

NFL's Number One Draft

Pick Sam Bradford has Family

Ties to Gibbon, New Ulm



Getty image taken from Thursday night's NFL draft in New York.

By Herb Schaper, Editor, New Ulm Sports Central

Sam Bradford may never have been to Gibbon or New Ulm but Thursday night he became a direct community link to professional football as the No. 1 choice in the 2010 National Football League draft. He was selected by the St. Louis Rams .

His great grandfather was a doctor in New Ulm and Gibbon. His grandfather (Johnny Esser) and his siblings are graduates of New Ulm High School. John lived and played several years of baseball for Gibbon as well as a short stint in New Ulm.

The family ties go through Dr. Oscar Esser who was the physician and a New Ulm High School graduate and good athlete in the early 1920's. Dr. Esser played with the 1921 New Ulm High School state tournament basketball team. In Gibbon there are extensive ties with the athletic Stadtherr family.

(Note: Some information regarding Dr. Oscar Esser provided by New Ulm Sports Central board member Carl (Red) Wyczawski whose wife, Mary, figures in the relationship as the daughter of Ben and Helen Green.)

In addition the Essers, and in various extents, the family ties also involve the Cal Backers family and other such as Frantas, Schwiess, etc. The grandfather is still well remembered in Gibbon.

After Dr. Oscar Esser graduated here he attended Marquette University and began medical practice in Iowa before returning to New Ulm. His marriage to Florence Stadtherr of Gibbon likely influenced his return to this area. While practicing in Gibbon, he lived in New Ulm while the children attended New Ulm high school. His wife was a sister of Tony Stadtherr who was the father of Jim, Bart and Pat Stadtherr, three of the all-time great athletes from Gibbon. Florence was the sister of Vincent and Prof. Richard Stadtherr. Dr. Oscar and Florence had three children, all born in New Ulm. John and Eileen graduated from New Ulm in 1945 and 1946,

Robert graduated from Gibbon in 1952 and was a member of Gibbon's great basketball team of that era, playing for Stan Wilfahrt. After attending St. John's and University of Minnesota, he received a master's degree in Arizona taught in that state. Robert died in 1996. Robert's wife, Gerry, who he met when she taught school in Gibbon, lives in the Tucson area.

One of her granddaughters is Marina Mercer who did graduate work at Arizona State University with a five-year scholarship. Gerry followed Marina's collegiate volleyball career all over the south.

Bradford's grandfather O. John (Johnny) Esser graduated from NUHS in 1944 and attended St. Thomas with New Ulm star athlete Stan Martinka and then served in the Navy. He was in the Okinawa area when WW2 ended and returned to Minnesota living in New Ulm and Gibbon. He played five games for the New Ulm Brewers in 1949, getting two hits, scoring four runs and a stolen base. His high school career included four games in 1942 and 11 in 1944 when the team was runner-up to the Carleton "state" tournament.

John had early connections in Gibbon and today recalls being the town team batboy as early as 1932 as he grew up he played some baseball for Bill McGowan, the 100-year-old amateur Baseball Hall of Famer from Gibbon.

Johnny vividly remembers his role as a “pinch runner”. Later he would return to Gibbon to play town ball with Stan Wilfahrt on a great Class A amateur team of the community.

After St. Thomas, he attended law school and entered the insurance field, finally settling in Oklahoma City where he was the state claims adjuster for his company. Prior to that he was in Rockford, IL. Where he met Phyllis Haugen. Their children were daughters Martha and Linda. Martha is the mother of quarterback Sam. The daughters were born in Miami, one of his other stops along life’s journey.

Daughter Martha married Ken Bradford and are the parents of Sam. Through Ken, Sam is a 1/16 Cherokee Indian. His father Ken played football for Oklahoma as a lineman.

Linda teaches in Oklahoma City and has changed her once married name back to Esser.

Johnny played grade school basketball at St. Mary’s grade school in New Ulm with such future athletes as the Polleis, Fesenmaier twins, Tommy Ubl, Hugh and Pat Sweetman and others. Leo Traurig who later coached at Trinity/Cathedral developed the bug to become a coach and teacher. High school wrestler-to-be Rusty Krebs also assisted there at the time.

Connections also are made through Arnold who was the older brother of Dr. Oscar Esser. The late Carol Backer was a daughter of Arnold so the Cal Backers are thereby connected. Another daughter of Arnold was Irene who married Herman Franta. Herman’s parents were John and Genevieve (Bushard) Franta.

Mary Wyczawski’s mother Helen was a Schwiess whose mother Helen (Mrs. Arnold Esser).

Bradford was the college football player of the year in 2008 before an injury sidelined him. Other recent winners included Tim Tebow, Reggie Bush, Matt Leinart, Ron Dayne and Ricky Williams, Josh Heupfel and Jason White. Tebow and Detroit Lion quarterback Matthew Stafford were in his college recruiting class.

Leo Esser is a brother to Dr. Oscar. The children of Leo and “Mickey” Esser included Mike and Tom of New Ulm, Elizabeth Neumann of New Ulm and Pat Esser of Texas.

Including all of the many cousins and other relatives in this area is not practical. An exception is a mention that one is Dan Esser who conducted a sports memorabilia and sports card business for a time in New Ulm.

Since this article will be an archived feature of New Ulm’s athletic history, please report any corrections or omissions to nusc@newulmsportscentral.com. It will later become an archived history article searchable in several ways on the website. The site search (left side column) is operational. The historic search (also left side) is in a development stage with objects being added on a regular basis.

