





Shepherd Football

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BAGENT NAMED HARLON HILL FINALIST!
 It was recently announced that Tyson Bagent is a finalist for the 2022 Harlon Hill award. The recipient is named the most valuable player in Division II Football. Bagent was the 2021 recipient. Congratulations Tyson!

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Born and raised in West Virginia’s eastern panhandle, Bagent was introduced to football at a young age by his father, Travis. And Travis, a world-champion arm wrestler (we’ll get to that), knew from the outset that he wanted his son to play quarterback. So, “I made sure I coached the team,” Travis said. “And I made sure we threw the football at a super-high rate.”

The approach paid off. Tyson Bagent later won the starting quarterback job at Martinsburg High School, where he led his team to the state championship in both his junior and senior seasons. He was named West Virginia’s Gatorade Player of the Year in 2018, when he threw for 3,199 yards and 41 touchdowns (against just four interceptions) and rushed for eight touchdowns.

Despite his prep success, though, Bagent never found much traction as a college recruit. Nearby FBS programs like Marshall and [West Virginia](#) didn’t see enough upside in his game. Neither did former FCS power (and recent FBS addition) James Madison, less than 90 minutes south of Martinsburg. The only FCS scholarship offers Bagent received came from Albany (N.Y.) and Robert Morris.

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It wasn’t enough to sway him from staying home and playing at Shepherd. That pairing made sense. But Bagent’s eventual emergence for the Rams as an NFL Draft prospect? That has been a lot harder to figure.

“I know what the percentages are for athletes (overall) to make it professionally,” Bagent said, “but I can’t imagine what the chances are for where I’m from.”

But Bagent’s talent, traits and upbringing might give him a chance to rewrite history come April.

Ernie McCook, then the Shepherd offensive coordinator and now its head coach, had a huge advantage when he was trying to recruit Bagent: He attended the same church as the Bagent family. So, McCook figured he’d run into the Bagents on one Christmas Eve when Tyson was in high school.

Just before mass started, McCook spotted the Bagents, walked down the church’s center aisle and sat behind them. He put an arm around Tyson and Travis.

“God meant for us all to be together,” McCook said.

“Hey, it’s about time,” Travis responded. “We’ve been saving that seat for you for 20 minutes.”



GO DEEPER

Dane Brugler’s NFL mock draft, 1.0: Can an elite group of defenders break up the QB run?

Had an FBS program come calling or the right FCS fit emerged, Bagent very well may have packed his bags and taken his shot. But the Bagent family roots run deep at Shepherd. His parents, who first met in high school, both graduated from there. Before his arm-wrestling days (yep, that part’s still coming), Travis was a southpaw on the Rams baseball team. Tyson’s younger brother, Ezra, is currently a senior quarterback at Martinsburg, with a Shepherd offer in hand.

Travis even held a part-time gig as a game manager for Shepherd. The connection meant that Tyson, who would go on to play high school football 10 miles away from the school’s campus, grew up training at the college’s facilities.

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His Little League baseball team hit in the Shepherd cages. The Bagents “used the basketball court every day,” Travis said. “We used the football facilities. It’s one of those things where Tyson became really comfortable with Shepherd when he was 10 years old.”

It was home.

It was part of the original plan, too. Back when Tyson first started playing youth football, Travis told McCook that his son “was going to come to Shepherd, be the best that (McCook) ever had, and they were going to build a statue of him before he left.” Coming from most parents, that’d be laughed off as a tongue-in-cheek remark. From Travis, a professional athlete known for his brash and outspoken swagger? It was essentially a guarantee.

“I always grew up around Shepherd,” Tyson said, “and knew what it was like, and (I) didn’t receive the offers that were spectacular enough to take me away from what I already had.”



“I know it’s probably not normal, but I know it is normal for all great people. They have this uncanny discipline because it’s just regular. It’s ingrained in them.”

——— Travis Bagent, Tyson's father

The Athletic

McCook obviously knew he had something, too. Bagent won the starting quarterback job as a true freshman in 2018 and spent his first two years inching his name into the program’s record books. After Shepherd (aside from one spring win over Mercyhurst) lost its 2020 season to COVID-19, Bagent came back and put his name on the NFL radar with a standout junior campaign.

During that 2021 season, he led the Rams to a 13-2 record and became just the ninth player in college football history (across all divisions) to reach 5,000 passing yards and 50 passing touchdowns in the same year — he finished with 5,000 on the dot and 53 touchdowns. Bagent also took home the Harlon Hill Trophy, the Division II version of the Heisman Trophy.

“We built our offense to fit him,” McCook said. “(We put) the right personnel around him. He can manage the game as well as anyone we’ve had here. He sees the field and processes it and owns everything. He is a great decision-maker. Our offense is always going to go through No. 2.”

With that 2021 performance, Bagent finally drew some of the attention that had eluded him coming out of high school. Last offseason, he put his name in the transfer portal and heard from — by his own estimation — “almost every school in the country.” He took official visits to West Virginia and Maryland and had additional trips planned to Western Kentucky and Northwestern.

“I knew there would be heavy hitters,” Travis said. “West Virginia gave him a visit that was better than the Bruce Irvin visit (Irvin transferred to West Virginia from a junior college in 2010). And (Maryland coach Mike) Locksley took 47 people out to dinner, and Tyson was the only recruit there. ...

“I’ll tell you the truth, I don’t think Tyson needed it. But as a father, to see two prestigious schools throw out the red carpet, I got a feeling that Tyson was just as happy to do that for me and his younger brother (as he was for) him. It was a great process and I don’t regret it.”



Tyson Bagent has thrown for at least three touchdowns in eight of Shepherd's 14 games this season. (Photo courtesy Shepherd University)

[Maryland](#) and West Virginia quickly offered Bagent a spot, and the opportunities likely would have continued to pour in as long as the transfer-portal window remained open. But Bagent liked the vibe at Maryland, where he would have had to compete for the starting job with [Taulia Tagovailoa](#). He was almost set to be a Terrapin.

One complication arose, though: While he only needed to complete a weightlifting internship to earn his Shepherd degree, Bagent said he learned he'd have to take between 30 and 50 additional credit hours to graduate as a transfer athlete.

"When the (West Virginia) academic advisor gave us his schedule with 37 credit hours, I looked at Tyson and he looked at me, and I knew he was going back to Shepherd at that point," Travis said.

It was around that same time that Bagent first started hearing from NFL scouts. They reassured the Bagents that Tyson didn't necessarily need to compete at a higher level to be on the radar. He was already there.

So, Tyson stayed put.

"It really just came down to me loving the situation I'm in," he said, "and wanting to be with my friends and teammates for one more year."

When that final year at Shepherd ends, either this week or next, Bagent will complete his run as one of the most accomplished statistical quarterbacks in college football history. It's been quite a journey, but perhaps his success slinging the ball should have come as no surprise.

After all, strong arms run in the family.

"It's like the Mount Rushmore of quarterbacks with Tom Brady and Peyton Manning, and then you can figure out the other two," the always-candid Travis Bagent explained. "In arm wrestling, I'm one of the first two guys on Mount Rushmore. I'm proud and happy about that."

Boyd would host three or four tournaments a year, with the best arm wrestlers in the world making the trek just off I-81 to Shepherdstown, W.Va. “My whole career started,” Travis said, “because I was trying to beat grown men at a young age.”

Not long after, two months removed from throwing his last pitch in college, Travis traveled to Washington D.C., to compete. He did so against the advice of Boyd, who wanted him to gain more experience. Travis returned with his first tournament win.

Part competitor, part showman, he went on to become one of the most decorated arm wrestlers in the sport’s history and a 28-time world champion (17 left-handed, 11 right-handed).

Travis Bagent VS Richard Lupkes



As a career, professional arm wrestling can be an inconsistent source of income, but the cash payouts often are lucrative for those at the top of the sport. Bagent’s biggest prize? A \$140,000 haul at a February 2019 tournament in Moldova.

“I think Tyson grew up in that competitive nature of our household,” Travis explained. “If Pop wins, Christmas will be better.”

By Travis’ count, there are approximately 20,000 professional arm wrestlers in North America. His competitions also have taken him (and, at times, his family) all over the world, from Moscow to Japan to Istanbul. He has competed in all 50 states and throughout Canada.

These days, Travis does less competing and more promoting, which is perfect for what Tyson describes as his dad’s “energetic and loud” personality. Travis might be as proud of his reputation for being one of arm wrestling’s greatest trash-talkers as he is of his many wins. He never pushed his son toward that sport, though.

“No, no, arm wrestling is whack,” Tyson said. “I always thought football and basketball are way more fun. But it’s really fun to watch him compete because his whole mantra and the way he carries himself fits in pretty well (with) being a pretty good arm wrestler.”

“However,” Travis said. “I’m even happier to be a football dad than an arm wrestler.”

After Tyson finishes his playoff run with Shepherd, he’ll start his NFL training, which will include a trip to the Senior Bowl. The prestigious all-star game’s executive director, Jim Nagy, visited the Shepherd campus last month to personally extend Tyson his invitation. Bagent became the first quarterback to commit to this year’s game. Don’t be surprised if you see Travis on ESPN or the NFL Network arm wrestling all comers that week, either.

Tyson Bagent Senior Bowl invitation



After the Senior Bowl will be the scouting combine, followed by Bagent’s pro day and countless meetings and workouts with NFL teams. The process will culminate in late April at the 2023 NFL Draft, where he’ll hope to hear his name called.

Bagent certainly checks a lot of boxes that scouts are looking for at the position, hence the heavy interest from NFL scouts. He has a projectable body at a verified 6-3 1/8 and 220 pounds, with 9 3/8-inch hands. He isn’t a dynamic athlete, but he can create with his functional footwork and a live arm. Shepherd runs a spread, RPO-based offense, and Bagent is able to threaten every inch of the field, showing the accuracy and efficiency to hit his targets in stride.

He can thank his dad, too, for drilling home the work ethic that should help through the draft process. As early as when Tyson was 7 years old, he attended multiple workout classes per day due to his dad’s relationship with CrossFit. Constant training became the norm, even at a young age.

“I know it’s probably not normal, but I know it is normal for all great people,”Travis explained. “They have this uncanny discipline because it’s just regular. It’s ingrained in them.”

The passing records also haven’t come by chance — or because Tyson plays at a lower level of competition. McCook contended that Bagent “processes the game better than any player I’ve ever been around,” and that’s a message he shares with scouts.

Shepherd isn’t a must-stop for NFL teams in a typical year. But Bagent isn’t a typical Division II quarterback.

“He has an unbelievable work ethic, both on the field and in the film room,” McCook said. “He brings players along at every position and is always there for his teammates. He’s the best player in Division II but also the best teammate on the team.”

Tyson Bagent

SHP - QB

CAREER STATS

COMP	ATT	COMP PCT
1381	2006	68.9
YDS	TDS	INTS
16869	159*	46

*Broke NCAA record previously held by Alex Tanney (157)

Will that be enough? Based on initial grades, Bagent is considered a “draft-and-develop prospect” with the “tools to stick on a roster while he adjusts” to NFL speed, according to area scouts.

Still, carving out an NFL career from the Division II ranks will be challenging. Of the active players in the NFL, approximately 2.4 percent came from DII schools, including Patriots safety Kyle Dugger (Lenoir-Rhyne), Vikings receiver Adam Thielen (Minnesota State) and Chargers running back Austin Ekeler (Western Colorado).

But no quarterbacks.

“I tell scouts that if they pound the table for him, he won’t embarrass you,” McCook added. “They’ll say, ‘You found a good one.’ He has a lot of football left to play after Shepherd.”

“I know nothing is promised,”Tyson said. “This week could be the final game I play or I have 10 more years to play, you never know. My honest answer: It always made sense that this is what I was going to do with my life, and I’ve attacked every day to get better at something that would help me be a better quarterback.”

(Photos courtesy Shepherd University and the Bagent family)

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Dane Brugler is a national NFL writer for The Athletic covering the NFL Draft. He previously covered the NFL Draft for NFL Draft Scout and CBS Sports. Follow Dane on Twitter [@DPBrugler](#)

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Great article -- Brugler's writing just gets better and better every year.

12

Z Zach B. · 2h 3m ago

Fantastic article. I am from WV and had no idea, hahaha.

S Scott A. · 1h 37m ago

How do you pronounce his last name?!

1

Chris Burke · 1h 13m ago

@Scott A. Like "agent" with a B.

3

B Bobby F. · 55m ago

Great read!

C Catherine B. · 43m ago

Excellent article, what a fun story! Did you know going into it about the dad's championship status, or did you head out there first and then discover the arm wrestling?

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