

Heading into Super Bowl, Rams' Tyler Higbee can give WKU credit

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Looking back, Los Angeles Rams tight end [Tyler Higbee](https://www.courier-journal.com/story/sports/college/kentuckiana/2015/09/18/wku-footballs-tyler-higbee-next-in-line-of-big-time-tight-ends/72400274/) (<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/sports/college/kentuckiana/2015/09/18/wku-footballs-tyler-higbee-next-in-line-of-big-time-tight-ends/72400274/>) was made a pro at Western Kentucky.

There were the coaching staffs — three of them in his five years in college — that taught him more about football and change than he ever anticipated. And there was the meal plan that helped transform his body from that of a wide receiver to an NFL-level tight end.

"They gave me a scholarship to play football and gave me meal swipes to help me put on some weight to help me play the tight end position," Higbee told the Courier Journal last week, when asked what he remembers from his time in Bowling Green.

He added: "It's cool, just being able to represent Western Kentucky and help put that school on the map is important to me."

The 26-year-old still has WKU on his mind, just days before his team takes on the New England Patriots in Super Bowl LIII in Atlanta. Higbee is set to become just the second Hilltopper to play in a Super Bowl, joining Rod Smart, better known as XFL's "He Hate Me," who returned punts for the Carolina Panthers in the 2004 Super Bowl.

Super Bowl: [Rams WR arranged for team custodian, son to attend Super Bowl](https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/super-bowl/2019/01/29/super-bowl-2019-brandin-cooks-custodian-los-angeles-rams/2711580002/) (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/super-bowl/2019/01/29/super-bowl-2019-brandin-cooks-custodian-los-angeles-rams/2711580002/>)



A handful of WKU players have won Super Bowls from the sidelines — running back Bobby Rainey was on the injured reserve for the Baltimore Ravens in 2013, while Romeo Crennel, Darryl Drake, Joe Bugel and Dale Lindsey won as coaches.

But Higbee has a chance to do something Sunday that's never been done by a Hilltopper — play in and win a Super Bowl.

"Hopefully we can get the job done and I can be the first one to win. That would be cool," Higbee said.

If the Rams do win, Higbee will likely have something to do with it. In his third season in the NFL, the Florida native has become an integral part of the Rams' offense.

Higbee caught a touchdown in the third quarter of the [NFC Championship against the New Orleans Saints](http://courierjournal.com/story/sports/nfl/playoffs/2019/01/20/los-angeles-rams-new-orleans-saints-nfc-champions-score-super-bowl/2633198002/) (<http://courierjournal.com/story/sports/nfl/playoffs/2019/01/20/los-angeles-rams-new-orleans-saints-nfc-champions-score-super-bowl/2633198002/>). After the score, he raised a finger to his mouth and shushed the Saints' home crowd. The Rams, down 10 before the touchdown, rallied back to win in overtime.

"Just to have the Superdome quiet down after they were yelling at us every snap, every play. That felt pretty good," he said.

To have a chance to play in the Super Bowl? That feels good, too, he said.

10 strangest Super Bowl bets: [From Tony Romo's acumen to Adam Levine's shirt](https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/super-bowl/2019/01/29/super-bowl-prop-bets-rams-patriots/2644311002/) (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/super-bowl/2019/01/29/super-bowl-prop-bets-rams-patriots/2644311002/>)

The win caught the attention of Jeff Brohm, Higbee's coach at WKU and now the head man at Purdue. Brohm sent a congratulatory text to Higbee, telling him to "have fun and enjoy the experience."

"I think he's excited to go the Super Bowl," said Brohm. "It's a very rare occurrence. I think he's going to cherish this opportunity."

Brohm called Higbee a "great competitor who loves the game of the football."

"I loved having him on our team because I knew he was going to go out every single game and give us a chance to win, and fight, scrap, figure out a way to get it done," Brohm said.

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Higbee credits his parents for instilling him with that work ethic. It hasn't been the easiest road since he signed with WKU in 2011 as a two-star recruit out of East Lake High School in Tarpon Springs, Florida. After catching two passes for 92 yards and a touchdown as a freshman, he redshirted his second year to bulk up to play tight end.

"I've been always kind of been too small, too slow, not good enough here and there. And then I just worked, worked to kind of get that upper edge on the people that had it athletically on me," he said.

NBA: [The best NBA prospect you've never heard of? Murray State's Ja Morant](https://www.courier-journal.com/story/sports/college/basketball/2019/01/29/murray-state-ja-morant-ground-despite-nba-draft-potential/2642806002/) (<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/sports/college/basketball/2019/01/29/murray-state-ja-morant-ground-despite-nba-draft-potential/2642806002/>)

After that redshirt year, his first coach, Willie Taggart, left for South Florida. Then it was Bobby Petrino, who left for Louisville after a year. He spent his last two — and most productive — seasons under Brohm. He caught 38 passes for 563 yards and eight touchdowns as a senior and was named first-team Conference USA. He also graduated with a physical education degree.

"I went through three coaching staffs there, so I had to deal with some coaching changes, some different offenses, some terminology usage. All that kind of prepared me for this level," Higbee said.

He said his favorite memory was how the program improved.

"The year before I got there, I believe, they were (2-10). When I left, we were 12-2," Higbee said. "It was a fun ride to kind of come in on one end and leave on another."

He almost jeopardized his career after running into legal trouble before the NFL draft. He was charged with assault (http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/20071805/tyler-higbee-los-angeles-rams-pleads-guilty-assault-kentucky) after a 2016 fight in a parking lot in Bowling Green. He later pleaded guilty and was ordered to pay the victim an undisclosed amount and perform 250 hours of community service.

He may have slipped in the draft for that reason. Nonetheless, the Rams took him in the fourth round of the 2016 NFL draft. He posted 49 catches, 587 yards receiving and three touchdowns over the last two years. He has started all 32 regular-season games and three playoff games over that span.

In just their third season back in Los Angeles, the Rams advanced to the Super Bowl to take on the Patriots. It's the same two teams that met back in 2001 — the Rams' last Super Bowl appearance in St. Louis, and quarterback Tom Brady and coach Bill Belichick's first of five championship wins.

Read this: Ex-WKU volleyball player gets good news in cancer fight: Remission (<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/sports/college/2019/01/29/ex-wku-volleyball-player-alyssa-cavanaugh-is-in-remission-in-cancer-fight/2708252002/>)

Higbee refused to make a prediction for Sunday, just saying it should be a good game.

"People keep telling me to enjoy the experience and make sure you're enjoying everything and taking it all in. I'm trying to, but at the same time it's just another game and if we play our game, we'll be all right," he said.

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Local players in the Super Bowl

Rodger Saffold, OL, Los Angeles Rams (Indiana)

Saffold (<https://theramswire.usatoday.com/2019/01/15/rodger-saffold-is-thankful-for-his-first-playoff-win/>), 30, is in his ninth season with the Rams after he was drafted in the second round of the 2010 NFL Draft. He has started 111 games in his career, including all 16 regular-season games and two postseason games in 2018, and is the longest-tenured member of the Rams. He'll start at left guard on Sunday.

Trevon Young, LB, Los Angeles Rams (Louisville)

Young (https://www.courier-journal.com/story/sports/college/louisville/2018/03/03/trevon-young-nfl-combine-hip-injury/383148002/?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter), 23, had trouble finding the field in his rookie season, playing in only two games and recording a fumble recovery. But the fact that he's even been able to remain part of the roster has been an impressive feat. Two years after dislocating and fracturing his hip in a bowl game, he recovered from the career-threatening injury and was drafted in the sixth round by the Rams. He'll likely be inactive on Sunday.

Darrell Williams, T, Los Angeles Rams (Western Kentucky)

Williams, 25, is the other WKU alumnus on a Super Bowl roster. He joined the Rams' practice squad this season after playing seven games as an undrafted rookie with the San Francisco 49ers last season. Williams started on the 2015 and 2016 Hilltoppers' teams that won back-to-back Conference USA titles.



