

CACTUS LEAGUE IS HERE! *POST* Covers All Bases (and Stadiums)

post

PHX

Game Over. Game On.

March 2009

ALL ABOARD!

CARDINALS STAR BERTRAND "B-TRAIN" BERRY LIVES AND PLAYS IN THE BEST SPORTS TOWN IN THE U.S.

We hosted, then almost won, a Super Bowl. There are superstars all over Phoenix and there's always a huge event happening. Bottom Line—the Valley rules the Sports World!



CONFECTIONS OF A CHOCOHOLIC

Scottsdale's Julia Baker makes amazing desserts for LeBron, D-Wade, Bono and Oprah

WHAT'S NEXT FOR JEREMY ROENICK?

Something big, exciting and high-profile

MAN BEHIND THE MASK

A Major League ump lives in Ahwatukee

GOODBYE

WALL STREET... HELLO, WAYNE GRETZKY!

A Coyotes coach puts a financial career on ice

PICTURE PERFECT

Cardinals team photog Gene Lower captured history

PLUS:

- // A home fit and built for a star
- // Running to remember Pat Tillman
- // Meet the best concert promoter in the biz

ON THE COVER

Bertrand Berry photographed by Tracy Rasinski. Special thanks to Life Time Fitness, Tempe and Catrina Knoebl, Cactus League



POST ACCESS

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Former Coyote JEREMY ROENICK is arguably the greatest American-born hockey player of all time. But with his NHL career winding down, the next state in his life is just getting started. You can bet it will be as colorful, fun and successful as his playing days.

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He arrived in Phoenix unknown and not able to speak fluent English. Fast forward six years and LEANDRO BARBOSA is a fan favorite, bilingual, impossible to run down on the court and one of the nicest guys in all of sports.

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She Makes It A Good Morning

Tara Hitchcock has been setting her alarm clock at 3 AM for a long time. She enjoys hosting "Good Morning Arizona" on 3TV as much as her fans love waking up to her.

BY PAUL FRASER

PHOTO BY TRACY RASINSKI

"When I was in the sixth grade I was watching the news and I remember thinking to myself, 'I'll bet that never gets boring.' And I knew that's what I wanted to do; something fun that would never get boring."

Tara Hitchcock

Think back to the first time you realized what you wanted to do with your life, assuming that you have, in fact, figured it out. Because plenty of people haven't. In fact, there's a statistic floating around that says the average person changes jobs 13 times in their lifetime. But if you have figured it out, when did it click? In college? Shortly thereafter? When you hit 30? Mid-life crisis?

Or were you like Valley sweetheart and 3TV's "Good Morning Arizona" host and anchor Tara Hitchcock? Believe it or not, she knew exactly what she wanted to do with her life before she hit junior high.

"I promise I'm not making this up," Tara laughed. "When I was in the sixth grade I was watching the news and I remember thinking to myself, 'I'll bet that never gets boring.' And I knew that's what I wanted to do; something fun that would never get boring."

Well considering she's walked Amen Corner at The Masters, covered Super Bowls, broadcast live from the 2001 World Series in New York mere months after 9/11 and, in her own words, basically gets paid to "hang out with my friends and tell stories," it's fairly safe to say that Tara has done almost exactly as she intended.

She'll be the first to tell you that she's caught a few breaks along the way, especially at the beginning, when she landed a job within a few months that most people wait years for.

Tara earned her undergraduate degree from Boston College and her master's from Northwestern University.

"After college I gave myself about a month and a half to kind of screw around and do nothing. And then I ended up getting a job in Beaumont, Texas as a reporter and a producer," she said. Her family was in Texas at that time and to this day continue to reside in the same house Tara grew up in.

"And then a few months later they needed a main anchor, and I got the job."

A few months. Main anchor.

"Great timing has been a theme my entire life," said Tara. "I have been blessed by great timing."

And obviously, just a bit of talent. If you've seen Tara on the air, which you almost certainly have, you know that her personality is tailor-made for morning television. Energetic, loose and conducive to the palpable camaraderie amongst the cast.

"Dan [Davis] and I have been together all 13 years, and he was in my wedding," Tara told POST. "I've been with Brad [Perry] for 10 years, and I adore Scott [Pasmore] like a brother. Everyone I work with is great. We're all dysfunctional, just like a family."

It's not just the people that Tara loves about her job, but the job itself.

"I'll never go back to evening news again," she said. "The morning is just so much fun. You get to do so many great things. The mornings allow you to just be yourself."

The mornings have also afforded Tara countless opportunities, a few of which we mentioned earlier. Her list of favorite moments is seemingly impossible to narrow down but one of the first things that came to her mind was that World Series back in 2001.

"That's one of my greatest memories," said Tara. "Of course that was right after 9/11 and we went down to [Ground Zero]. And I was standing right next to Randy Johnson when President Bush threw out the first pitch for Game 3."

What about the Masters?

"Well, it's the complete opposite of the FBR Open," laughed Tara. "At the FBR, you're coming in your heels, ready to play. But at the Masters, you're afraid to even shuffle your feet. The tradition makes it so neat. To walk the course at the Masters was definitely an experience."

Of course, for a woman who says she is a "huge sports fan" and someone who has entrenched herself in the Arizona

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Showtime ↓

TARA HITCHCOCK

communities, the Cardinals' Super Bowl run was definitely a major highlight. As it turns out, Tara was quite prophetic when it came to the Cards' destiny.

"I don't know that I ever thought they'd make it to the Super Bowl," admitted Tara. "But this year, after Philadelphia beat the Giants and I knew we were going to play [the NFC Championship] at home, I knew we were going to the Super Bowl."

Tara put her money where her mouth was, purchasing her airline ticket to Tampa before the Philly game even happened.

"I saved a lot of money by doing that."

The list goes on and on. She has gotten to meet some of her "celebrity crushes" like George Clooney, and she's spent time with Sandra Bullock and Will Smith. She also has no problem telling you about the people she hasn't enjoyed, most notably Joan Rivers.

Then there's Kurt Warner on the flip side.

"I am a huge, huge Kurt Warner fan," said Tara, who is heavily involved with multiple charities, a few of which include Best Buddies, Child Help, Celebrity Fight Night and The United Way.

"You know, Kurt's wife likes to joke that she's married to Jesus, and I have to tell you that he's about as close as you can get."

There's also the man you've never heard a bad word about in your life – Luis Gonzalez.

"I love Gonzo," she said. "What I love is when you get to see him just being a guy. Gonzo is so professional but when you get him in a social setting he's got the mouth of a sailor! He is just a great guy."

However, anyone who's been in the business of reporting news knows all too well that news isn't always good.

"Obviously, being a reporter when 9/11 happened wasn't easy," she said. "And I was on the air when we found out that Pat Tillman had been killed and I knew Pat. That was awful. I convinced myself that maybe we were going to find out later that it was some kind of mistake. But then to find out that, in fact, he had been killed was very, very hard."

Maybe the hardest news to handle was delivered to her via cell phone.

"I was out of town when [our helicopter collided with Channel 15's helicopter in July of 2007]," said Tara. "I had left that morning to go to Telluride with my husband and when I got there I had all these text messages and voice mails. I hate to say it, but I feel lucky that I didn't have to go to work and report on that. I got a few days to grieve on my own and didn't have to do it in front of a camera. That was just devastating for everyone."

In the end, however, Tara could never have imagined that her life would turn out as it has. She is "married to a wonderful man" – Kenn Francis – and has three "terrific stepchildren" who are Dylan, 13, stepdaughter Alex, 18, and Dane, who is 20. Both Dane and Alex currently attend ASU and were there to join Dylan – alongside their father, of course – to get down on one knee and propose to Tara back in 2004.

"It was pretty incredible," Tara said of the unique proposal. "We were married in Telluride on a mountain, and all the kids were all a big part of it."

So, looking back, has it been everything she thought it would be back in the sixth grade?

"More," she said. "I never thought in a million years I'd be in Phoenix at the age of 25 and end up with such a great family with such a great job. I feel so lucky to do what I do and feel supported by my friends and family. I'm really lucky, and I don't ever forget that."