

GAME CHANGER

One call morphs this Lion into a Baltimore Raven.

Projected to be selected as early as late second round of the 2013 NFL Draft, former Lion Brandon Williams waited patiently for a call. On April 26, Williams sat with family and close friends at Sportsman's Park in Joplin, Missouri, to watch the NFL Draft. Alyssa Karel, Williams' girlfriend and mother of their 6-month-old son, Ryder, was also present, as was his No. 1 fan, his mother, Shelly Washington.

"I just wanted this so bad for Brandon," said Karel, '11. "All of his friends, family and teammates were there. I never had any doubt he would be chosen night two; it was just a matter of when and where."

With only three players left to be drafted that evening, many people, including Williams, became anxious.

Then, his phone lit up. The room fell silent as Williams answered.

"Brandon got the call and immediately everyone was saying, 'a call from Maryland, a call from Maryland,' Karel said. "When he got off the phone, he leaned over and kissed me and said, 'We're going to Baltimore.' About that time, they announced it on TV, and everyone started cheering. There were many tears of joy."

Williams was ready to accept his new team.

"I am a Raven now," he said. "I am going to get up there and give everything I've got, work hard and show them that I want to be there. I was always told if you are good enough, they will find you."

Williams and Karel have seen their lives change since the call. Williams began his professional career, and their family relocated to Maryland.

"Besides the money, the adjustment has been pretty smooth," said Williams. "The



Brandon Williams works out with his new team, the Baltimore Ravens. — Courtesy Baltimore Ravens

Williams was the highest picked NCAA Division II player in the NFL Draft and highest in Missouri Southern history. He began his rookie season for the Baltimore Ravens as a nose tackle in the 2013 season.

BRANDON WILLIAMS

Baltimore Ravens

No. 98, nose tackle

Missouri Southern honors

MIAA Defensive Player of the Year and National Defensive Player of the year, 2012; First-team All-MIAA, 2011 and 2012; three-time All-American, 2010, 2011 and 2012

biggest adjustment has been getting the playbook down and making new friends. My lifestyle has changed a little bit. It's a new city, I bought a house, and my family is up here. I'm wanting to spend as much time with them as possible.

"The physical part is the easiest part. I've been doing this since I was little; the hard part is the mental part. I'm the rookie, the new guy. I just want to take the pressure on to make my family proud."

Williams said Karel played an important role in the beginning of his career.

"She's taken on every role for me to focus on football," Williams said.

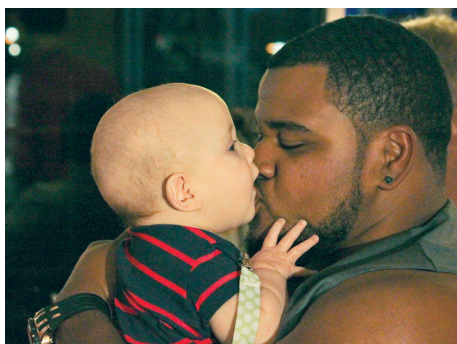
Williams' Southern family is also proud of his success.

Daryl Daye, Lions head football coach, said Williams had his share of struggles but is benefiting from his hard work.

"He knows he's starting at the bottom again, and he'll have to put a lot of work in, but he's used to that. He's started at the bottom before," said Daye.

"The special thing about Brandon is that he is a quality person — a good athlete, a good person, a good father. He wants to come back and get his degree, he wants to give back, he wants to donate and help the program. If you had a son, you'd want him to be like Brandon."

Williams attributes much of his success to Daye and his Southern family.




Top, Brandon Williams and Alyssa Karel, '11, celebrate after hearing the news that the Ravens selected Williams in the second round of the NFL Draft last spring. Above, Williams celebrates by giving a kiss to his son, Ryder, at Sportsman's Park in Joplin. — Sam Pogue, '13

"To tell you the truth, coach Daye was the reason I came to Missouri Southern," Williams said. "He got me where I needed to go. To play for him my senior season to finish it off and him be there and be the head coach, it was a storybook ending."

The local and national spotlight on Williams reflects well on Southern.

"He's made a positive impact on our recruiting; he's been a lot of good publicity for the school," said Daye.

Williams' mother is proud of her son's accomplishments.

"I thank Jesus for this new chapter in his life and chapter for our family," said Washington. 

— Sam Pogue, '13, and Sydney Marsellis, '14

NFL PLAYERS WHO ATTENDED MISSOURI SOUTHERN

Allen Barbre,
Philadelphia Eagles

Mike Tosaw,
Buffalo Bills

Richard Jordan,
Detroit Lions

Jared Kaaiohelo,
Houston Oilers

James Thrash,
Philadelphia Eagles

Rod Smith,
Denver Broncos

Harold Noirfalise,
Atlanta Falcons

Billy Jack Smith,
Los Angeles Raiders

Greg Brown,
St. Louis Cardinals

Ozzie Harrell,
Kansas City Chiefs

Mike Loyd,
St. Louis Cardinals

Terry Joyce,
St. Louis Cardinals

Source: Justin Maskus,
Athletics Media Relations Director

Keep up with Brandon Williams
and his new team at
www.baltimoreravens.com