

Captain Courage

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There stood Zach Wilson on the podium in Cleveland, Ohio with several of the other top NFL draft picks, waiting for something to happen—a cue. The others standing next to Zach Wilson appeared calm and composed, while the No. 2 selection and recently drafted New York Jets selection Wilson looked around nervously, not having an understanding of what was coming.

Social media picked up on this and went nuts, thinking the quarterback out of BYU was either afraid of standing next to the other big, bad players throwing up gang signs, or was in a moment that was possibly too big for him. “New York is going to be Hell for buddy,” stated one @MrRAGER_x on Twitter, hammering home the fact that Zach looked like he was completely and totally out of his element.

This burner account army also hammered on Zach for the featured, scheduled ads they were seeing of him on Twitter. Some on Twitter even accused him of sounding “fake,” calling him the ‘Disney Channel Quarterback.’

The Wilson-bashing really hit a fevered frenzy when Wilson’s mom Lisa was seen helping him onstage in Cleveland. The statuesque blonde was seen and heard on live television giving him little tips from backstage, which grizzled media types even jumped on and mocked.

Few had a CLUE what the real reason probably was for all of his naivete. Or that Wilson—who has diagnosed learning disabilities—was misreading social cues.

“Individuals who have learning disabilities may be less observant in their social environment, may misinterpret the social behavior of others at times, and may not learn as easily from experiences or social “cues” as their friends,” said a statement from the Learning Disability Association of America.

As someone who also has a learning disability, let’s make a few things clear. Having a learning disability become an integral part of your life isn’t a declaration of a death sentence; like Wilson I have learning disabilities that were diagnosed when I was younger. [For example, I have difficulty maintaining eye contact and also have severe disabilities in math and listening comprehension.]

Social situations can be BRUTAL for me, but it’s something I’ve worked on for years and continue to work on to this day. Sometimes, I’ll carry on conversations for far too long and things can become awkward because I don’t know when to stop talking.

That said, it didn’t hamper me one iota in college and I eventually went on to become a business and sports reporter who won several awards in both arenas. I’ve authored several books over a 30-year span, including this one. I’ve produced TV shows. In other words, I don’t let the disability define me; I define my disability.

To that end, when Wilson told his new Jets coach Robert Saleh — who was also a pioneer as the first NFL head coach of Middle Eastern descent — that he would work hard as a rookie out of BYU, I think you could believe that all the way to New York’s training facility and not necessarily the bank.

Despite coming from some money [Zach’s uncle David is the founder of JetBlue Airlines] you’d have to be some kind of a fool to believe that Wilson would be letting that 5-year, \$34 million contract he signed as the No. 2 overall draft pick of the New York Jets override his desire to be the best NFL quarterback he could be.

Quitting playing football because his family comes from new money simply isn’t in Zachary Kapon Wilson’s DNA. His father Mike grew up poor in Honolulu and worked his way up to become a construction company magnate; Lisa herself came from very humble beginnings [her family owned a grocery store in East Salt Lake City, which is where she met Mike —who was a student and linebacker on a Utah Utes football team coached by Ron McBride].

Two other things you’ll never have to worry about from Wilson—and others who have learning disabilities—for as long as he’s physically able are an insane attention to detail bordering on obsession and a laser focus on whatever he’s doing. Wilson will now go 1,000 percent towards getting to his final destination, and since his new coach Saleh was one who prided himself in ‘thinking outside the box,’ that experience will undoubtedly help the BYU product in this quest to become a NFL great.

How has this money helped Wilson? Okay, I’ll bite; he has admittedly had a lot of help along the way from his parents. His weekend 10-hour drives to the beaches of Southern California to train with ex-BYU/NFL QB John Beck at the height of the pandemic were the stuff of Forrest Gump legend. If you think like Wilson and his family does, you think nothing of it.

I didn’t see Justin Fields, the No. 11 pick driving 10 hours both ways every weekend in the middle of a raging pandemic to make his dreams come true. Nor Trevor Lawrence, the No. 1 pick who from what I understand does a lot for charities, overcoming any learning disability like Wilson has, one that an insider told me is “moderate.”

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