

# 'It was my rescue. My salvation...'

Strong bond with coach,  
teammates helps athlete

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"It was my rescue... My salvation in a way."

These are the words Nathon Yenawine uses to describe his experience playing football for Wando. It was more than a sport. It was more than just tackling and running the ball.

It was his rescue. His salvation.

"It's about going out there and getting to do what we practiced. And if you feel like you did the best you could, and you feel like you did your part and did your fair share for your teammates, you're happy," he said. "I was always happy."

Life on the field doesn't always translate to reality. It's been a difficult journey.

Ten years ago:

"My life was just always changing. I've moved almost 15 times; I've been in several different states. So I'm used to change... I was never really forced to do anything on my own or left hung to dry or anything. I was pretty much set," Yenawine said. "I had my sisters. But at the same time, when I was younger I really didn't care. I was just a happy little kid. I mean, I didn't care at all. I had everything I needed."

It wasn't always like this.

Two years ago:

When everything changed.

"It started when I was really young, actually. My dad was in and out of prison a lot... and then he went away for a pretty serious offense," Yenawine said. "There was a lot of drama growing up. And then when he came back into our lives later on, that's when it started again."

It was his sophomore year of high school, and everything was different. He didn't want anyone to know.

"Wake up. Go to school. Then I'd be really happy at school because I had friends and I didn't have to think about it. But as soon as I got home, it was just an instant reminder. Every single day, I forgot. And every single day, I remembered. As soon as I walked in the front door," Yenawine said. "At home I just really didn't talk to anyone. I didn't care to do anything. I was detached and I just kept to myself."

No one had any idea what was going on. What he went home to every night. And he wasn't about to talk about it to just

anyone.

Two and a half years ago, his parents were arrested.

His father committed suicide in his jail cell. Months later, his mother was sentenced. 35 years in prison.

"I'm not a big emotional person. But when my mom was sentenced to over 30 years in prison, I lost it. I was hysterical... I wasn't in the right state of mind," Yenawine said. "When my mom was sentenced to 35 years and when my dad committed suicide, those are the only two times I can remember myself crying. Those moments really got me."

Now, flash forward a few months. He steps back onto the field.

"I had taken a big hiatus from [football]. Eighth grade, freshman year and sophomore year, I didn't play. And then after sophomore year, and all the stuff happened, I went back to football. It really was my rescue. It took my mind off of things and seriously helped me get through everything," Yenawine said. "I made the decision myself. It was all me. I decided I needed something and I needed the camaraderie of a team. So I went out and I absolutely got that. I love my teammates."

Camaraderie. That's what playing football was about for Yenawine.

"Without a doubt, we're a family. I mean, we're all connected out there on the field. We feed off of each other's energy and we all just love each other to death," he said.

One especially significant figure in Nathon's football experience was Defensive Line Coach Sean McCarthy.

"My position coach, Coach McCarthy, was absolutely amazing. He acted almost like a dad to us," Yenawine said.

But this wasn't a one-sided relationship.

"[Our relationship] started off player-coach, and very easily I can say that now I'd use the word friend. He's a very good young man. He's like an adopted son, he really is,"

McCarthy said. "Nate's a little bit different. Because Nate's not afraid to be a man and stand up for what he believes in. He's not afraid to say things. He can stand on his own, and he's very supportive."

Not only did Coach McCarthy have an effect on Nathon, Nathon significantly influenced McCarthy's life as well.

"Nate's a very stand up guy. I can't put it into words, really. I always say if I was going down a dark alley, he'd be the one I'd want to have my back," McCarthy said. "He's a guy that I would trust. If I needed someone to go pick my kids up, he's the one I'd trust... There's no doubt in my mind that no matter what I might need, I could pick up the phone and call him and he'd be there. He'd drop everything. And that is so rare... It's his heart. He has a big heart."

However, playing football wasn't always a walk in the park.

"It's a sport that you can get knocked down and beat up in. But you've just got to brush yourself off and face another day," McCarthy said.

Football was hard work and a huge commitment. It was time consuming. It was physically and mentally demanding.

"[Playing football] definitely made me more responsible. No one wants to get up at the crack of dawn to go work out... Over the season, we spend legitimately over 1000 hours working



provided// photo

Coach Sean McCarthy and senior Nathon Yenawine (fourth from left) stand with the defensive ends on the 2015 team.

