



In The Starting Lineup: Chris Morris

by **Danielle Portteus**

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Chris Morris had one goal entering this season — to start for the Oakland Raiders.

At 26, Morris, who is listed at 6-foot-4 and 305 pounds, played in all 16 of the Raiders' games during his third year in the National Football League. He started once. This year is different for the 2001 Bedford High School graduate. Morris is No. 1 on the depth chart for the center position.

"It was a great opportunity," Morris said during a cell phone call from his Oakland, Calif., home.

During his first two games, the Raiders are 1-1 with a first-week loss to the San Diego Chargers 24-20 and a 13-10 win last weekend against the Kansas City Chiefs. Morris' parents, Lambertville residents Mike and Jackie, attended the game. "It's terrific, and we are so proud of him," the elder Mr. Morris said. "It's about time they realize his talents."

Morris was a Class A All-Stater his senior year at Bedford as a two-way lineman. He was the center on offense and earned Monroe County Region Defensive Player of the Year honors after logging 42 tackles and 5 sacks. After high school, Morris played four years at Michigan State University in Lansing where he started for three seasons and was nominated for the Rimington Award as the nation's top center as a senior.

He was drafted in the seventh round by Oakland in 2006 and was the 214th overall pick.

Morris said he wasn't nervous entering the first game of the season.

"I got to start a game last year, so I wasn't nervous," he said. "It was exciting though, playing in prime time and having people back home being able to watch the game." "Being out West, people back home don't always get the chance to watch me play," Morris added. Starting was his top goal entering this season. Now that he's reached it, Morris' goals are centered on the team. "I'm not done because I still have work to do," he said. "But I'd like to make the playoffs."

Temperance resident Gene Stock, who is vice president of the Bedford High School Alumni Association, said it is exciting to see a Bedford alum starting in the NFL. "He is a great role model for our younger players ... a great student, athlete and a real gentleman," Mr. Stock said in an e-mail. "I can remember a couple of years ago when I got him to sign autographs at the Bedford Trade Fair at the Alumni Association booth, the kids were lined up before he got there."

Jake Krueger, a captain for this year's team, said Morris is an inspiration. "It is really cool that someone from our high school is a starting player in the NFL. It shows to everyone that you can go somewhere even if you do not attend a private school," he said. For the last two summers, Morris has returned to Bedford Township to host a football camp for young players.

His father said he is pleased Morris returns to his hometown to help with the camp. "We're really proud he's able to come back and help the community," Mr. Morris said. "The kids from little Bedford get a charge out of it."

Morris said he keeps in contact with Jeff Wood, Bedford's varsity football coach. "I didn't know him when I was a player (at Bedford), but he reached out to me when he took over coaching," Morris said. "He keeps me informed about the team."

For the aspiring football stars, Mr. Morris said players should make goals for themselves. "Take it one step at a time," he said. "Set goals in high school, then make goals to play in college and go from there." Morris is married to the former Krista Kreinbrink, who also is a Bedford graduate. The couple lives in California during the season and return to Bedford Township in the off-season.