

Carolina Panthers Defensive End Tackles the Quarter Mile



(Photo Courtesy of Carolina Panthers)

Gainesville, FL – Tyler Brayton recently fulfilled a personal dream. And make that fulfillment times two. One that had nothing to do with the three-hundred and sixty foot playing field he is accustomed to. This time it was on a much longer thirteen-hundred and twenty foot “playing field”, if you will, and a little different type of safety gear.

Brayton, number 96 defensive end, who is set to start his second year for the Carolina Panthers, has always had a love for cars, albeit fast cars.

“It started as just a passion for old cars,” Brayton explained. “Back in high school my dad and I had a little project car that ended up just being a daily driver. But in college I had a buddy and I would go up to his house and he would help me work on my car and stuff like that. Well he had a race car and I asked him ‘Can anyone do this?’ He said yeah and told me all about bracket racing. “

It was then when Brayton took his car to a local track and in his first outing went five rounds in the street class.

“I had such a great time,” he reflected. “That was it, I was hooked.”

During the nine years that have passed, and many professional football games later, Brayton had all the while still been trying to take his drag racing to the next level and acquire his competition license.

“When I was still playing for the Oakland Raiders, I really wanted to attend Frank Hawley’s School in California. Then I transferred to North Carolina last year and my racing aspirations got temporarily put on the back burner while we got settled in. I was so happy to finally be able to work going to his class into my schedule,” he said.

His wish finally came true earlier this month when Brayton attended one of the school’s Super Classes held at their Gainesville, Florida home location and drove one of the school’s Super Gas Firebirds.

“That first pass was just a blur and when I was done, I was physically shaking from all the adrenaline. You know I was like trying to play it all cool,” he laughed. “The speed of that car and the power was just shocking.”

Over Brayton’s football career, which spans from high school, through college at Colorado and his two professional teams, he has worked with many levels of coaching. He was quick to compare working with Frank Hawley to his past experiences.

“I actually wrote Frank a letter just to let him know how much I appreciated his teaching ability,” he said. “He has a God given ability to be a teacher. I think Frank could teach you anything and not just drag racing. Whatever the subject was, he could take that subject matter and teach it proficiently. He held my attention the entire time and I just thought he was an awesome teacher.”

“Let’s face it, I went down there simply to drive a fast car and get my license. But I ended up benefitting, I feel like, more from the classroom time that we had then from the driving part,” he continued. “The things he spoke about in regards to the whole sports physiology side of drag racing are things I have learned to be true from my own sports experience, but I never understood how or why. Frank just did an outstanding job of explaining things that I can apply to not only drag racing, but football and just life in general.”

Brayton tackled not only acquiring his NHRA competition license in Super Gas, but he also made his cross-grade passes and picked up his Super Comp license during the same trip to Frank Hawley’s Drag Racing School.

“After I finished licensing in the Firebird, I was like it took me way too long to get here in the first place. I have no idea when I will be able to make it down here again and well, I want my Super Comp license, too. I’m so glad I did that because now I can drive either car or class and the dragster was such a major kick in the pants,” he exclaimed.

“I don’t ever plan on being a professional drag racer. I just love that there are so many ways to participate in this sport and I can’t explain how happy I am that I finally made it to one of Frank Hawley’s classes. It was so much more than I ever hoped it would be,” he added.

Tyler looks forward to getting in some racing whenever he can between now and the beginning of the regular NFL season, which starts for him when his team the Carolina Panthers takes on the Philadelphia Eagles at home September 13th. Kick-off is scheduled for 1pm and can be seen on Fox.

To find out more about all programs and their respective locations available at Frank Hawley's Drag Racing School, visit the school's website - www.frankhawley.com or call 866-480-7223. (Outside US 352-336-4111)