Missouri vs. Wyoming, 6:00 p.m. (ESPNU) — September 8, 2018

CHANGING THE STATUS QUO
Fast Five: The Missourian talked to Marching Mizzou director Amy Knopps about her favorite instrument and favorite city to visit

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Toddlers to Tigers:
Being smaller than the competition isn’t new for sophomore cornerback Adam Sparks, but he’s never let it affect his play

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10 impossible questions about Wyoming

1. Alvin and the Chipmunks released a cover of “Ragtime Cowboy Joe,” Wyoming’s fight song, in 1959. Where did it peak on the Billboard Pop Singles Chart?

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MISSOURI OFFENSE VS. WYOMING DEFENSE

MISSOURI

Kicker: Tucker McCann 19
Punter: Corey Fatony 26
Long snapper: James Workman 86

WYOMING

Kicker: Cooper Rothe 40
Punter: Tim Zaleski 27
Long snapper: Jesse Hooper 99

SPECIAL TEAMS:

MISSOURI

Kicker: Tucker McCann 19
Punter: Corey Fatony 26
Long snapper: James Workman 86

WYOMING

Kicker: Cooper Rothe 40
Punter: Tim Zaleski 27
Long snapper: Jesse Hooper 99
Outside of Marching Mizzou, what music do you usually listen to?
“Honestly, it’s usually silence. I’m around music all day, and so the opportunity to have silence is really golden. Silence is my music.”

What’s your favorite city that you’ve visited?
“Right now, Cape Town, South Africa. It was beautiful because the city itself was outstanding, and then so close to the city you had wine country, you had the beach, you had the city life. So there was a lot around it that I really enjoyed. And there are mountains right there, as well. ‘I have been to every continent in the world except for Antarctica. … I have to go to every continent, absolutely. I’m a big traveler, and it’s not in the immediate plans but it’s definitely on my radar. This summer, I’m going to go to St. Petersburg, Russia, and to Stockholm, Sweden, and kind of do some of that up north. I’ve never been to Scandinavia. I’ve never been to Russia.”

What’s your favorite instrument?
“Flute and piccolo. That’s my main instrument — piccolo, specifically. That’s what I grew up playing. ‘As you’re looking to choose your instrument, they often will have older students demonstrate the instruments. When I was going into fifth grade, ‘What’s the instrument? What do I want to do?’ Because I knew I wanted to be in band, because my mom was a clarinet player. And there was this flute player who played the tune ‘Bippity Boppity Boo.’ And I love Cinderella. I probably wore out my VHS tape growing up because I loved Cinderella so much. And I love Disney… That sold it for me.”

What’s your favorite Missouri sports memory?
“Mizzou volleyball. The Kreklows came during my time here at Mizzou, and they’d never been anywhere without a volleyball band. … I was a drum major at the time, so they gave me the task of, ‘OK, you’re going to do volleyball band. You’re going to lead it. You’re going to choose the repertoire. You’re going to recruit for it. You’re going to do this and make this happen.’ So here I was, an undergraduate student, doing the volleyball band. I mean, I did the whole thing.”

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What’s your favorite movie?
“Currently ‘La La Land.’ I really enjoyed that movie. I love musicals. My favorite musical right now is ‘Mean Girls.’ I saw it this summer on Broadway because I go to New York every year, multiple times a year if I can.”

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More than a backup plan: Brandon Lee’s pursuit of an MBA

Focused on his future on and off the field, NFL prospect Lee works toward master’s degree during his final season as a Missouri Tiger

BY ERIC LEE
sports@columbiamissourian.com

A concrete slab lined with gravel and dirt sits behind the house. Bushes and stray trash cans dot the edges of the slab, waiting patiently to claim victims who venture too far from the center. Eventually — it always happens — someone does just that and falls prey to the obstructions.

Spacing is important in basketball, after all.

Around the holidays, a young Brandon Lee can be found on that court. If he isn’t in the back shooting hoops, he’s out front, running down and tackling a ball carrier in a pickup football game.

His opponents are his family. The house belongs to his grandparents — the site of massive Lee family gatherings.

Brandon’s grandfather, David Lee, had seven siblings and fathered 11 children. Many of David’s kids — including Brandon’s father, Kenny Lee — have at least five children, as well. Factor in great-grandchildren, and the extended Lee family has upward of 100 members.

Family get-togethers are common, especially since the bulk of the family lives in Indianapolis. When the time comes to round everyone up, the meeting spot is usually David’s house.

Spacing is important in families, too. While the kids occupy the front and backyard, the rest of the family packs inside. Spades and kemp are favorite card games among the group, and football is on the TV. Of course, not everyone can fit in the living room, so others mingle and chat elsewhere, sometimes forced to go upstairs when the main level fills.

On occasion, like at a recent reunion, the family has to migrate to a local park to accommodate everyone.

“Gosh, you just can’t count how many people were there,” Kenny said. The Lees, like a lot of families, take great pride in their last name. Not only does it bring them together, but its meaning also holds a special significance for them.

The name originates from an Old English word, “leah,” meaning meadow, or in other translations, shelter and protection. David urged his kids to live out the latter meaning, to be a source of strength to those around them. Kenny did the same with his children.

It’s a big reason why Missouri’s redshirt senior linebacker is starting his pursuit of a Master’s in Business Administration this semester.

Changing the status quo

Kenny, Brandon’s father, has seen it before — kids from the inner city of Indianapolis who show promise, both academically and athletically, but fail to make it all the way through their high school or college careers, often due to circumstances out of their control.

He remembers a young student-athlete whose mother rented an apartment but was never around. The student-athlete took care of himself, went to school and played sports, but it wasn’t sustainable.

“Eventually, it got the best of him,” Kenny said. “The family structure is just not there in the community the way it used to be years ago.”

In 2016, 12.3 percent of households in Marion County, Indiana — Indianapolis makes up 90 percent of the population — were single-parent homes, according
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Lee aims high, striving to set a new standard back home

PLAN from page 6C

to data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the American Community Survey. Poverty plays a role, too. A study by the Sagamore Institute, which is based in Indianapolis, found that 21.3 percent of people in Indianapolis lived in poverty in 2015, up from 11.8 percent in 2000. Indiana Department of Education data shows, 29 percent of Marion County residents who are at least 25 years old have a bachelor’s degree.

Nationally, 23 percent of children live with a single mother and 4 percent live with a single father. Although Marion County is lower than the national average in terms of single-parent homes, it doesn’t meet the national average for poverty (12.7 percent) or those with a bachelor’s degree (33.4 percent).

This, in part, has motivated Kenny, who is a youth pastor at Zion Hill Missionary Baptist Church in Indianapolis, to encourage the children he works with to strive to further their education to the highest level and break the mold.

Brandon Lee bought into the idea at a young age. Years later, in 2014, the opportunity to go beyond a bachelor’s degree presented itself when he redshirted in his first year at Missouri. Suddenly, the linebacker was going to be in Columbia for more than four years, and the plan to pursue a master’s degree began to take shape.

The logic checks out. Lee would complete a bachelor’s degree in four years, then still have one more year to reach his academic goals thanks to the redshirt season. Moreover, having a master’s degree, he figures, will give him a backup plan that sets him apart from the competition in a job search if he doesn’t make it to the NFL.

In May, the plan fully materialized when he graduated with a finance degree and, a few weeks later, was accepted into Missouri’s MBA program.

Even if he turns pro and puts his master’s pursuit on hold, Lee intends to return to Missouri to finish his degree. Why?

“These days, the trips that Lee can make back to Indianapolis are few and far between. But every time he goes back, all eyes are on him. “He’s kind of like a celebrity,” Kenny said. “He’s been away for five years now, and he’s kept it together and kept his head on straight. A lot of people want to talk to him about that and talk to him about football.”

KENNY LEE
Brandon’s father

He’s been away for five years now, and he’s kept it together and kept his head on straight.

A lot of people want to talk to him about that and talk to him about football.

Brandon Lee and his mom after his undergraduate graduation from MU in May 2018.

“...I’m just trying to set an example and open up different paths that they can take, and show them that it is possible that a guy from the inner city can make those things happen. So this is just the beginning, but I also have to complete the program so I can actually do that for them.”
Putting the wheels in motion

Two years. That’s how long it will likely take Lee to finish the program. And that doesn’t account for the time he has already invested in blazing his path.

In the summer of 2017, Lee interned with Krilogy Financial in St. Louis. Two or three days a week, the linebacker went to summer workouts with the Tigers in the morning, then hopped in the car to drive to the Krilogy offices in Creve Coeur, where he worked the rest of the day before driving back to Columbia at about 6:30 p.m.

And he wasn’t just the intern who makes coffee runs. Lee helped analyze client portfolios and evaluated risk and return projections while working under Kent Skornia, Krilogy’s president and CEO.

“He was knee deep in everything for us,” said Skornia, who played football at Missouri in 1995 and 1996. “... He’s a hard worker, which can get you pretty far, but he also has some God-given talents in terms of his brains that are pretty off the charts.”

Lee recently flexed a little of that brain power.

This past summer, Lee took two courses at Missouri and interned at Edward Jones in Columbia. On top of that, he took three online classes through Harvard as part of the prerequisites for Missouri’s master’s program. Yes, that Harvard. But Lee doesn’t see it as that big of a deal.

“If I was to get a true certificate from Harvard or something on paper saying that, it would be really cool. But I can’t walk around and say, ‘I did this and that at Harvard,’” he said.

This semester — and those to come — don’t offer much relief. Although Lee said his class work isn’t much more difficult than the courses he took as an undergraduate, he only needed one word to describe his schedule.

“Busy,” he said.

On a recent Wednesday, the Tigers had workouts, film and practice from 6 to 11 a.m., but Lee had to leave for class before practice concluded. Another class — one from 6 to 9 p.m. — awaited him later, as well. Afterward, he decided the long day was worth a reward.

“As soon as that (last) class finished, I called Texas Roadhouse and ordered the Wednesday steak,” he said.

The task ahead certainly isn’t a cakewalk, but Lee believes it’s manageable and said the classes are more enjoyable.

Ask anyone around Lee — his teammates, his coaches, his family — and none see anything but success in his future.
"He’s just starting," Skornia said. "I think there’s a lot more to what Brandon’s going to do."

**President Lee**

Because of his internship this summer, Lee often left workouts in a suit and tie to cries of, “It’s President Lee!” from his teammates.

“They admire it. Even though they’re joking, I know that they’re getting something out of it,” Lee said. “People think of football, they think of people that are just dumb jocks,” sophomore linebacker Jamal Brooks added. “That’s something I’ve gotten before in high school, but I took AP classes in high school. I was happy to see someone going after their degree not just to get through school, but to actually have a plan and do something. He’s a huge influence on me.”

Lee’s influence isn’t limited to off-the-field matters. Inside the linebacker room, he’s one of the leaders. Lee has an extensive knowledge of the playbook and experience at all three linebacker spots for the Tigers. In turn, the young players often look to Lee for guidance — including sophomore Aubrey Miller Jr., who had to make a transition from strong side to weak side linebacker.

“He’s smart,” Miller said. “He knows everything that’s supposed to go on.”

Lee’s play speaks for itself. A season ago, he posted a career-high 42 tackles, five of them for loss. In a 45-17 win over Vanderbilt, he returned an interception 42 yards for a touchdown.

“I think he’s got a chance to play football past this year, I really do,” head coach Barry Odom said. “He’s talented kid. He’s intelligent, very driven (and) focused.”

“I was happy to see someone going after their degree not just to get through school but to actually have a plan and do something. He’s a huge influence on me.”

**JAMAL BROOKS**

sophomore linebacker

Brandon Lee, center, and his family after graduating from undergrad from MU in May 2018.

**PLAN from page 9C**

“I was happy to see someone going after their degree not just to get through school but to actually have a plan and do something. He’s a huge influence on me.”

**JAMAL BROOKS**

sophomore linebacker

Supervising editor is Michael Knisley.
Cowboys need surprise performers to survive in Columbia

BY NICK KELLY
sports@columbiamissourian.com

It took almost half a century before Wyoming saw another one of its players go in the first round of the NFL draft.

Until this past spring, the Cowboys had not produced a first-round pick since 1976 when Lawrence Gaines and Aaron Kyle joined the NFL. Then the Buffalo Bills selected quarterback Josh Allen, the first top-10 pick in Wyoming’s history.

It was the last accolade Allen would add to his Wyoming resume before he left Laramie for the NFL. Along the way, he was named Most Valuable Player of the Famous Idaho Potato Bowl and North Team Most Outstanding Player in the Senior Bowl after two years as captain of the Cowboys.

He leaves a legacy like that of a folk hero in Wyoming, as well as a gaping hole in the Cowboy lineup and the hearts of Wyoming fans. It’s redshirt freshman quarterback Tyler Vander Waal’s task to fill it.

No pressure, freshman.

“I think Vander Waal has taken a very mature approach to it,” Wyoming beat writer Robert Gagliardi said. “He is very confident in himself, and he has some tools to work with. He has some athleticism and a good arm. Does he have a Josh Allen arm? No, but very few of those types of guys are out there.”

“(Vander Waal) has some skill,” Missouri head coach Barry Odom said. “He looks like, to me, that he's good on the move throwing the ball.”

Those tools have not yet produced consistent and positive results through two games. Vander Waal has completed 21 of 42 pass attempts for 204 yards with zero touchdowns and one interception. Gagliardi, who works for the Wyoming Tribune Eagle and the Laramie Boomerang, attributes the slow start to the coaching staff’s choice to limit how much they throw at Vander Waal.

But if Wyoming (1-1) wants to...
‘He never saw size.’ Cornerback Sparks was always small and scrappy

BY BRENDAN LAVELL
sports@columbiamissourian.com

At 6 feet and 180 pounds, cornerback Adam Sparks is one of the smallest Tigers. In fact, he’s the second-lightest member of Missouri’s entire defense.

This lack of size isn’t a new challenge for the sophomore. He’s been competing against larger opponents since he first started playing football at 4 years old.

When he was 8, his youth team traveled from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to Texas for a game. Small for his age, he was also the youngest player on his team — and he swears the boys on the team from Texas were 10 and 11 years old.

His mother, Janelle, who was watching the game, remembers seeing a tiny figure burst out of nowhere.

“We see this little dude run and tackle someone twice his size,” she said. “And we were like, ‘Oh yeah, that’s Adam!’”

Around the same time, he wrote those goals down, he started putting in extra training with his father, Kenyatta, who played football at Southern — a Football Championship Subdivision school in the Southwestern Athletic Conference. Adam would practice after school, eat, do homework and then head back outside for extra training with his dad. Many of those days would last until 10 or 11 at night.

“When he woke up each morning. He used every ounce of energy the good Lord gave him that day. He didn’t save anything for the next day.”

KENYATTA SPARKS
Adam’s father

Luckily, Adam was blessed with a high motor. His father said he refused to keep still and never walked anywhere — running, climbing and bouncing were his preferred methods of transportation. Sometimes, he would even do footwork drills while he sat at the table.

“When he woke up each morning,” Kenyatta said, “he used every ounce of energy the good Lord gave him that day. He didn’t save anything for the next day.”

Adam’s brother, Jared, now a wide receiver at Purdue, is just a year older, so their dad trained them together. Back in middle school and even in flag football, Jared was a quarterback, while Adam played both sides of the ball. Not many young defenders can stop a quarterback-receiver duo with that much chemistry.

“Every time I was wideout, he’d just look at me and nod his head,” Sparks said. “He’d be like, ‘Let’s rock and roll.’ He would just throw it, and I’d go get it.”

“Me and my wife really enjoyed it,”

Please see SPARKS, page 13C

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SPARKS FAMILY

JASON VANCE/Missourian
Cornerback Adam Sparks warms up during a Sept. 4 practice at the Mizzou Athletics Training Complex.
Kenyatta added. “It’s one thing to see your sons play. It’s another to see one of your sons throw a touchdown to your other son.”

Nowadays, the brothers are facing off for bragging rights rather than teaming up to beat the competition. After the Boilermakers’ 35-3 victory over Missouri in Columbia last season, Jared Sparks has the upper hand. But things are going to get more personal this season on Sept. 15.

Not only will the Tigers be pining for revenge after 2017’s embarrassing blowout, but the Sparks brothers have fought their ways to much more prominent roles since the teams squared off last year. Now, Adam is a starting cornerback and Jared is a starting receiver.

Get ready for some brother-on-brother sparring.

Adam is used to competing against family. In Baton Rouge, he lives in close proximity to dozens of cousins. Some family gatherings were large enough to hold football games between two full teams of 11 kids. Games of football and basketball could get serious, and the smaller Sparks suffered “his share of cuts and bruises.” They never kept him from going right back outside.

Over the course of a couple weeks, the then-7-year-old got stitches after dropping a bag of trash with a protruding tin can on his toe, suffered a black eye while playing outside and then needed stitches again after slitting his finger on a pencil. At that point, there was only one thing on Kenyatta’s mind. “There’s no way in the world we can bring him to the same hospital,” he said.

In high school, Adam attended a football camp. One of the coaches in charge told the players that, all things being equal, they would have to take measurables into consideration as they ranked and evaluated the campers. Kenyatta remembers well what his son said to him afterward. “Dad,” Adam told his father, “I’m going to make sure that all things aren’t equal. I’m going to be quicker. I’m going to be faster. I’m going to have the highest football IQ. I’m going to make sure they don’t have to look at that size.”

Supervising editors are Michael Knisley and Eric Lee.
A
fter a Week 1 romp over UT Martin, Missouri hosts another non-
Power Five opponent in Week 2. The Tigers square off with Wyoming at 6 p.m. Saturday
at Memorial Stadium.

As Barry Odom and company are back on the
field, the Missourian is back
with another edition of the
Impossible Quiz to put your
knowledge of the Wyoming
Cowboys to the test.

From an Alvin and the
Chipmunks cover to Josh
Allen receiving statistics,
from geyser

So, how well do you know
the Wyoming Cowboys?

Alvin and the
Chipmunks released
a cover of “Ragtime
Cowboy Joe,”
Wyoming’s fight
song, in 1959. Where did it
peak on the Billboard Pop
Singles Chart?

The University
of Wyoming was
founded how
many years
before Wyoming
received statehood?

Former Vice
President Dick
Cheney, a Wyoming
alum, also served
as the White House
Chief of Staff under which
president?

Quarterback
Josh Allen, who
was drafted
seventh overall
in the 2018 NFL
draft, had how many
receiving touchdowns
at Wyoming?

Craig Bohl spent 11
seasons coaching
at North Dakota
State before
becoming the head
coach at Wyoming in 2014. How many wins did he
amass at NDSU?

What current
NFL defensive
coordinator
coached under
Bohl at NDSU?

Yellowstone
National Park, most
of which is located
in Wyoming, is
home to the geyser
Old Faithful. Water that
erupts from Old Faithful can
reach what temperature?

Which of the
following did
NOT attend
Wyoming?

Wyoming has
just three
NCAA team
championships,
one of which
came in men’s basketball.
In what sport did Wyoming
earn the other two?

A
fter

SCHEDULE

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ANSWERS: 1 (C) 2 (B) 3 (B) 4 (B) 5 (B) 6 (D) 7 (A) 8 (D) 9 (C) 10 (D)
Wyoming seeking offensive balance heading into matchup with Tigers

WYOMING from page 11C

beat Missouri on Saturday, the coaching staff might need to give Vander Waal more freedom to take the next step in his development as the Cowboys look to avoid running a one-dimensional offense against a Southeastern Conference defense.

“They want to run the ball. There’s no confusion about that,” Odom said.

The Cowboys, then, will have their work cut out for them if running back Nico Evans can’t play. Evans, who suffered a rib injury against Washington State last week, leads the team in rushing yards, touchdowns and carries.

Gagliardi told the Missourian via phone Monday that his understanding is Evans is day-to-day and could be a game-time decision.

After Evans left the game, the Cowboys mustered only 52 yards of offense.

If Evans can’t play against Missouri, Jevon Bigelow and Xazavian Valladay likely will receive most of the carries. Through two games, the two backups have combined to carry the ball 43 times for 173 yards and one touchdown.

Evans has 279 yards and three touchdowns on 42 carries.

A key to the Cowboys’ offense is getting both the running and passing game going at the same time, Gagliardi said, as they can’t fall back on Allen’s star power. If Wyoming can’t produce a balanced offense, it will have to rely on a defense that led the country in turnover margin last season.

The Cowboys have mustered only two turnovers through two games this season, though, and the pass rush fell flat against Washington State, failing to produce any sacks.

“This defensive line, talking to them, they are not real happy with how they played against Washington State,” Gagliardi said. “I will be curious to see how they bounce back.”

Without a pass rush, the Cougars took advantage of a young cornerback group, which Gagliardi called a perceived weakness.

“With Missouri and Lock and all of the skill and stuff around him, I would absolutely go after the young cornerbacks,” Gagliardi said. “It will be interesting to see how Wyoming counters that.”

The questions remain at cornerback, not the entire defensive back group, in Gagliardi’s mind. He called the safety group outstanding.

But the perceived strengths and weaknesses won’t matter much if the Cowboys can’t clean up penalties that plagued them against Washington State — 13 penalties for 109 yards.

“If they come anywhere close to 109 penalty yards with no pass rush,” Gagliardi said, “this game will be over after one quarter.”

Supervising editors are Michael Knisley and Eric Lee.
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