

How 2 women who call each other 'sis' raised ASU running back Kyson Brown

It's a story of selflessness, sacrifice and someone ASU coach Shaun Aguano calls a 'special' young man

By Scott Bordow, ASU News
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The Lancaster High School graduation ceremony has just ended, and running back Kyson Brown poses for a photo with the two most important people in his life.

On his left, in blue shorts with a cream-colored jacket is his mother, LeKetra Shumpert Taylor. On his right, in yellow slacks and a striped top, is his mother, Rayven Shorter.

The two women are smiling broadly as Brown drapes his arms around them, his high school diploma dangling from his right hand.

It's a portrait of accomplishment. Of pride. Of a young man and the women who raised him.

But it doesn't tell the whole story. It can't. There's too much to tell.

An emotional beginning

Arizona State University football fans know Brown as the speedy running back who filled in admirably when Cam Skattebo wasn't bowling over defenders in 2024.

Brown rushed for 351 yards and two touchdowns, and with Skattebo moving onto the NFL, he should have a much larger role this upcoming season for the Sun Devils, who begin spring practice March 25.

What they may not know is that Brown is a member of Barrett, The Honors College. Or that he's majoring in design studies and real estate. Or that he wrote a paper that helps first-year student-athletes navigate the Tempe campus and learn where to get necessities, like toiletries or

prescriptions.

And they certainly don't know his back story, a story that began with a fainting spell in June 2018.

Taylor had returned home to Tupelo, Mississippi — the family had moved to Lancaster, Texas, a suburb of Dallas, when Kyson was 8 years old — to help plan a surprise birthday party for her mother.

But one day, while visiting her mother, Taylor passed out. It took about 15 minutes to revive her, and when she woke up, she couldn't feel anything from her waist down. Doctors at the hospital diagnosed her with Guillain-Barré syndrome, a rare neurological disorder that occurs when the body's immune system attacks the peripheral nervous system.

After the school year ended, Taylor's children moved back to Tupelo from Lancaster. But as Kyson was getting ready for eighth grade at Tupelo Middle School, he kept thinking about his other family, the family he left behind in Lancaster.

Soon after first moving to Lancaster, Brown had met a boy named Isaiah Shorter through a nonprofit youth sports organization that Isaiah's parents, Brandon and Rayven Shorter, helped run.

The boys hit it off immediately, and soon Brown was spending nearly as much time at the Shorter house as he was with his mom and three siblings. (Kyson's father was not in the picture.)

"His mom is a single parent, so Brandon would be like, 'Hey, I'll pick him up on practice days and then bring him back home,'" Rayven said. "Then it was game days. Then that got to be long weekends. Brandon would pick him up on Friday, he'd stay all weekend, and we would drop off him at school on Monday."

Brown was thriving athletically, emotionally and scholastically. Now, back in Tupelo, he was torn. He wanted to be there for his mother, to help her as she was confined to a wheelchair. But he also longed to be back in Lancaster, with Isaiah and the Shorter family.

"I wanted to stay because of the relationships that I had made," he said. "I liked school there. I also had football. It was just a mix of things that made it the best situation for me."

He approached his mom. With tears in his eyes, he asked her if she would let him move in with the Shorter family.

"I will make you proud," he said. "I just feel like I can thrive there."

Taylor told Brown she needed some time to pray. As she was considering his request, Brandon Shorter called and assured her he would take care of her son.

"I just want you to know that I love him, and I'm going to make sure he stays on the straight and narrow," Brandon said.

Taylor prayed some more. Finally, she did something she would have considered unthinkable just months earlier. She let her son go.

A blended family

"I had to put my emotions and feelings aside," Taylor said. "I could not walk. I was in a wheelchair. I could not care for myself. It was one of the hardest things I've ever had to experience in my life. But to look at my son's eyes and see the determination to achieve his goals ... I had to do what's best for him."

How does a situation that could be fraught with jealousy and resentment become one of selflessness and sacrifice?

Two strong women doing what's best for one young man.

After moving in with the Shorters, Brown made sure Taylor was still involved in his life. Through almost daily FaceTime calls, he would tell her what was going in school, at football practice and at home. He told her he loved her and that nothing would ever change that.

But it was the personal relationship between Taylor and Rayven Shorter that made the situation work. They didn't always share the same parenting techniques — Rayven said she's more structured while Taylor gave Brown "a little more rope" — but they always had his best interest at heart.

"His mom had done such a great job giving him a foundation of how you behave, your manners, being respectful, all those things," Rayven said. "But when he moved in with us, she really took the back seat, which I know is difficult. She said, 'Whatever you decide is best is what we're going to go with because you are there.'"

In turn, Rayven made Taylor a promise.

"I tell her all the time, 'I'm almost positive there's no way I'd be able to do what you did,'" Rayven said. "For her to do that, I took a personal responsibility. And I told her that. I said, 'I will not fail you because you've given me your most precious gift. Whatever it is you want for him, whatever dream you have for him, we're going to make those dreams come true.'"

Brown thrived in Lancaster. He excelled in football and track, felt unconditional love from the Shorters, and was getting straight A's in school.

But he was still torn between his new home and the one he left behind. So, before his freshman year, he moved back to Tupelo to be with his mom.

"She was missing me," he said. "I was missing her and my siblings. And I wanted them to be able to come out to games to see me play."

But as the bond between Brown and Taylor grew stronger throughout his freshman year, Brown again came to realize that to become the best version of himself, to grow academically and athletically, it was best if he was back in Lancaster with the Shorter family.

As Taylor, who had regained use of her legs, drove him back home after football practice one day, he said he had something he needed to talk about.

"He laid it out to me, expressing all of his feelings and concerns about his future," Taylor said. "I was like, 'Can't you get the same things here? We're not going back down this road again.'"

She thought that perhaps she had been a bad mom, which made Brown's request even harder to digest.

"It was worse that time. I was feeling like, 'What am I doing wrong as a mother to make you go away again?'" Taylor said. "He said, 'It's not that. It's not anything you've done wrong. It's just where I see myself.'"

"I argued with him. We went through almost that whole summer before I decided. I finally said, 'OK, let's do it. You can go back there.'"

There was one final selfless act for Taylor to perform. Rayven told her that in order for Brown to live with them and enroll at Lancaster High, they had to formally adopt him.

This, Taylor thought, was one step too far.

"It was like, 'No, I'm not giving you the rights for my son,'" she said. "This is not your son. He's mine."

Then she thought about what the Shorters had done for Brown. How Brandon took him in as his own son. How Rayven never tried to "steal the spotlight" and always included her in any serious conversations or decisions.

And, as always, she thought about what was best for Brown.

"I love him, and I saw their relationship and their bond," she said. "It's amazing. So I said yes."

Raising a 'phenomenal young man'

Ask ASU running backs coach Shaun Aguano about Brown, and words of praise flood out of him.

"From an intelligence level and professionalism, he's probably better than anybody I've had over the last seven to eight years," Aguano said. "You can see it with the younger guys on the practice field. He's taking them under his wing. He's helping them. And it's weird because they're all competing for one job. But he's just that type of kid that is very, very special."

Special, because Brown had a master class in relationships from his mothers. To this day, Taylor and Rayven talk every week. They call each other "sis." They've sat together during Brown's games and were in Arlington, Texas, when ASU beat Iowa State to win the Big 12 championship.

There are no labels in how they refer to their relationship with Brown. Taylor isn't the "biological mom." Rayven isn't the "bonus mom." They're parents, raising — as Taylor put it — "this phenomenal young man."

And what was a painful, prayerful conversation years ago in Tupelo has become a blessing Brown will never forget.

"Now that I'm older, to think about my mom letting her youngest son be miles and miles away, day after day, missing her son... I realize how much of a burden that was on her and how much that really hurt," he said.

“I just appreciate her for allowing me to be in the situation I needed to be in, to grow into the man I am today. I just thank her every day for that.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



ASU running back and second-year architectural studies student at Barrett, The Honors College Kyson Brown poses for a portrait on Feb. 19. Photo by Samantha Chow/ASU

Text image(s)



ASU running back Kyson Brown at his high school graduation with his two moms, LeKetra Shumpert Taylor to his left and Rayven Shorter to his right. Photo courtesy of LeKetra Shumpert Taylor