I've seen them overcome obstacle after obstacle."

Risner found an opportunity to thank the Hamptons for allowing him to be a part of Kayden's life. Will and Steph Hampton were together for 15 years, but never tied the knot due to their financial situation. A wedding wasn't in the cards, so Risner took charge in giving them what they always wanted -- a ring.

Risner had gotten engaged to his longtime girlfriend Whitney in March, and used the help of Kay Jewelers to make the Hamptons' dream come true, too. The company was happy to help, thanks to the experience Risner had in his engagement plans.

"They stood out and made it unique for me," Risner said. "They were so thoughtful on what Whitney and I wanted. They helped with that and made it an awesome experience. I wanted to keep working with them and the great things they do for people."

Risner was able to show his thanks to the Hamptons with a ring of their own. All they wanted was a wedding. Risner helped make it happen, and hopes that feeling he experienced of helping a family in need continues for years to come. He knows he was put on this earth to do good. Seeing the smile on Steph Hampton's face and the impact he's made on Kayden's life meant everything to him.

For all the Hamptons did for Risner, the Broncos lineman wanted to give back.

"I can see this lasting my whole career," Risner said. "If we can make half the impact on other families like we did with the Hamptons, we're going to be just fine. That was a huge moment and milestone in their life. It's a tremendous feeling I want to continue."

Broncos' Dalton Risner gives back to hometown of Wiggins, hoping to be 'role model for all the small-town kids'

By George Stoia
The Gazette
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Drive an hour Northeast of Denver, approximately 66 miles, and one will find Dalton Risner's hometown of Wiggins, Colo.

It's easy to miss. There's only one exit on I-76 East, exit 64, and no stoplights in the town with a population of around 1,000. And just outside of town where Interstate 76 and Highway 34 merge, sits Stub's Gas & Oil — where Risner, now the Broncos' starting left guard, and many other locals grew up hanging out.

"No stoplights and one gas station that has everything we need," Risner said. "It's a great town where everyone knows each other."

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On Monday, July 12, though, one might not have realized just how small Risner's hometown is. On this day, over 400 kids in elementary, middle and high school from all over Colorado gathered at Wiggins High School for Risner's free football camp.

For Risner, who has become one of the most community-involved Broncos in only two years in Denver, giving back to Wiggins was a no-brainer.

"Coming back home means a lot to me because this is where I grew up and where the dream of the NFL started," Risner told The Gazette. "I would have never imagined being a part of the Denver Broncos when I was a kid. So coming back here and being able to be a role model for all the small-town kids out here that sometimes don't have the access to the things the bigger schools have."

Risner was raised on a ranch with 80 acres not too far from the high school, after his parents, Mitch and Melinda, moved to Wiggins in 2000. In their 20s with four kids at the time, Mitch and Melinda wanted to live in the country and chose Wiggins after seeing they had won the 1A football state championship the year prior. Twenty-one years later, Mitch is now the head coach at Wiggins and has been for the past nine seasons. He also started the Wiggins youth football program in 2003.

Football rules the Risner household, with Mitch playing at Murray State. All five of their sons played football in high school, with Risner and his older brother, Taylor, leading them to a runner-up finish in 1A state football in 2011. They only had 17 players on that team, and in a town like Wiggins, Friday nights are what they live for.

“Dalton is such a people person and he’s so outgoing that everyone in town really knew who he was (in high school). He’s never known a stranger,” Melinda said. “Everybody’s always been really supportive of him, but he’s also had some naysayers too. But he’s very proud of his hometown because he learned a lot of great things here not just about football, but life.”

When he wasn’t playing football, Risner spent his time farming and ranching for others. But his dream never wavered, becoming one of the top recruits in the state and earning a scholarship to Kansas State despite playing for a small school.

“In the summers, I scooped a lot of poop, I worked at a dairy farm, I worked on a ranch, I built a lot of barb-wired fences, I pulled a lot of rye out of wheat fields, bailed and stacked a lot of hay,” Risner said. “But no matter how big the dream was, I was always going to say I was going to do it. When you live in these small towns and you’re in high school, sometimes you have that mindset of ‘this is all there is to the world.’ And I had a lot of people tell me along the way that I couldn’t. A lot of people told me, ‘no one ever leaves Wiggins.’

“At the same time, I had a lot of people in this community who supported me too. And that’s why I want to give back. I’m able to give these kids hope and let them have a dream as well.”

That was Risner’s goal with his camp, teaching those kids about dreaming big while also being a good person — a lesson he learned years ago from his parents.

“I’m extremely proud. I love his heart,” Melinda said. “Football is amazing and he loves it and I’m a huge football fan, too, but I’m more proud of just the way he deals with people and the way he carries himself and is a good role model for the younger kids.”

Wiggins is slowly growing, thanks to a new subdivision that’s pushed the population over 1,000. And Risner has no intentions of stopping his community work in Wiggins, hoping to host a camp at his old high school every year.

“I love this community. This community is my type of people,” Risner said. “What a miracle it is to be right down the road. I’m not coming back wearing Seahawks gear, I’m not coming back wearing Bears gear, I’m coming back wearing Broncos gear, which is what everyone loves around here.

“I want them, and everyone, to remember me as someone who gave back and helped people. I care way more about that than if I’m remembered as a good football player.”