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September 01 09:45 2023

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The Young Pro-Files

FROM THE FOOTBALL FIELD TO THE INSURANCE TECH FIELD

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FORMER NFL TIGHT END HELPS BUILD SALES AUTOMATION STARTUP FIRM

By Christopher W. Cook

It's that time of year again. Football! The National Football League (NFL) season kicks off this month, and as a New Orleans Saints fan, this writer is excited to see tight end Jimmy Graham back on the team. Let's hope he and newly signed quarterback Derek Carr can replicate some of the glory from the Drew Brees era.

Speaking of tight ends, this month's Pro-Files installment features a man whose football talent and hard work led to a brief stint in the NFL. But after injuries ended his playing career, Will Shaw eventually found himself in the insurance technology business.

But prior to that, it was all about ...

Football!

Shaw's dedication and love of the game in his early years carried over to the collegiate level. Starting at Mesa Community College in Arizona as a defensive back, Shaw transferred to Youngstown State University in Ohio for his sophomore year. He played one season at the safety position before switching to tight end for his junior and senior year, where he would serve as team and position captain, and make the All-Conference team in 2012.

"Football taught me just about everything I know about life: discipline, overcoming obstacles, hard work, etc.," he says. "One thing I took very personally was the idea of being the hardest worker in the room. It didn't matter who we were playing that week; if I was in a battle to be the starter in my position or whatever. And I was willing to outwork everyone, and I mean everyone, to achieve my goals."

Shaw, now chief executive officer of agency software firm Better Agency, would use this mindset when he transitioned from football to the business world. But he wasn't finished at the collegiate level.

"I was a zero-star recruit (out of five) coming out of high school. I was told I had less than a 1% chance of playing Division 1 football, let alone playing in the NFL," Shaw says. "I just decided that if I stuck to what I knew and outworked everyone, it would work out."

In 2013, as a free agent, Shaw tried out with the Pittsburgh Steelers. While he didn't make the team, Shaw signed a contract with the Philadelphia Eagles after the team held its rookie minicamp that summer. Unfortunately, injuries ended his career the following year.

"I did receive my bachelor's degree in business administration from Youngstown State University after going back and finishing during the 2013 offseason," he says.



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Business career

After his playing days ended in Philly, Shaw moved back to Arizona, where he served as a business consultant for Infusionsoft for about two years. "I eventually left to start my own consulting company, Capsule Five," he says. "We focused on integration and process management on the Salesforce and various other platforms. I also served as head of operations.

"During this time, we ended up working with a few insurance agencies, who referred us to more, and we ended up working with about 100 agencies over a two-year period. I realized that many agencies were trying to accomplish similar goals, and as much as we were helping, we were also creating more problems (multi-system chaos, dual-data entry, multiple points of failure, etc.), so I decided to walk away from my own company (we had built into various verticals) and build from scratch a sales automation platform for P-C (property and casualty) insurance agencies."

This was the beginning of what would become Better Agency, headquartered in Gilbert, Arizona, which launched in late 2019.

"Better Agency is a sales-enablement CRM (customer relationship management) for P-C independent insurance agencies, helping them sell more premium through increased sales conversion, enhanced renewal performance, and unlocked cross-sell opportunities. We also offer agency management solutions via our AMS add-on, and personal-lines rating," he says.

A personal career highlight of Shaw's is his involvement with a conference that Better Agency hosts each year in Phoenix. "Our whole thesis is to help agencies be successful and to sell more premium, and oftentimes that has absolutely nothing to do with our software," Shaw says. "Having agents, who are not clients of ours, go on and do more with their communities and their agencies with just a little help from our event is one of the more rewarding things we get to do."

Shaw serves as a board member to several companies and as an investor in various spaces; he also advises a community fund created locally in Arizona that acquires local small businesses.

Throughout his careers in football and business, Shaw has been thankful for numerous individuals for contributing to his development. "I could go on about many coaches and former teammates, but one in particular would be my tight ends coach in college, Coach Mauro Monz," Shaw says. "He not only taught me how to play the position at a professional level, but how to approach life as a professional. 'Never too high, never too low' and 'Things are never as bad, nor as good, as you think they are' are two quotes that served me well in football and life.

"Professionally, I owe a lot to Greg Head, [an advisor and consultant to SaaS (software as a service) founders], whose advice and guidance early in my journey has shaped what I've been able to accomplish. As well as countless insurance professionals who have graciously given me their time, advice, thoughts, feedback, and insights."

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—Will Shaw

Chief Executive Officer

Better Agency

Involvement, advice and homelife

Shaw and his firm keep active supporting a variety of organizations, both insurance-related and non.

“We are partners with many of the insurance associations as a vendor and supporter,” he says. “We try to work with any and all associations, groups and providers that are aimed at helping independent agencies.

“We are also involved with Startup-AZ, a foundation formed to help create a program for startups—primarily in the tech space—to have a community and resources to help start, scale, and grow their companies. I’ve been a participant in this program, and still actively participate and donate.

“I also actively support and try to be involved as much as possible with Insure Equality, a nonprofit that is creating accountability in the insurance industry in the pursuit of diversity and equality.”

When it comes to young or new professionals starting a career in the insurance industry, Shaw reminds them that “many are willing to help. I’ve been welcomed into this industry as an ‘outsider’ with open arms and have received countless introductions. Many of us are trying to solve similar problems. The more we work together, the better we become.”

When he’s not working, Shaw enjoys spending as much time as he can with his family.

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“I met my wife when I was 18 and we now have two daughters, who are three and one, along with our two dogs. I enjoy swimming, soccer, skiing in the winter, and even a little golf. If I can get my daughters into golf when they’re older that will be ideal to get a little more golfing time in my life,” he says with a laugh. “I’m also an avid backcountry snowboarder and spend days at a time in the mountains—avalanche gear and all.”

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