

Big Kid. Big Heart. Big Influence.

ASU star running back [Keegan Herring](#) breaks tackles for huge gains on the football field. Off it, he runs to the crowds, especially if they contain kids he can help and inspire.

BY JIM JARVIS

PHOTOS BY TRACY RASINSKI

“I think one of the greatest things about sports is that you meet all types of people from different places. You get to see some different ways that people see things, and you have a lot of great personalities.”

Keegan Herring

It's 9:30 on a Tuesday morning and 80 students from Webster Elementary are eagerly waiting outside the Carson Student-Athlete Center at Arizona State, peering through the windows into the Sports Hall of Fame, where legends like Barry Bonds and Pat Tillman immortally reside. Wells Fargo Arena is to their backs, the south end of Sun Devil Stadium to their right, a scant opening allowing their mesmerized eyes a view of enough empty seats to light their Pop Warner imaginations on fire. Before the day is through, they'll visit the locker rooms and weight rooms, and take part in a mini clinic being conducted by players they're used to watching on TV.

It'll be a day they won't soon forget. But less because of all the aforementioned highlights, and more because of their tour guide — ASU's charismatic running back Keegan Herring, who, one day after finishing his spring semester finals, has been gracious enough to spend the first day of his summer vacation captaining a few youngsters' dream rides.

Truth is, there's no place he'd rather be.

“Now, before we go in,” he says outside the entrance to the Hall of Fame, “the number one rule...is to have fun!”

And with that the floodgates open, and a mild hurricane of fifth-grade energy is sweeping through the room. You're overwhelmed just watching it. But this isn't exactly Keegan's first rodeo. To the contrary, he's smack-dab in the middle of his element, pointing, talking and entertaining with a palpable energy equal to that of his troops. And not once has he stopped grinning, nor have any of the kids. His zest is infectious.

“I can't tell you how many times he's been on campus and he'll just go up to a group of kids and start talking to them,”

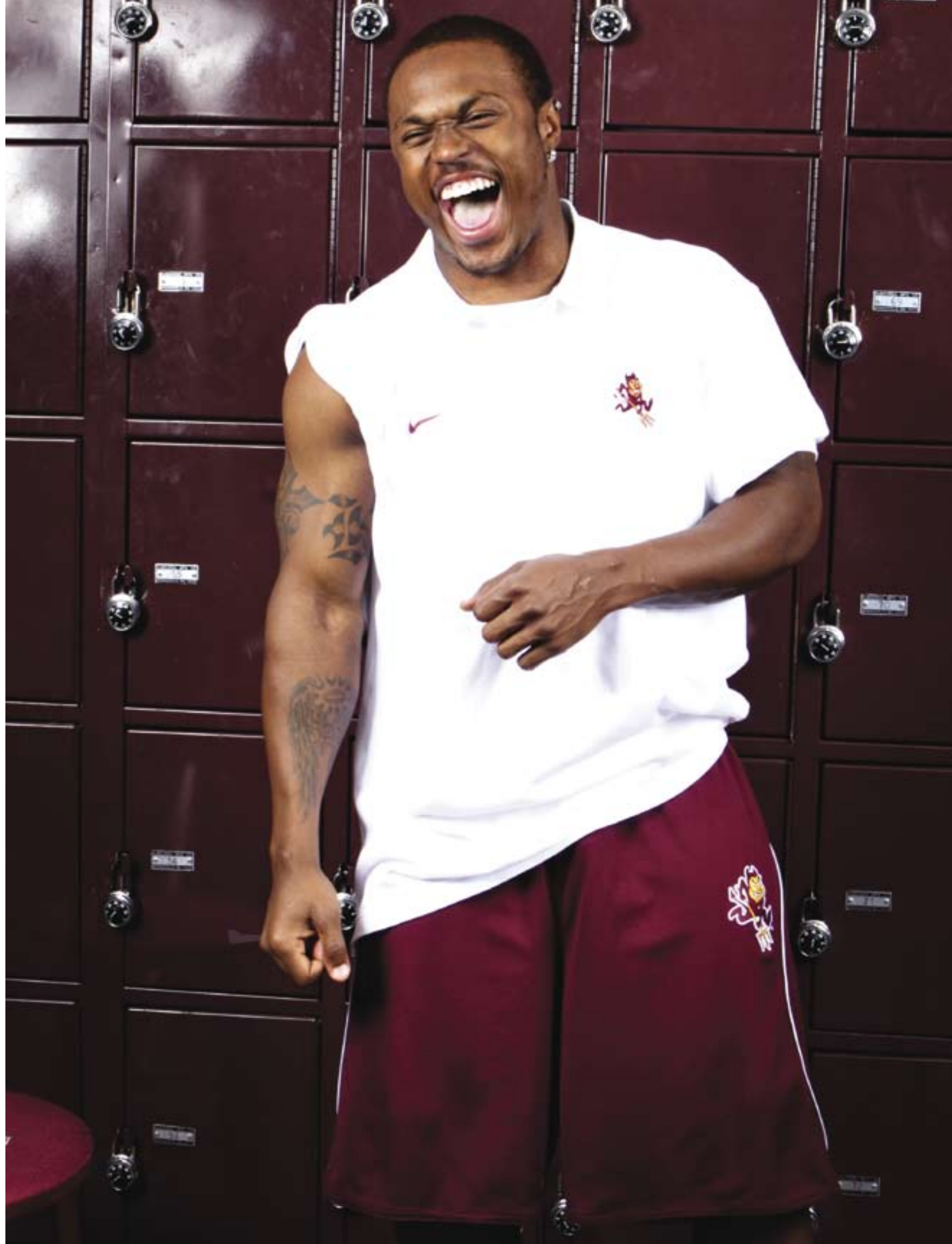
says Corinne Corte, who is technically Keegan's academic advisor, but as you'll soon learn, is so much more than that. “He's been asked to go on site at different schools and talk to kids, because he just connects with them. It can be one kid, or a group of 80, and he will hold their attention and have a lasting impact. I get e-mails from school administrators months after he has been there saying that the kids are still talking about Keegan, and they still remember everything he said. He's just terrific with kids.”

By now, we all know kids are smarter than you'd think, observant beyond their years. We've learned that you can't hide from a child's eyes, because they're bloodhounds for insincerity. And more than anything, we know that kids always tell the truth. And the most truthful thing they've done on this day is effortlessly gravitate to Keegan. Like just about everyone else who is naturally drawn to Keegan — the big kid who Corinne says “always has a smile and a hug for you” — they can sense his sincerity.

“I love to be around kids. They make you feel more important than you thought you could be,” Keegan told *POST*. “The more kids you're surrounded by, the more love you have. I think that's why I love to be around kids so much, because they bring all that out in you.”

Corinne can't even say Keegan's name without breaking into the kind of glowing smile that can only come from within. When her cell phone rings and she sees that it's him, she smiles even wider and says to herself, “Oh, here he is now.” The two have developed a relationship that resembles nothing of the typical student/advisor dynamic. Minus the blood, they're family.

“I've been working with Corinne since I first walked in



POST ACCESS

Making A Difference ↓

KEEGAN HERRING

ASU runningback Keegan Herring spreads joy all over campus with his infectious personality and ever-present smile. His impact on kids has been especially impressive, says his academic advisor and friend Corinne Corte.

my freshman year,” Keegan says. “We are very, very close. She knows my family, and I know hers. I try to treat her with as much respect that I can, and if she needs anything from me, she knows that I am there for her. And she is always there for me.”

Never more than last year, when Keegan’s father, Freeman, his sister, Denisha, and his aunt and a close friend all passed away within the span of a few months. Obviously, words

are powerless to describe what the young man was going through, and continues to cope with. And as Keegan reflects, it was a familiar face standing by his side during a period when he easily could have spiraled downhill.

“Corinne helped me a whole lot going through that time,” he says. “She went through the same thing, her mom and her dad died and she was all alone. I was going through a hard time and wasn’t focusing on school and all that kind of stuff. She just told me to stay strong. I really appreciate Corinne and my mom because they got me through that.”

And so here he is, on the brink of a senior season that stands to be quite memorable. Despite losing five players to the NFL, ASU returns a roster that expects to once again be in contention for the Pac-10 championship, and if things go well, maybe even the national championship. And whatever heights the Sun Devils reach in ’08, Keegan — who sits 10th on ASU’s all-time career rushing yards list — will undoubtedly play a vital role.

Although his senior campaign remain unwritten, with credentials like that and speed that is considered world-class, the NFL is certainly within Keegan’s scope. Within the halls of the Carson Student-Athlete Center, Keegan takes in a daily dose of inspiration when he passes by a wall decorated with plaques of former ASU players and their current NFL helmets. It’s a dream that still sits just beyond the reach of his fingertips, but one that he’s inching closer to by the day. And not a soul who knows anything about Keegan isn’t rooting for that to happen.

For right now, however, Keegan continues to soak in the once-in-a-lifetime experience of being a big-time college football player — the crowds, the nationally televised games, the spotlight. But as you might guess about a grounded kid like Keegan, his perspective runs much deeper than what fans see on the surface, and allows him to appreciate the fact that when this is all said and done, he’ll recall the relationships and camaraderie with as much fondness as the touchdowns.

“I think that’s one of the greatest things about sports is that you meet all types of people from different places,” Keegan told *POST*. “You get to see some different ways that people see things, and you have a lot of great personalities. We call our football team a family, because we go through everything together.”

And if the NFL doesn’t come to fruition and this turns out to be Keegan’s final season in uniform, there’s no need to worry. When put on the spot to name his primary alternative career, he says he’d like to work with kindergartners. Go figure. And he says that he would teach them that if they work hard, in school as well as everything else, that they can do anything they want.

“I’m always telling Keegan that he’s so much more than a football player,” says Corinne. “Keegan is a special, special human being. He really is.”

We couldn’t have said it better ourselves. **P**

