

One-on-One With Tom Brady

July 19, 2012 | by Laura Drouillard

Charles Fahlsing remembers two gifts he received from his mentor in third grade. The U-M student gave him a pack of Rolo candy during one visit. Another time, he brought him a football. But it wasn't just any football; it was the game ball from the '99 U-M football game against Rice University. His mentor was Wolverines quarterback Tom Brady ('99).

Brady mentored Fahlsing, a student of Ann Arbor's Eberwhite Elementary at the time, for the academic year as part of the Department of Psychology's [Michigan Mentorship Program](#). Through the program, U-M students enrolled in Psych 305 match up with students within Ann Arbor Public Schools. They spend up to eight hours each week together, often working on daily assignments, discussing issues, or simply shooting some hoops.

"We'd just hang out or work one-on-one with various school assignments. Sometimes he'd come outside for recess. We went to the gym to hang out and talk about things other than school," Fahlsing says of his time with Brady.

The third grader was thrilled to be paired up with a quarterback for the Wolverines.

"My mom says I'd come home from school, excited to talk about what Tom and I did that day... I wrote essays about him. And that school year, I dressed up as [Tom Brady] for Halloween," Fahlsing says. "I was excited to get that one-on-one time with someone I looked up to and respected."

Years later, Fahlsing visited a New England Patriots spring practice in 2002, shortly after Brady led the team to a Super Bowl victory. Fahlsing came with a mission in mind.

"On one of the last days [Tom Brady] mentored me, he gave me the game ball from the Rice

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[University] game that season. I brought it with me to the spring training in hopes that he'd sign it this time around," he says. "There were thousands of fans lined up, and a woman stopped me when I tried to walk towards Tom, who was talking to other football players' wives and kids. I explained that I knew him and that I was from Ann Arbor. He turned around and immediately recognized me. We talked for a while, and he autographed the ball for me."

The experience left a lasting impression on Fahlsing, who will graduate from LSA in December with a B.A. in psychology. As a junior, he enrolled in the Michigan Mentorship Program and worked with a student at Pittsfield Elementary. The following semester, he served as a peer advisor to help fellow U-M students learn how to forge relationships with mentees. Fahlsing is considered a "second generation" student in the nearly 19-year-old program, which he says has provided him a unique perspective.

"Looking back, I think what I took away most [as a mentee] is the importance of having someone to look up to—someone to help you with whatever it is that you need. I was just a little behind in school; I just needed a little extra help. As a mentor, you're forging a relationship with someone in need, and on top of that, as a student, you're getting hands-on experience with a developmental issue, such as autism or ADHD," says Fahlsing. "You can only read so much in a book; when you're actually there working with the kids, it's 10 times better than a scholarly article."

Ellen Quart, director of the Michigan Mentorship Program and adjunct assistant professor in the Department of Psychology, says Fahlsing's experience "shows what a positive force can do."

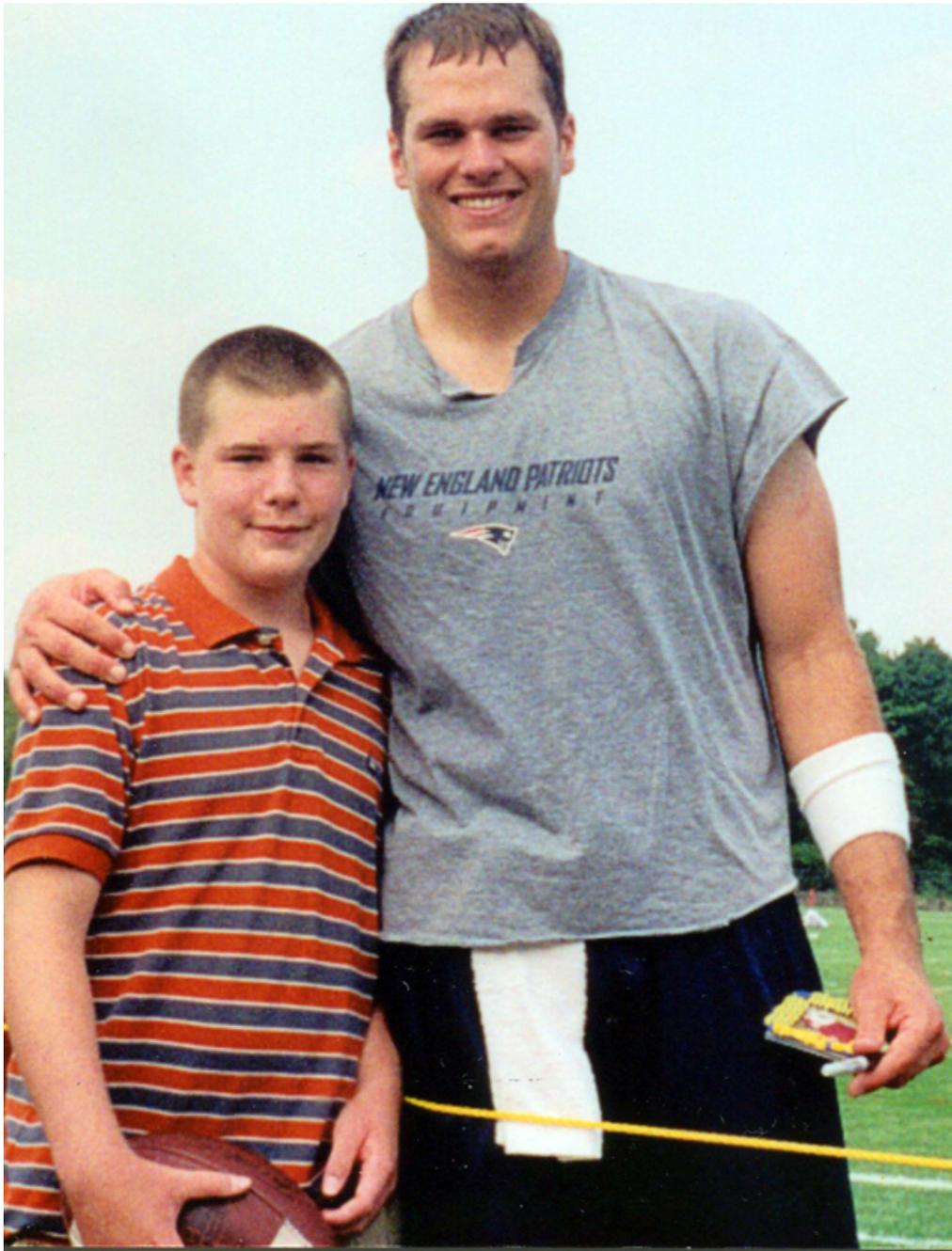
"It's more than just giving back, paying it forward. With Charles, he knew that this experience really made a difference in his life. Tom Brady is and was an exceptional mentor, and Charles really wanted to do the same for someone. It's having that realization and actually following through with it that makes Charles so special."

Quart, who has been an employee of Ann Arbor Public Schools for over 35 years, attributes the program's success to the caliber of the students as well as the program structure.

"My goal is to show these U-M students how to really understand children. The way you do that is entering their space, sharing in their struggles. They spend eight hours a week together—that's how you really form a relationship, that's how you learn to guide and understand kids. I can see by the end of a term that a mentor really understands a [mentee] and their psychological dynamics," Quart says.

She adds that this story is "one out of hundreds" stemming from the program.

"We've had mentors come back to visit their mentees years after meeting. There are those who keep in touch after moving to a different state, and even to a different country," Quart says. "It's my belief that everyone should have a mentor. Teachers are under pressure to cover so much and to get so much content down, which often means that students' psychosocial needs aren't met. Kids have needs beyond just a tutor for math; mentorship is an incredibly powerful force in developing healthy brains and behavior."



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Awesome article! Go Blue and go Eberwhite!

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Especially in light of the recent tragedy in Colorado, let's offer gratitude to Ellen Quart(mentioned briefly in the article)and people like her who devote their lives and professional careers to helping people care about others. Talk about paying it forward! Thanks Ellen and mentors past, present, and future.

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Thanks for running the program, Dr. Quart. I enjoyed my time as a mentor and learned a lot!

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