



# Beginning in the End Zone

“I was never the best kid. I couldn’t bust an assignment; I had to work from whistle to whistle. You knew what you were going to get out of me. I was going to work as hard as I could. There was as much value in that as there was in being a superstar athlete.”

—JEFF NOVAK

Jeff Novak tried his best even when he knew he wasn’t the best. A walk-on in college, then an NFL player who experienced three cuts from the team before his career steadied, Jeff realized early that football would be but a small slice of his life.

“Every single Tuesday of the year, they’d bring in [new] players to work them out. You’d see them bring in a bunch of offensive linemen and know they were trying to find somebody who may be more athletic and better than the bottom two or three guys. So if you weren’t in the top five and you were player No. 6, 7, or 8, you knew there was a chance every Tuesday [that] your nametag might be off the locker,” Jeff said.

Jeff made the decision early in his career that he would give his best to football but at the same time, invest in what was really important to him: diversifying his interests and preparing for the future.

While playing in Florida for the Miami Dolphins and the Jacksonville Jaguars, Jeff had launched a company with a college teammate called Saber Security, a low voltage wiring business in Texas. From Florida, Jeff managed the accounting and payroll after games and practices. During off-season, he’d fly to Texas to manage the company on site. But the company was difficult to manage from a distance and the profit margin was narrow. He eventually sold the company to his partner. “I just thought I should be doing something that had bigger opportunity,” he said. This decision coupled with a career-stopping injury created the perfect timing for Jeff’s new venture: Intra Focus marketing, a software marketing and analytics company.

#### OFF THE FIELD

For those who are of the opinion that professional football players can’t also be perceptive businessmen, it may be a surprise to learn how playing football

prepared Jeff for life beyond the end zone. “A lot [of skills] are transferable from professional sports to the real world that don’t get taught in school,” Jeff said. “I’ll argue all day that we have more transferable skills than most people...because we know about accountability and teamwork—putting the team before yourself.” He lists many of his teammates who have gone on to obtain advanced degrees and run successful companies. “But we don’t ever hear about those people,” he said. “You hear about the guys getting busted for tax evasion or domestic abuse.”

Today, Jeff’s professional team is his business. And he uses the perseverance and tenacity he learned on the football field to grow what is now IF Marketing, a full-service advertising agency in Georgetown. He also uses the extensive network he built while playing professional sports. “The interesting thing about sports is that it opens a lot of doors when you’re ▶

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**“If you play football long enough, you end up being a 32 or 33 year old man who has no job skills. The point is that when you get done, there aren’t a lot of people who want to mentor a 33 year old guy and you’re not really in a position where you want to take an entry level job. You can’t; you have four kids and bills to pay.”**



## END ZONE

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done playing. People are interested in your experiences and what it was like playing in the NFL. It provides you with a big network, he said.”

It’s not hard to see why people want to be around Jeff Novak – and it has little to do with his stint in professional football. “It seems that Jeff never tires, he is always working and he manages to make a success out of just about everything he does,” said Joy McVean, the company’s vice president of account services and Jeff’s older sister. “He has drive, determination and lots of heart...always has,” Joy said. “The people at IF marketing and advertising work extremely hard for him, not because he demands it... but because they want to. He’s a good boss and an even better man.”

This drive is inherent in the Novak family. There are six siblings.

“We’re all sort of intertwined in each other’s business,” Joy said, mentioning that their mother Judy Novak, a former healthcare CEO, now heads up the front office managers and staff for another brother who owns First Choice ER. “One thing I always said was do whatever you want to do. All you

have to do is believe in yourself,” Judy said. “I think they’ve all done it. I’ve been fortunate watching that happen. I think I’ve been very blessed.”

### **BROWNSTONES IN GEORGETOWN?**

Jeff and his brother Jack recently joined forces to form the real estate development firm Novak Brothers. You may have seen their sign on the way to Wal-Mart on Rivery Blvd. Jeff’s new venture? Texas Brownstones. If you’ve visited Boston or Manhattan, or watched the Cosby show, you’ll recall stately brick homes, standing like soldiers in a row. An urban village, the Novak Brothers’ development of 115 brownstones is part of a mixed-use community currently under construction. The community will include full and limited service hotels, five restaurants, hundreds of thousands of square feet of high-end retail space and 150,000 or so square feet in office space. “There is a market for an attached single family fee simple product, and we’ve already pre-sold two,” he said. Market research revealed that people, especially professional businesswomen, like being able to walk to a restaurant or movie theatre while having the security of living in a community with neighbors close by.

“The jewel of the sight for me is our hike and bike trail that runs right through it. You can literally get on a bicycle and get to downtown Georgetown or out to our lake, mountain bike around the lake and never have to be on a public street which is pretty cool,” he said. It’s also pretty cool that Jeff continues to keep his eye on the end zone, driving down line, gaining real estate along the way. ■

### **THE BROWNSTONE AT THE SUMMIT**

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