

EXPOSURE



DRIVING SUCCESS

Beyond the sport: KeeSean Johnson

Story by [Fresno State](#)

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KeeSean Johnson is an all-star wide receiver at Fresno State, but growing up, football wasn't his first love. It was his brother's.

"All I wanted to do is what he did," KeeSean said. "After his first practice, I put his pads on and I felt like it was something I could do."

Raised in East Palo Alto, KeeSean and his older brother, Vincenté, focused on academics and football at the insistence of their parents. East Palo Alto was a rough neighborhood, KeeSean said, and both his mother and father ensured that their sons stayed positive and off

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His mother, Monique, instilled strong academic values, insisting that education is one thing “nobody can ever take away from you.” KeeSean’s father, Sean, emphasized the importance of a strong work ethic to keep him focused.

They urged KeeSean and Vincenté to participate in after-school activities.

“My dad would be like, ‘Go do this. Because that’s going to get you what you want later on in the future,’” KeeSean said.

Driving success





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RISING UP

But for KeeSean, football didn't come easily. While his brother became a safety at University of Arizona, KeeSean was sitting on his high school bench as a freshman of 5'3". After working hard and hitting a growth spurt in his sophomore year, he made it to the field, but he felt discouraged after not making varsity.

KeeSean played through his junior year of high school without receiving any college football scholarship offers. But when Vincenté suffered from a neck injury that left him unknowing if he would ever play again, KeeSean's entire family felt the loss.

"He didn't know if he was going to play, so I told him, 'I'll get a scholarship for you.' It was something that I wanted to do for my brother," KeeSean said.

With his family's support, KeeSean started shining the summer before his senior year. He lifted weights and practiced as often as he could. As a senior, he caught 58 passes for 1,015 yards and made 14 touchdowns.

"I was doing everything the right way," he said. "I was working hard. My dad was telling me, 'If you're hungry, go get it.'"



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It was Vincenté who helped KeeSean get a scholarship at Fresno State. Vincenté spent hours putting together video reels of KeeSean's best plays and sent them to over 50 universities nationwide.

"I remember thinking, 'My brother's not getting any scholarships right now, but I see the talent — I see what he's doing week in and week out,'" Vincenté said. "It was keeping me in football. Him doing so well and me making him the highlight tape made me feel like I was still playing."

The highlight video earned KeeSean several scholarship offers right away. But like former wide receiver Davante Adams, who was also from East Palo Alto and mentored KeeSean, KeeSean chose the Bulldogs.

While Vincenté transferred to San Jose State University, KeeSean worked toward academic and athletic success at Fresno State.

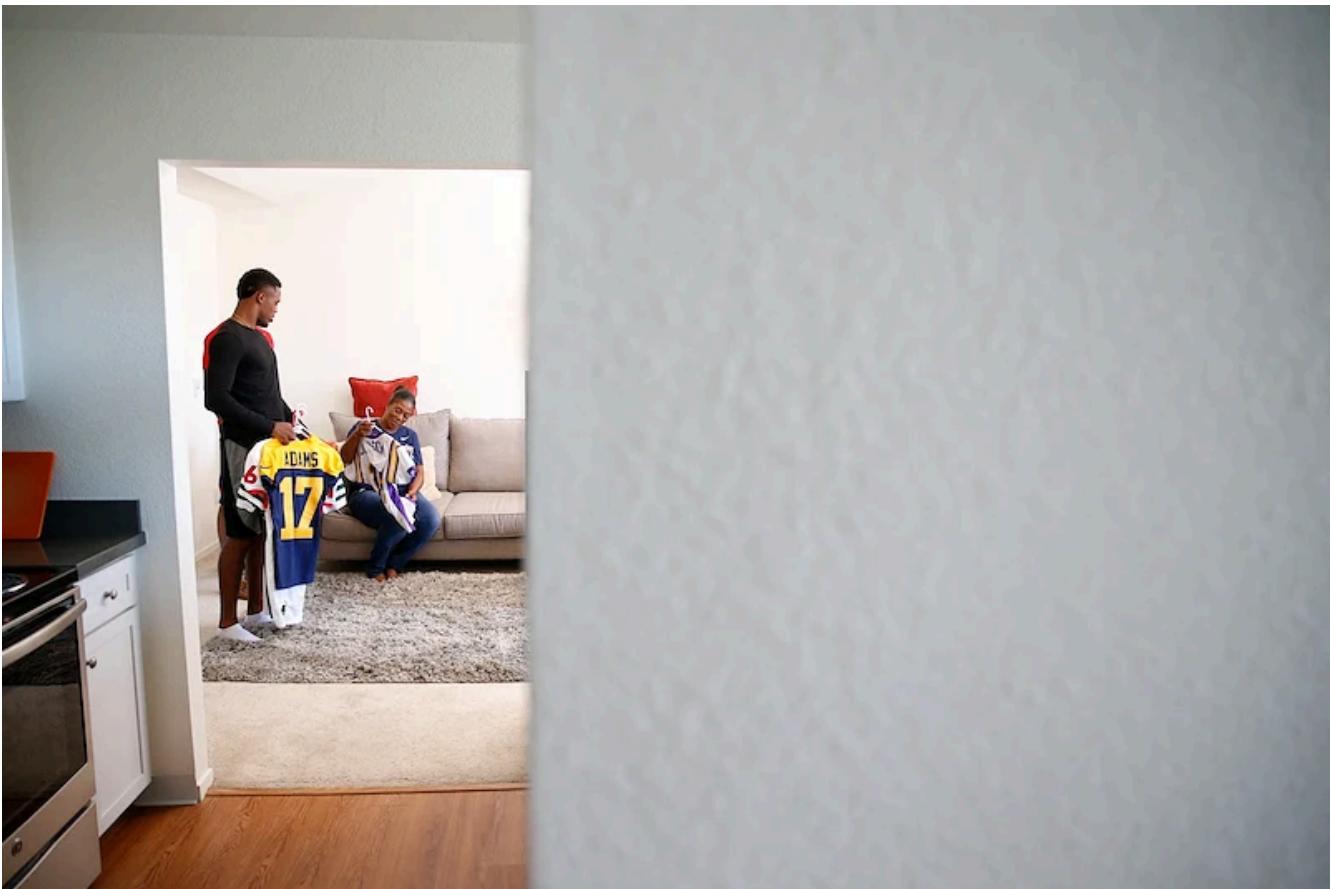
In 2017, KeeSean started all 14 games and led the Bulldogs in receptions, receiving yards and touchdowns for the second-straight season. Recently, he was named to Biletnikoff Award Watch List and the Preseason All-Mountain West Team. Academically, KeeSean is focusing on criminology, with an emphasis in law enforcement.

But he'll never forget his roots, growing up in East Palo Alto with Vincenté.

"I've seen a lot — more than the average 21-year-old," KeeSean said. "Where I come from, there aren't a lot of kids that go to college or can play Division I football, because they don't have the support system. So me having the support system, I want to give as best I can to others."



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“I feel like all I’ve been raised with and lived for is pushing me, and it’s only going to push me harder,” KeeSean said.



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Footnote: *Photos by Cary Edmondson, Story by Esra Hashem, Video by Domenick Satterberg – University Brand Strategy and Marketing*

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