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Two Kinds Of Family Drive Pagano

If **Chuck Pagano** had followed his father's career advice, he probably wouldn't be the Ravens' current defensive coordinator.

Promoted from secondary coach in place of departing assistant head coach Rex Ryan, Pagano was the perfect in-house fit to lead Baltimore's defense.

"It was an easy choice. It was quick," said Ravens Head Coach **John Harbaugh**. "Chuck's a great secondary coach, but he's not just a secondary coach; he's a great football coach. He's a great defensive mind.

"He's more than ready to be really successful at this job."

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But who knows where Pagano would be if his path had taken another turn nearly 30 years ago?

Sam Pagano was a lifelong football coach, even coaching Chuck and his younger brother, John, at Fairview High School in Bowie, Md.

So when the two Pagano boys approached dad for guidance, he surprisingly discouraged them from getting into the family business.

"He actually tried to talk the both of us out of it," Chuck said with a laugh. "He said, 'This is no life to lead.' The hours, the family, especially in college, were hard. He said, 'It was OK for me, because I decided to be a high school coach. I had chances to move on, but I didn't want to move my family.'

"He got to stay in one place for 20 years, and my first life in Boulder."

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Family was the operative word in the Pagano patriarch's message, but the call to follow his passion was too much for Chuck Pagano.

Thus began an impressive 26-year coaching career of his own.

He couldn't have done it without a loving – and football-mad – family.

Growing Up in the Game

From the time he was a child, Pagano roamed the sidelines of his father's Fairview Knights squads.

He had sisters who were cheerleaders. Mom took care of the post-game get-togethers.

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But when it was time to join the team, Pagano toughed it out when the father title changed to "head coach."

"Chuck was good enough and better than everyone, but dad wasn't just going to play him because he didn't want people to feel that the only reason he was playing was because it's his son," said John Pagano. "He's old-school. His senior year, Chuck really got to shine. He made a lot of plays and went to the state championship game."

Those fond memories are a big part of what pushed Chuck towards his father's line of work, as it did with John, who is currently the San Diego Chargers' linebackers coach.

"I thought, 'What else are we going to do? That's all we know,'" Chuck definitively said. "Friday nights were for football."

No matter what winnings the elder Pagano gave his boys, they were on a crash course for the profession.

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"With our dad being a coach for as long as he was, our life was living and breathing football 24/7," John affirmed. "There was never a doubt that it was something we were going to pursue."

The Journey Begins

Pagano first broke into coaching in 1984 at USC.

Coming off a successful four-year tenure as a hard-hitting safety at Wyoming – including two as a starter – there were admittedly dreams of playing at the next level. But there was a clear-cut moment when he knew he should pick up a whistle.

"I knew the minute I ran my 40 on pro day," Pagano said. "As soon as they looked at their watch, that was it.

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"That's when I knew I had to get serious and get my diploma and start thinking about where I wanted to begin my coaching career."

As he hopped from coaching stop to coaching stop – Boise State, UNLV, East Carolina to name a few – his own family grew.

He and his wife, Tina, had three daughters, Tara, Taylor and Tori.

Tara lives in Idaho with twin daughters, Avery and Addison (4). Taylor is set to graduate from UNC-Wilmington and head to medical school. And Tori graduated from high school a year early and plans to stick around the area at a community college before attending a major university.

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In a stroke of good fortune, as the girls grew up, Pagano had a 10-year coaching stint for the University of Miami and Cleveland Browns under Butch Davis, who fostered a family-friendly atmosphere similar to the one Harbaugh espouses with the Ravens.

"I've been in other places where they didn't want to see any kids around, didn't want to see the family," said Pagano. "The best formative in the 10 years I've spent with Butch, both collegiately and professionally, and the time I've had here, it's been great."

Building A Second Family

Pagano may have pursued a coaching career despite parental advice, but there was one lesson from dad he will never forget.

"My father taught me that first and foremost coaching is about relationships and caring for these guys," said Pagano. "The football is one thing, but it goes way beyond that."

It is Pagano's ability to cultivate relationships with players and fellow coaches that has made him so successful over the decades.

Just ask future Hall of Fame safety **Ed Reed**.

Pagano first met Reed in 1996, when the young man was attending Destrehan High School. Pagano was there to convince Reed that the University of Miami should be his top college choice.

Ultimately following Pagano to "The U," Reed became an All-American and credited Pagano for his success both on the field and in the classroom.

"Coach Pagano is like a father figure to me," Reed said in early November. "A lot of my success has been because of the mentality he brought to me. … Coach has watched me evolve from a 17-year-old kid to a 32-year-old man. Even to this day, I look up to him. He has always helped me find a way."

Reed isn't the only Raven who admires his new defensive coordinator.

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When the team officially promoted Pagano, a long list of players sung his praises, including **Chris Carr** and **Fabain Washington**, who both played for Pagano in Oakland; **Josh Wilson**, **Haloti Ngata**, **Jarret Johnson**, **Haruki Nakamura** and defensive leader **Ray Lewis**.

"I really have had a truly personal relationship with Chuck," Lewis said when Pagano was promoted. "Chuck has gotten to coach me, I have known what kind of man and coach he is for a while now."

It's not always easy to win over a locker room full of unique personalities and varying perspectives, but Pagano's genuine passion to make others better draws in player after player.

Harbaugh, also the son of longtime coach, has known Pagano for years from the collegiate recruiting circle. He believes the ability to build such strong relationships within the Ravens' team-focused atmosphere, in addition to his enlightening around the gridiron, made Pagano the ideal man to lead the Ravens' defense.

"We see things pretty much the same way, and that's a good starting point," Harbaugh said. "It's easy for us to relate to each other. Philosophically, we're on the same page. We have the same kind of background, all the way back to when we were kids.

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"I think he's a really talented and gifted teacher in the way he relates to the players. He's got a great knack for earning players' trust and confidence. You can't teach that, and he's learned how to do that. And, he's loyal to his players and his coaches. You can trust him. All of those things, to me, make for a great coach and coordinator."

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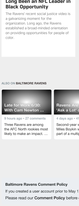

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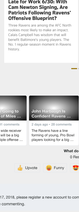

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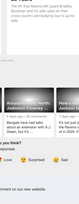

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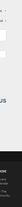

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