

A future he can rely on

As a sophomore marketing and human resources major, Pe'a isn't sure what he wants to do after graduating. All he knows is school and perhaps a shoe business will lead him to the life he wants.

"Until I was 12 and really understood what jobs were like, I wanted school to take me to be a trash truck driver," Pe'a said.

He started making money in seventh grade when his mother bought him Jordan Retro Maroon 6s that he resold to people who were willing to spend \$1000 on a pair of shoes. Once he started working at KFC, he bought more and more shoes and has now sold about 350 pairs. He uses his Instagram page, Schoolboy Kicks, to market his shoe finds.

Between business classes, Pe'a keeps busy with shoe selling, 6 a.m. football practices, trips to thrift stores and three other jobs. He still makes time for Xbox with McMillon after finishing statistics homework.

When McMillon started looking at colleges, Pe'a told him to consider Bethel. After he stayed with Pe'a during a visit, McMillon knew that Bethel was for him. The Lakes High graduate started Bethel this fall and said Pe'a makes being far from home easier.

Now they're on the same team again. This fall, the football team scrimmaged. Pe'a wore a white jersey; McMillon wore Navy.

"We always talk. We can't go back to that. Whenever we touch the field, we're like, 'Hey, remember why we do what we do,'" McMillon said.

Football has made it easier for Pe'a to be far from familiarity. The defensive line and special teams coach A.J. Parnell became a father figure to Pe'a, bringing him home to see what a healthy home life could look like. He also shows Pe'a support by going with him to doctor's appointments.

"He wanted me to experience life raising a solid family in a nice neighborhood," Pe'a said.

For now, Pe'a is okay with being 1,990 miles away—but he thinks about moving back to San Diego where the temperature doesn't dip below zero. Although his relationship with his mother is distant, he's hopeful it will get better. He calls once a month to update her on how school is going. She also tells him about school, as she attends a community college to work in business administration.

"Communication is getting better and I can understand things as I get older," he said.

As an older brother, Pe'a's motivation partly stems from the desire to be a positive example for his siblings.

"Now that I see them following in my footsteps, there's pressure to keep going because they only have me as an example. I'm kinda leading the way now, figuring it out for myself while they're watching and seeing what I'm doing."

Pe'a holds his future in his hands. The sneakers are just a symbol of the life he wants, a life where he doesn't need to worry about where he's going to lay his head at night. **C**

2001

Pe'a was born at UCSD Hospital in San Diego, Calif on July 17, 2001. His mother, Lehua, holds him.



2019

From left to right, Jamal (family friend), Charlie (youngest brother), Pe'a, Keoni (middle brother) and Lehua (mother) pose at Pe'a's graduation from Lakes High School on June 5, 2019. Pe'a's family and friend drove 18



2015

Moved to Washington to live with his sister.



Fall 2019

Started at Bethel University



2020

Pe'a stands with Jaydon McMillon and Rafi Mbujia, who also attended Lakes High School in Washington, after a 2020 Bethel football game.

Pe'a carries a football at Bethel's outdoor stadium. He excitedly anticipates playing on this field during the spring football season, COVID permitting. | Photo by Emma Gottschalk

