

# CARR

HOPES HIS  
JUGGLING ACT  
HAS THE  
PERFECT  
ENDING

*by Eddie Hughes*



**Derek Carr** looked downfield, rolled out to his right to pass and – *whoosh!* – got splashed with full buckets of water from both sides while more water rained down on him from a hose. Fresno State's star quarterback was doing a preseason promotional photo shoot, modeling the team's new all-white uniforms. The waves of water were tossed around him to symbolize Fresno State's Red Wave fan base.

It was part of a busy summer Carr spent juggling frequent media requests and press conferences to promote the team and to discuss his numerous preseason accolades. Even before training camp and the start of the fall semester, Carr was awake at 5 most mornings for conditioning, studying film with teammates and leading Fresno State on the practice field to prepare to defend its Mountain West Conference championship.

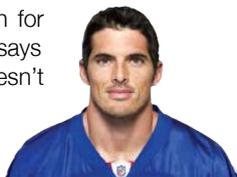
Most importantly, it was a time of waiting for Carr and his wife Heather as the birth of their first child drew near. (The Carrs welcomed a son named Dallas — which is Derek's middle name — on Aug. 5. Two days later, the new dad was back at practice between visits to the hospital where his newborn son was battling an intestinal disorder. The couple was finally able to bring Dallas home three weeks after his birth.)

Even with all the demands on his time, Carr showed up right on schedule for his afternoon photo shoot that 100-degree July day, dressed in full uniform and walked out to the university amphitheater stage where the lights were set up. He spent nearly two hours getting drenched during the creative shoot and recording video promos and interviews — and did it all while cracking jokes.

***“I can't complain,” Carr says. “I'm so blessed to have my wife, to have my son and to have a program that believes in me enough to put my face on everything.”***

Carr is indeed the face of a program getting national media attention for its lofty goals. Heightening that attention is the fact he's the brother of David Carr, arguably Fresno State's greatest quarterback ever. David was the No. 1 overall NFL draft pick in 2002 and led Fresno State as high as No. 8 in the national rankings in 2001.

“Our careers and what we have tried to establish for the Fresno community are not entirely separate,” says David Carr (*right*), an 11-year NFL veteran. “He doesn't look at my career as something he has to live up to. He has looked at my time in Fresno as something he aims to finish.”



In 2001, Fresno State was the national media darling, knocking off Colorado, Oregon State and Wisconsin and generating buzz about being the first team from a non-Bowl Championship Series conference selected for a BCS bowl. David Carr was placed on the cover of Sports Illustrated with the headline, “Fresno?” But a shocking home loss to a then-unknown Boise State program derailed the Bulldogs' dreams.

Derek Carr was just 10 years old then, sitting in Bulldog Stadium with his family, emotionally drained. The years went by and Fresno State again flirted with BCS dreams in 2004, 2005 and 2008. But each of those runs ended with unexpected losses.

Meanwhile, Derek was developing into a highly touted high school recruit, drawing attention from LSU, USC, Alabama, Notre Dame and most of the Pacific 12 Conference. He turned down an offer from Cal to play for Fresno State.

“I am probably the biggest Fresno State football fan there has ever been,” Carr says. “There are a lot of people who would argue with me about that, but I love Fresno State football. I am a huge fan who gets to play quarterback.”

And his wife is a Fresno State fan who got to marry the quarterback.

Heather Carr said her parents began taking her to Fresno State games as a child. Then, four years ago, while she was waitressing at BJ's Restaurant and Brewhouse in Fresno, Carr was eating there with some teammates and asked for her phone number.

“We ended up hanging out and have been inseparable ever since,” says Heather, who graduated from Fresno State two years ago with a bachelor's degree in liberal studies. Derek has already met the requirements for his degree in recreation administration and leisure services management.

Heather recalls last season when the Bulldogs clinched the Mountain West championship and her husband ran off the field hoisting the trophy. The look on his face that day, she says, makes it worth the daily juggling act Carr performs with all of his commitments.

“Derek does a wonderful job of balancing his life and everything he has going on,” she says. “He's very good at keeping his priorities straight — God, family and then football. As a wife, I do worry that he might get overwhelmed with everything going on, but when you look at Derek you see how well he is able to handle all the pressures. I try to take the pressures of home from him so that when he gets home he can just focus on what he needs to.”

On the field, Carr is focused on leading. He knows all eyes are on him — and that's exactly the way he wants it.

It hasn't always been that way. Though Carr came in as the most promising Bulldogs quarterback recruit in a decade, he served his first two seasons as a backup to Ryan Colburn, redshirting his second season to preserve a year of eligibility. Carr says that's when he realized he had to mature as a leader.

***“The biggest way to be a leader when you get here is to just shut your mouth and work,” Carr says. “It can't just be a one-time, one-day thing. It's got to be every repetition, every day. When that happens, guys look at me as a leader.”***

All-conference sophomore wide receiver Davante Adams says Carr's talent and leadership were among reasons he chose Fresno State.

Carr says it's not just him, it's the whole team taking responsibility to work hard. And Carr says that's why team chemistry is at an all-time high. “Those great teams, they have to be together. That's the point of difference,” Carr says. “That's one thing we've got, we've got 100 guys that will go out to battle for everybody.”

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Original photograph: Cary Edmondson • Photo illustration: Todd Graves



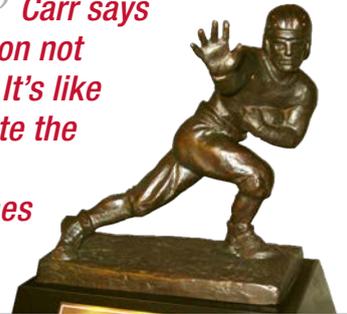


But, deep down, Carr knows he's going to battle for more than those 100 or so teammates. He's playing for that 10-year-old boy locked away in his memories. The one who sat in Bulldog Stadium and watched his role model and older brother David lose in the final seconds on that October night in 2001. The loss killed any hope of a BCS bowl game and a Heisman Trophy for David.

Derek remembers calling in to a radio station that year, in tears, pleading that his big brother deserved to win the Heisman.

Memories like that don't fade, and there's only one opportunity left to follow in the footsteps of his big brother and accomplish all of the things that 2001 team couldn't.

***“It's amazing,” Carr says with the season not yet started. “It's like someone wrote the perfect book, and here comes the ending.”***



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