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## Stanford Jennings Is Still Super

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**NOTES**

FROM THE

**FIELD**



Once Stanford Jennings hit full speed and eluded the grasp of a San Francisco defender, he was on his way to a 93-yard kickoff return in Super Bowl XXIII.

## Notes from the Field

# STANFORD JENNINGS IS STILL SUPER

BY VINCE MOORE

It was late in the third quarter of Super Bowl XXIII, and Stanford Jennings '84 had a lot to think about as he stood in the end zone awaiting the kickoff from the San Francisco 49ers.

For starters, Jennings' Cincinnati Bengals were tied with the 49ers, 6-6, in the biggest sporting event in the world. Of equal importance, however, was the fact that his first child, daughter Kelsey, had been born the day before in Cincinnati while he was in Miami preparing for the game.

His wife, Kathy, and baby were doing fine, and Jennings was thinking it would be nice to do something special for them during the game. He even had written Kelsey's name on his cleats.

What happened next had happened only once before in the previous 22 Super Bowls and only eight more times since. Jennings caught the football on the seven-yard line, sprinted through a gap in the middle of the field and ran 93 yards for a touchdown.

It was an electrifying play that gave the Bengals the lead and elicited a legendary "Oh, my" from NBC announcer Dick Enberg.

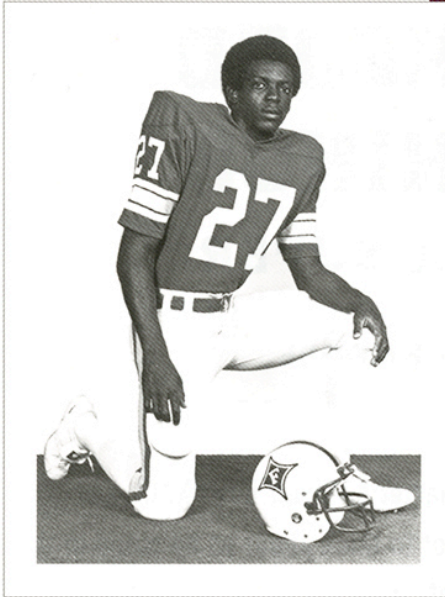
"I can't really say I was nervous," Jennings says. "The blocking scheme

is called before every kickoff, so I knew exactly where I was going to run. The guys made their blocks, the hole was there and I ran through it as fast as I could. The adrenaline carried me the rest of the way."

Following the kickoff return, after Jennings and Bengals head coach Sam Wyche '66 had embraced in a hug on the sideline, Enberg duly noted that both men were Furman alums. And what were the odds, Enberg might have added, that two men who played football at a small school in the South would find themselves together on the National Football League's grandest stage?

"While nobody could have predicted we would return that kickoff for a touchdown, I knew I could count on Stanford to hang onto the football and make the right decisions," Wyche said. "A lot of kick returners like to cut left or right when they're following their blocking, but Stanford hit the hole at full speed and just took off. It was a great play."

## Notes from the Field



Jennings, shown here during his years at Furman, graduated as the school's leading career rusher.

While the Bengals would ultimately lose, 20-16, in the game's final seconds, Jennings' feat in Super Bowl XXIII has not been forgotten. In the summer of 2018, the Cincinnati Enquirer named his kickoff the top play in the 50-year history of the Bengals. A year earlier, he was also named one of the top 50 players in Bengals history.

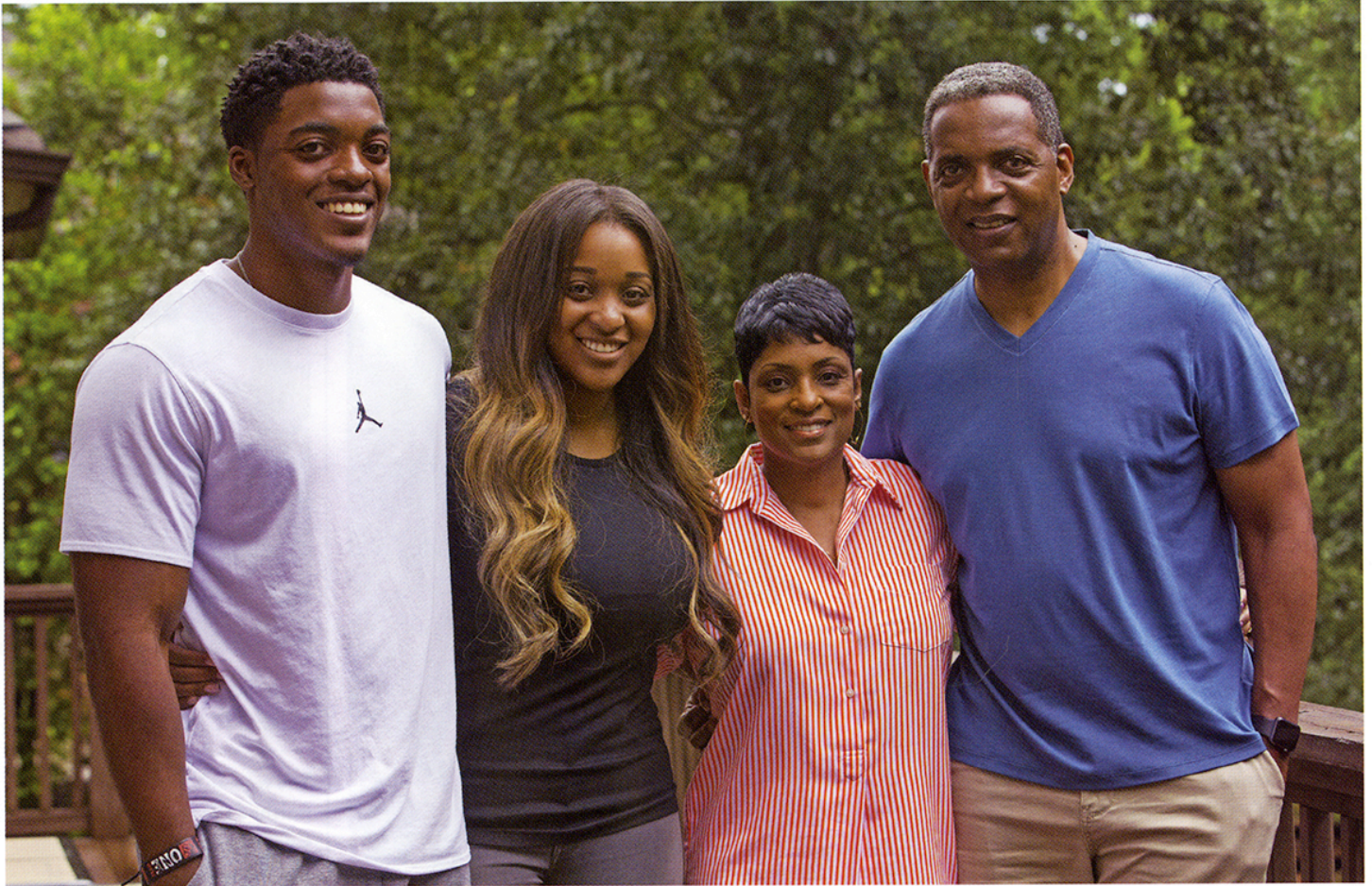
"We (the Bengals) wanted to draft Stanford because we understood what a great player he was at Furman," Wyche said. "The scouts talk to one another, and we knew we weren't the only team interested in drafting him. He turned out to be everything we thought he would be."

Jennings remains, 35 years later, one of Furman's greatest student-athletes. The Paladins won Southern Conference championships each of his four seasons, and he graduated as the school's leading career rusher with 3,868 yards and 39 touchdowns. His teams recorded victories over South Carolina and Georgia Tech, and he was the first person in the history of the conference to be named league Player of the Year three times.

He was drafted in the third round by the Bengals, the highest draft choice in Furman football history. He played a total of nine years in the NFL – seven with the Bengals, and one each with New Orleans and Tampa Bay – before retiring in 1992.

It's no surprise that Jennings has been as successful off the field. He and Kathy currently live in the suburbs of Atlanta, where he serves as the regional sales manager for New Balance Athletics. His daughter, Kelsey, graduated from

## Notes from the Field



Family has been every bit as important to Jennings as football. From left: son, Jamie, daughter, Kelsey, and wife, Kathy.

Furman in 2011, and his son, Jamie, attended Georgia Southern.

Of all the good things Jennings has done since graduating from Furman and finishing his NFL career, giving back to his alma mater has to be near the top of the list. He established the Stanford Jennings Football Scholarship just a few months after he graduated, and he has served multiple terms on the Furman Board of Trustees. He's on campus quite often for activities and events, and not just ones involving athletics.

"It's nice to look back on the choices you made in life and realize you made some good ones," Jennings says. "I'm very appreciative of the fact that I had the chance to go to Furman, get a scholarship and be associated with such a great, character-building football program and a top academic institution. Being a true student-athlete was important in my development. And still being involved with the university as a trustee and a Furman parent has provided a lasting connection."

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and realize you **MADE SOME GOOD ONES.**"**

The Jennings household contains more than a few memories of Super Bowl XXIII. There are newspaper articles and photos of the kickoff return staged in sequence. The official football of Super Bowl XXIII is still in its Wilson box, unopened. So Jennings doesn't mind reliving the memories, especially when another Super Bowl rolls around. In fact, he and Kelsey make a point every year of getting together and watching videos of his kickoff return. Yet, there is one thing.

"It's the thing that still sticks with me, that sticks with all of us (on the team)," Jennings says with a wry laugh. "As great as it was, it would be a lot better had we won the game." ●