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## Howell: Ex-Raptor Apodaca on a new path, but excited for his future

By **Brian Howell**

Longmont Times-Call

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Former Silver Creek quarterback Austin Apodaca will be starting for Mesa Community College in the fall. (Daily Camera)

It was in February of 2012 when Austin Apodaca sat in the Silver Creek High School gym and signed his letter of intent to play football at Washington State University.

The Raptors' record-setting quarterback talked at that time about his excitement of becoming a [quarterback](#) with making Pullman, Wash., his home for four or five years.

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...taking classes and working out in triple-digit temperatures in Mesa, Arizona. Pullman is in the rearview mirror as Apodaca [TC](#) forward to starting at quarterback for Mesa Community College this fall.

"I'm excited to get back into football and doing what I love," he said. "It'll be refreshing for me just to get back and play the game I love all the time and be able to compete all the time."

It's funny how life often blocks the path we feel destined to take, setting us on a new course.

Apodaca arrived in Pullman with eyes on leading a downtrodden Washington State program to winning seasons and bowl games.

Two years in, he discovered Wazzu wasn't what he thought it would be, despite developing many life-long memories. On the field, he was a backup to Connor Halliday, who grew up in nearby Spokane, and Apodaca didn't see that changing any time soon.

"After a couple of years, I just didn't feel that level of comfort that I felt like I needed and had to get out," he said. "The biggest thing was that you only have so much time for eligibility and I just felt like it wasn't a perfect fit, and I needed somewhere to get that perfect fit."

That story was all too familiar for Austin's father, Mike, who has been Silver Creek's head football coach since 2003.

Mike, 43, also had big things in mind when he started his college football career years ago. He signed on to play linebacker at his hometown school, the University of Wyoming. He was an undersized linebacker, though, and reality set in quickly.

"I probably just didn't see it materializing the way it needed to, but wanted to still continue playing and found an environment that was a little more conducive to that," he said.

Mike found a new home at Sioux Falls (S.D.) College (now the University of Sioux Falls). Injuries limited his college football career to about a half dozen games, but Sioux Falls turned out to be the perfect fit for Mike.

In the end, college football didn't turn out the way Mike envisioned, but the experience gave him a unique perspective that he has helped him throughout his career as a coach, teacher and father.

Mike learned to make the best of what life throws at you, and as another Father's Day approached, he and wife Melissa couldn't be happier.

Their oldest child, 22-year-old Amanda, is married and mom to a young son. Yeah, 43 seems a bit young for a grandfather, but the good thing, Mike said, is that "I don't necessarily feel it, either."

Meanwhile, Austin is settling into his news digs in Mesa and the family's youngest, Andre, is looking forward to his freshman year on the football team at Azusa Pacific University in California.

Mike speaks with pride about the success each of his children have found, and the journeys they've taken to this point.

"Whether they're 10 or 20, just watching them find their own way is a pleasure in itself," he said. "I have healthy kids and they're all finding their little niches."

Austin is still trying to find his niche. He knows his time in Mesa is short. He turned down some offers from Division I-AA and Division II schools so that he could continue to pursue his dream of playing for a Division I school.

He will play this season at Mesa, graduate in December and look for a shot somewhere else. He's already had several schools — including Colorado State, Kansas State, New Mexico State and South Florida — express interest in signing him after this next season, and he's quite confident he can lead a Division I team.

"I feel like I'm 150 percent a better quarterback than I was (in high school)," he said. "I credit that to everything that's happened. Everything that happened with me just made me want to get that much better. I still have that drive to be the best and it might be even a little bit higher now."

The drive is there, and Austin knows the path he wants to take. If all goes well, Austin's journey will be the one he hopes to take, but the Apodacas have learned it's just fine to wind up on a different road.

Contact Brian Howell at [howellb@dailycamera.com](mailto:howellb@dailycamera.com) (<mailto:howellb@dailycamera.com>) or on Twitter: [@BrianHowell33](https://twitter.com/BrianHowell33).

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