

# SIGEPS

**RYAN MATHEWS, Fresno State '11**

SigEps in Sports

MATT WEBER/THE COLLESIAN



**“If you work hard at somet**

## Ryan Mathews reflects on life and leadership in SigEp and the NFL

By MITCH GOLDICH, Lehigh '09

Ryan Mathews, Fresno State '11, offers more to the San Diego Chargers than just his explosive skills as a running back.

The man they made the 12th pick in the 2010 NFL draft is also well-schooled in being a team player. It's an education he's gained during his standout days on the football field, and one he's complemented as a member of his Fraternity.

A year and a half before he signed his five-year, \$25 million NFL contract, Mathews signed a bid card to join SigEp.

"I learned a lot about brotherhood," Mathews said of his SigEp experience. "You get guys from all different kinds of backgrounds, and they come together as one. It's kind of like another football team."

So while Mathews was shredding defenses for 1,808 yards and 19 rushing touchdowns during his junior season at Fresno State, he made sure his other team was well-represented. Look closely at his highlight reels and you'll notice three Greek letters written on his eye black for every home game: ΣΦΕ.

"My time in SigEp was wonderful," Mathews said. "I feel really blessed to call myself a SigEp."

### Making the time

While many varsity athletes don't think they can make the time commitment to join a fraternity, Mathews proves otherwise. "For guys like me, who are in sports and think they don't have time, it's just how diligent you are. There is a lot of time in your day."

And even now, after amassing over 800 total yards and seven touchdowns as an NFL rookie, he still makes time for his Fraternity brothers. "I try to stay in touch as much as I can," he said. "When

I go to Fresno, I stop by the house and say hello to everybody. I email them, and stay in contact. They text me and let me know how they're doing.

"I still try to make my presence felt with the younger guys," he added.

It's no coincidence that Mathews still appreciates his stature as a leader and role model. As an NFL rookie, his role was reversed.

Mathews points to Pro Bowlers Antonio Gates, Philip Rivers and Shaun Phillips as leaders on the Chargers, and studies their leadership styles. "They lead by example," he said. "Some of them are also vocal leaders, and I think you need both. For a young guy like me, it's important to see how to lead. I want to be a leader of the team someday, so I follow them and see what they do."

### Exceeding expectations

It was a little strange for Mathews to see the television coverage before the draft, and listen to fantasy experts tout him as one of the biggest sleepers in the league as a rookie. Previously scouts and critics have always doubted him.

"Throughout my whole life I had people telling me I couldn't do it," Mathews said. "In high school they said I'd maybe get a college offer. I ended up leading the nation in rushing my senior year. Going into college, they said the same thing—that I was just an average guy."

There's no malice in his voice, just a steady determination to keep proving himself. "I just don't like being told no,"



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Mathews dominated at Fresno State, while balancing his time between football and SigEp. His hard work was rewarded when the San Diego Chargers drafted him 12th overall and gave him a \$25 million contract.

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he explained. "Or hearing I can't do something."

His critics now question if he can stay healthy enough to be the great running back that pro scouts envisioned, after missing four games due to injury last season. Mathews plans to get through this the same way he always has: with a no-quit attitude that will fuel him through the final carry of his career.

"They say hard work pays off," he said. "Well it really does. If you work hard at something, you can accomplish anything."

### Finishing what he starts

Ryan Mathews is an outlier. Many star athletes lament college as a form of purgatory, after they reach national prominence but before they are allowed to turn pro. Mathews actually struggled with the decision to leave school early. Before declaring himself eligible for the draft, he promised his mother that he would eventually graduate.

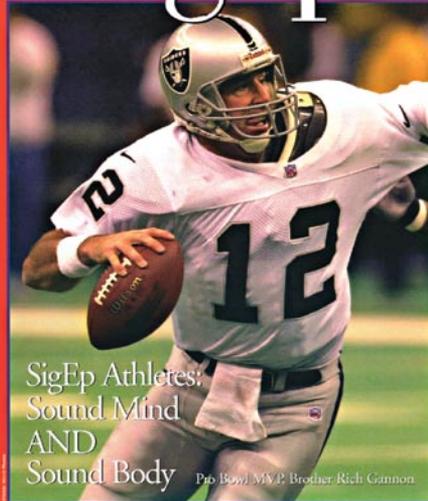
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"I do plan on going back and getting my degree," said Mathews, with the confidence of somebody who's never quit anything in his life. He's already looked into the possibility of online classes.

Mathews' degree will be in communications, which will enable him to stay in football after his playing days. "You see ex-players do such a good job of analyzing the game on TV," he said. "It's something I look forward to doing. I love football, and after my time is done, I would love to be an analyst and keep in the game."

# SigEp

THE JOURNAL OF SIGMA PHI EPSILON  
SPRING 2011



The spring 2011 Journal cover features Pro Bowl MVP Brother Rich Gannon, Delaware '87.

## Gannon predicts success for Mathews

Not long ago **Rich Gannon, Delaware '87**, was SigEp's face in the NFL and a cover story in the *Journal*. He now does color commentary for regular season games on CBS, and appears on The Sirius Blitz, Mondays through Thursdays year-round.

As Ryan Mathews takes the torch from Gannon, the 2002 NFL MVP reflects on his college days and offers advice.

"I thought SigEp was a unique opportunity," he said. "For me, it was an ideal opportunity to see another part of the social life on campus and be with a group of guys who shared a lot of the same interests. The thing I cherish the most is the relationships that I had."

**His advice for Mathews:** "I think he's off to a good start," Gannon said. "It's a major transition, learning how to become a professional, but I think big things are in store for the guy."

"His focus will be important. If you want to learn how to have a successful career in this business, you need to look at the ones who are doing it right now. Figure out what these guys are doing in the offseason and during the season to always be mentally and physically prepared to play at a high level," Gannon said.

Gannon shares other SigEp connections. His brother, **John Gannon, Delaware '83**, encouraged him to join his chapter once he got on campus.

Gannon's father-in-law, **Bill Brown, Illinois '61**, is also a SigEp. Brown played 13 of his 14 NFL seasons with the Minnesota Vikings. He was part of the famous Purple People Eaters, who played in Super Bowl IV. He amassed over 9,000 yards from scrimmage and 76 total touchdowns.

"We look at old pictures, and it's fun," Gannon says. "He has a number of great things to say about his experience."

While Mathews is the star today, Gannon reminds us that he is continuing a strong tradition of SigEps in the NFL.

He's even discussed this plan with Marshall Faulk, the Hall of Fame running back who now works for the NFL Network.

### Focusing on the team

While Mathews is well-served to mirror Faulk's post-playing-career plans, he should also study up on Faulk as a player. The shifty runner was one of the biggest threats in the league in his day, and he won an MVP award and a Super Bowl ring.

For Mathews, 23, the real focus is still on the playing career ahead of him. And hoisting the Lombardi Trophy after the Super Bowl is precisely what he plans to do.

While Mathews' talent has brought success to many of his teams, it is his attitude that makes him such a great teammate. His values emerge when he talks about his personal goals. "The main thing is to win a Super Bowl," he said, without a waver in his voice. "If we win the Super Bowl then most of my goals will be accomplished."

"Sure, I want to lead the league in rushing and touchdowns, and go to the Pro Bowl," he added. "But if the team wins, those come along later."

That attitude has been shaped by every team he's ever been a part of, including his Fraternity.

# ..ANYTHING"

~Ryan Mathews