

MARK INGRAM

FAITH FOCUSED



Upon winning the Heisman trophy Ingram said, "I'm just so excited to bring Alabama its first Heisman winner. First and foremost I would like to thank God, without Him I would not be able to accomplish this." He added a thank you to his coach's wife, Terry Saban. "She is always a high spirited, positive person around here," says Ingram. "All the players love her. She cares about the players and the success of the football program just as much as any of us."

When University of Alabama football stand out Mark Ingram accepted the Heisman trophy earlier this year, emotion swept over him. What most of us don't know is how deep that emotion ran. The moment

spoke of a difficult, hard fought journey of faith and family. "It was more than just a trophy or football. It was about being able to overcome adversity and everything we've been through as a family. It was all those emotions tied into one," explains Ingram. "I guess that's why my mom was crying and why I broke down." Ingram adds his mom's tears of joy tugged at his heart. "That's what really broke me down. I hadn't really seen my mom cry before. It was a really special moment to me."

The moment came after what Ingram describes as a childhood focused on faith. Ingram says his maternal great grandmother Gertie Wright, grandmother Barbara Johnson and mother Shondra Ingram gave him a triple dose of what it is like to live your life for Christ. "I grew up in the church and just seeing the types of struggles that we had through our life and how they [great grandmother, grandmother and mother] handled it through their faith just really inspired me, and I wanted to develop a relationship with Christ as well." Treating others with kindness and giving God thanks are expected in the Ingram home. "My grandma and my great grandma are always saying, 'Amen,' and thanking the Lord. They inspire me."

Three other women in Ingram's life also keep him in line – his younger sisters ages 16, 12 and 10. He considers them his charge. "I'm real protective. Don't mess with my sisters," chuckles Ingram. "I can tease them all I want, but nobody else can mess with them."

As a highly recruited high school football player, Ingram's close relationship with family weighed heavily on his decision of where to attend college. He recalls specifically how he leaned on the Lord to clear his mind and make the right choice. "I really just prayed about it a lot. I was really confused. People were telling me this and telling me that. People were promising me this and promising me that. I just didn't know who to believe. I would just pray about it every night." Over time Ingram knew what to do. "I just had this feeling in

Post football, Ingram hopes to have a career sharing the accomplishments of other athletes. "I love all sports," says Ingram. "It would be a great job to be a sports broadcaster." Ingram's major is communications.



my heart that Alabama was the place for me. Sometimes I was even fighting it, saying, 'I want to stay home and play at Michigan State,' but I felt like God was telling me, 'This is where you need to go.' " And with a twinkle in his eye and a smile on his face Ingram adds, "It's been good so far."

Prayer also proceeded Ingram's most celebrated public moment as a college player. Although the events leading up to the Heisman announcement kept the Heisman candidate busy with multiple appearances, Ingram and fellow Heisman candidate and previous Heisman winner, Tim Tebow, found time to pray. "We did have a little moment there where we got to pray and worship together. To open up with me and pray with me that was a special moment, and it helped calm my nerves," remembers Ingram who sees Tebow as an example. "How he handles himself off the field and the things he accomplishes on the field are tremendous."

For his family, team mates and fans, Ingram strives to lead by example. He commits time to studying God's Word. Ingram says the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) provides the framework for him to do that at college. "Anybody who is hungry to learn the Word, they (FCA) just open their arms. We have Bible study whenever people can make it. We read Scripture, go over a lesson and pray. We are getting the Word and getting prayer every week, and I think that's great."

Ingram says keeping his faith at the forefront of his life is critical to staying on the path God has chosen for him. "I'm not the perfect person in the world, but I definitely know where my strength and my source of power come from. I know I'm not in control. Everything is in His hands," emphasizes Ingram who says God gives him peace under pressure. "I really don't feel pressured by anything because I know who is in control of my life. Football could be over for me tomorrow or I could be playing for another 20 years. I just live everyday, I pray and I try to do the right things. I just know that the Lord is in control of my life, and He has a plan for me."

— Laurie Stroud



Mark Ingram helps lead the Crimson Tide to the school's 13th National Title. He is only the sixth player to win the Heisman and a national championship in the same season since 1950.

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