

TOMMY HODSON

LSU All-America QB and Heisman Trophy Candidate

By Greg Shepard

"Why do you want to do a story on me?" Tommy Hodson asked with a subdued tone. He thought *Bigger Faster Stronger* was interested only in athletes who were incredibly strong.

I laughed and assured Tommy that sometimes we do stories on skill athletes who train hard with great intensity, who are excellent role models, and who are *Bigger Faster Stronger* in the mental and spiritual aspects.

And so the interview began....

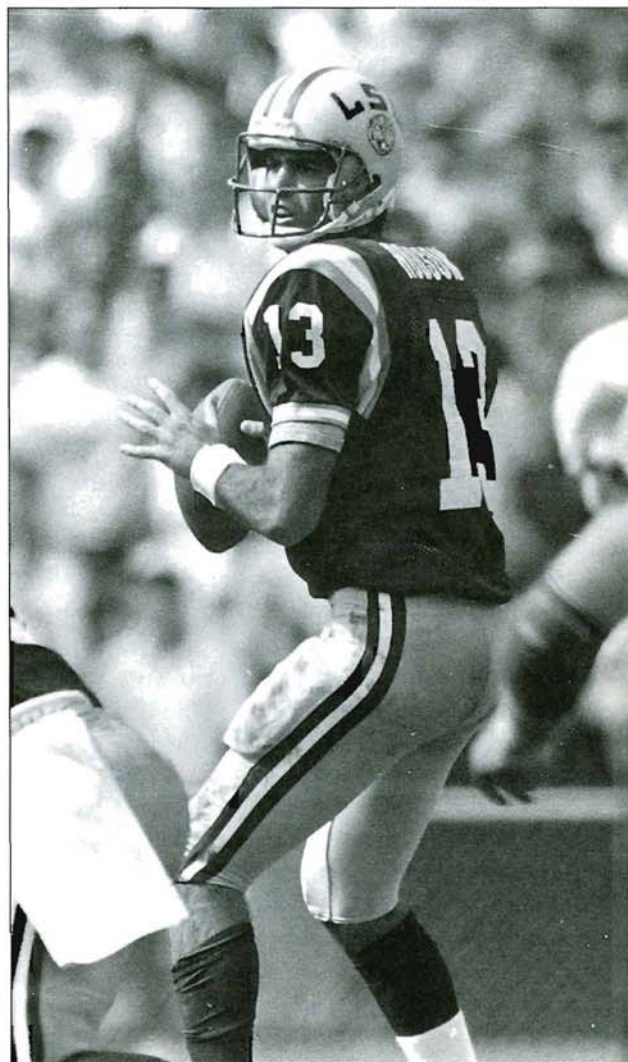
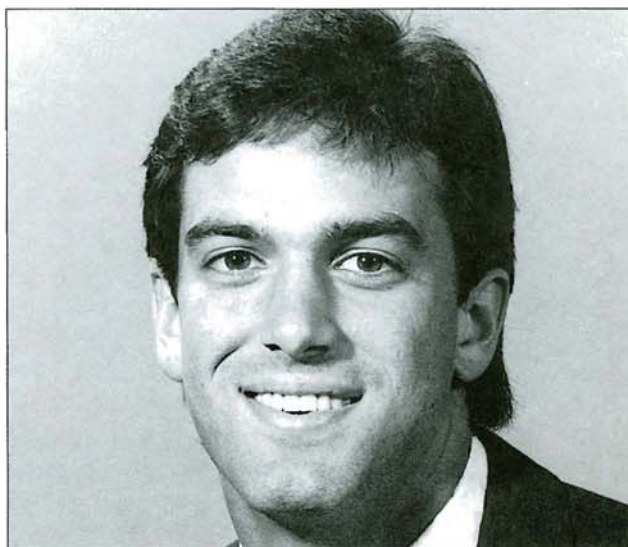
Tommy Hodson, the starting Quarterback at Louisiana State University, grew up in Cajun Country southwest of New Orleans and attended Central Lafourche High School. Being a Quarterback is all he has ever known, as he began playing that position in the sixth grade. Tommy started for the Green and Gold Trojans as a Sophomore Quarterback but he broke his collarbone during the first game. The collarbone healed and Tommy led his team to a 9-2 season in his Junior year. Head football coach Bob Gros let Tommy really open up in his Senior year. He threw for 3,000 yards while winning 13 straight games before finally losing in the AAAA semifinal game.

Basketball was also big in Tommy's life while he was in high school. He averaged 27 points a game from his Point Guard position. He attended five basketball camps to help perfect his roundball skills. Tommy's grades sparkled with a 3.7 GPA, and he ran a 4.7 forty. Even though Tommy weighed only 165 pounds, he had good height, being six foot two. Obviously, colleges were interested.

"Ever since junior high, I've liked LSU and wanted to be a Tiger," remembered Tommy, "but boy was I weak. I didn't lift in high school. I'm sure I was the weakest person on the team. I Benched only 155 pounds.

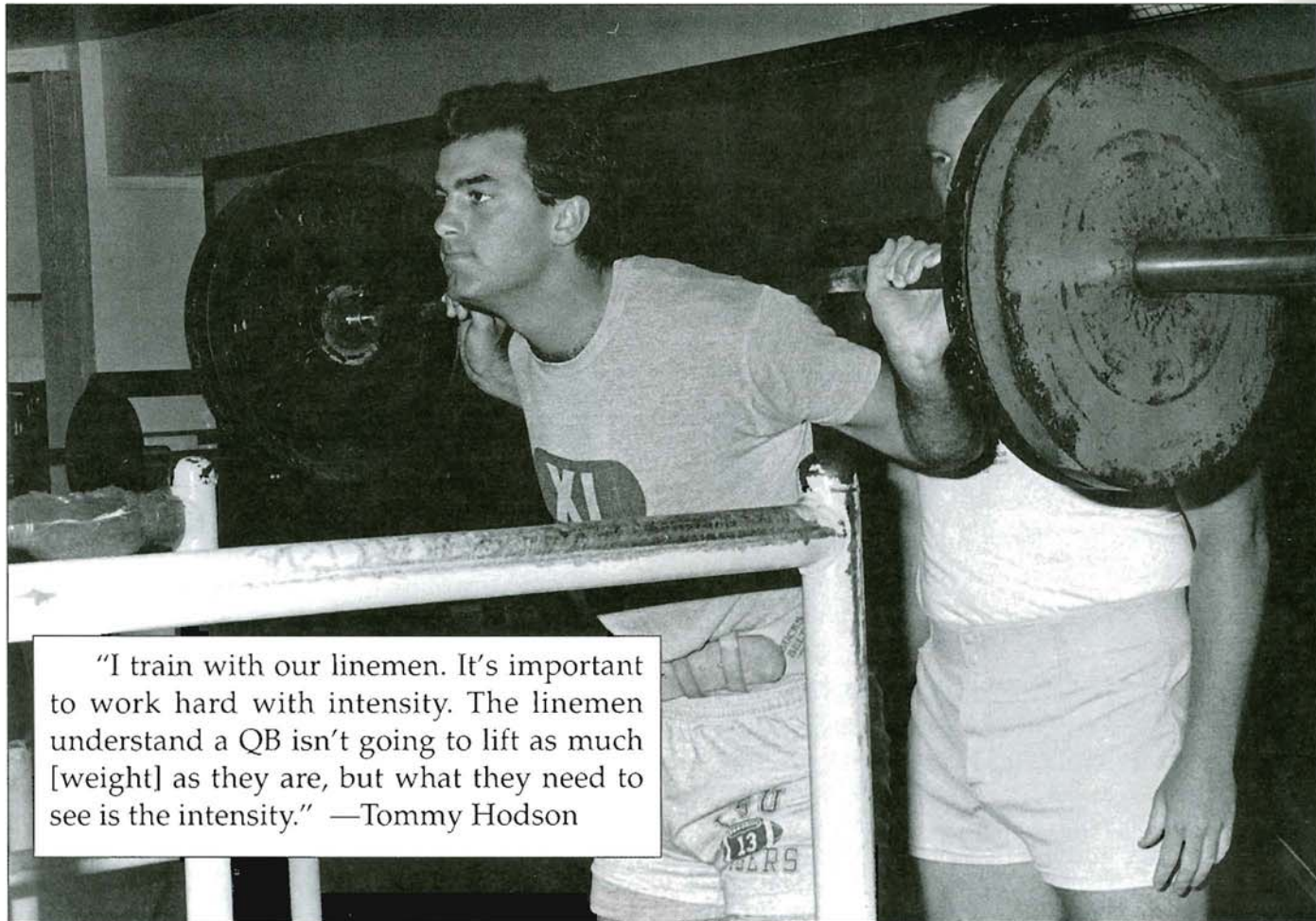
"I should have lifted. If I were a high school football or basketball coach, my players would lift. Of course they would need a lot of supervision, and the lifting would be combined with stretching and skill work."

LSU Strength Coach Milt Williams stated: "Tommy has improved tremendously. It's remarkable because he had elbow surgery in his first year and has still managed to increase his Bench by over 100 pounds. He trains with 330 on the Parallel Squat and he Power Cleans 280 pounds. He's added 30 pounds of body weight while keeping his speed the same and increasing his vertical jump by three



Preseason All-America Tommy Hodson led the SEC with 2,125 yards last season.

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inches."

Tommy said: "Power Cleans are my favorite lift. I train with the linemen. It's important to work hard with intensity. The linemen understand a QB isn't going to lift as much [weight] as they lift, but what they need to see is the intensity. You need to work hard to play hard."

LSU lost a lot of strong people through graduation, and most of those people were linemen. Last year we featured LSU Guard Eric Andolsek. He was one of the strongest linemen to ever play college football. Replacing players like Eric isn't easy and Coach Williams explained the situation: "Men, we need extra work. We're going to work out twice per day. Once at 6:00 a.m. and again in the afternoon. Each workout will be one and one-half hours long. This is for linemen only; but if anyone else wants to join them, you can."

Six other players came. Tommy Hodson was one of those six.

No one would have expected Tommy to do that. No one would have even thought or suggested that he do that. Star players often look for ways to save themselves. Tommy is just the opposite. The way he saw it, those linemen needed his presence. It was important for the team.

Tommy thinks team first. LSU Quarterback Coach Ed Zaunbrecher said: "Tommy's not a stat guy. He'll throw it away to prevent a sack. We don't get sacked. He's the last

guy off the field. If he doesn't feel good about something, he'll grab a receiver. He's got a lot of ability but he's willing to refine it."

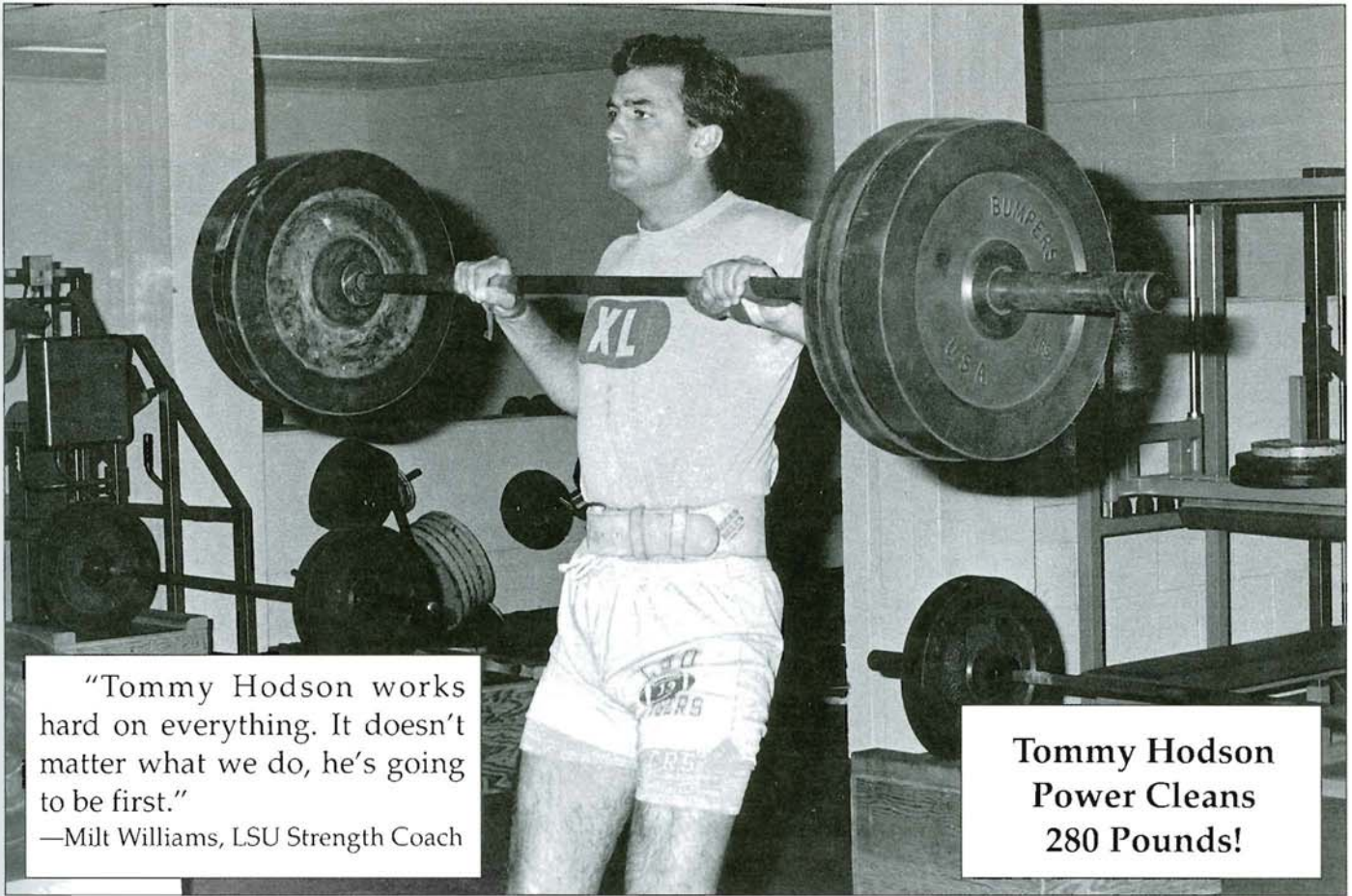
Tommy's mental toughness in the off-season carries over onto the playing field. As a starting Freshman Quarterback against Kentucky, Tommy took a brutal shot under his chin. He bit through his tongue during the first quarter, an injury that required five stitches. Tommy remembered, "It was no big deal." He came back in the second quarter and went 16 for 24 for a 255-yard passing day to lead a LSU victory.

Then last season against Georgia, Tommy was knocked unconscious on a late hit. It was again time for Hodson's heroics. After his head had cleared, Tommy led a victory drive in the final minutes.

Courageous efforts like these, combined with outstanding passing, make Tommy Hodson a Heisman Trophy Candidate. He's already passed for over 5,000 career yards and will most likely end up as LSU's all-time leading passer this year, overtaking former LSU great Archie Manning. Hodson already has the school record for TD passes with 37 and counting.

Last season, Tommy finished eighth nationally in passing efficiency (140.4) and passed for over 2,500 yards. Tommy states: "I'm not worried about stats. The important thing is to win." The LSU Tigers lost only one game last

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"Tommy Hodson works hard on everything. It doesn't matter what we do, he's going to be first."
—Milt Williams, LSU Strength Coach

**Tommy Hodson
Power Cleans
280 Pounds!**

year and that loss came against Alabama when Tommy was injured. At this writing, Tommy Hodson is 23-5-1 as a starting Quarterback at LSU. Three of those losses came in his Freshman year. Obviously, Tommy Hodson is a winner on the field.

Tommy likes LSU's tough schedule, which is perhaps the toughest in the nation. "I know it's a cliché but we have to take each game one at a time. I look forward to each challenge," stated Hodson last September.

"Practice is where I become successful. I try to always concentrate and be mentally into practice. I pay attention at all meetings because I feel the most important part of winning is preparation."

Hodson was redshirted in his first year and will graduate in five years. He'd like to play pro football and then get into college coaching. Tommy's mom and dad are both teachers, and his dad coaches football and basketball. "Dad was tough on us and that helped. He never let me quit," Tommy said.

Coach Zaumbrecher praised his prize player: "Tommy will be a great coach. He already works very close with the other Quarterbacks. Tommy's always trying to improve. This summer he got together with the track coach to improve his speed. Tommy's the best Quarterback I've coached, and that includes Mark Herrman of Purdue and an ACC Player of the Year. Tommy just locks in on what has to be done to win."

Tommy stayed at LSU last summer to throw and lift with his teammates. He likes to be in condition. As a Sophomore, the coaches had the team run 1.5 miles for time. Tommy came in first.

I asked him why he didn't slack off a little; after all, no one would say anything.

Tommy replied: "I try to be a competitor at everything. I work hard and I just don't like to lose."

Coach Williams added: "Endurance is a real strong point with Tommy, but he won the 1.5-mile run also to be an example. That's his way. Tommy's very helpful with the younger players and is a good recruiter for LSU. He's real interested in our program. Tommy's a class act."

Tommy Hodson seems to go the extra mile all the time. He comes into the football office at 12:30 p.m. to watch the game films and doesn't leave until 6:30 p.m. Many times, he'll also go over films again at night. Tommy's throwing workouts are constantly busy and very productive. Tommy believes in shorter, intense workouts.

In fact, Tommy is intense all the time. But, he confesses: "I didn't know what intensity meant until I came to LSU. You've gotta be totally committed to whatever you do."

Tommy speaks to many youth groups at schools, YMCAs, church functions, assemblies, and student council meetings. They usually ask him to comment on drug and

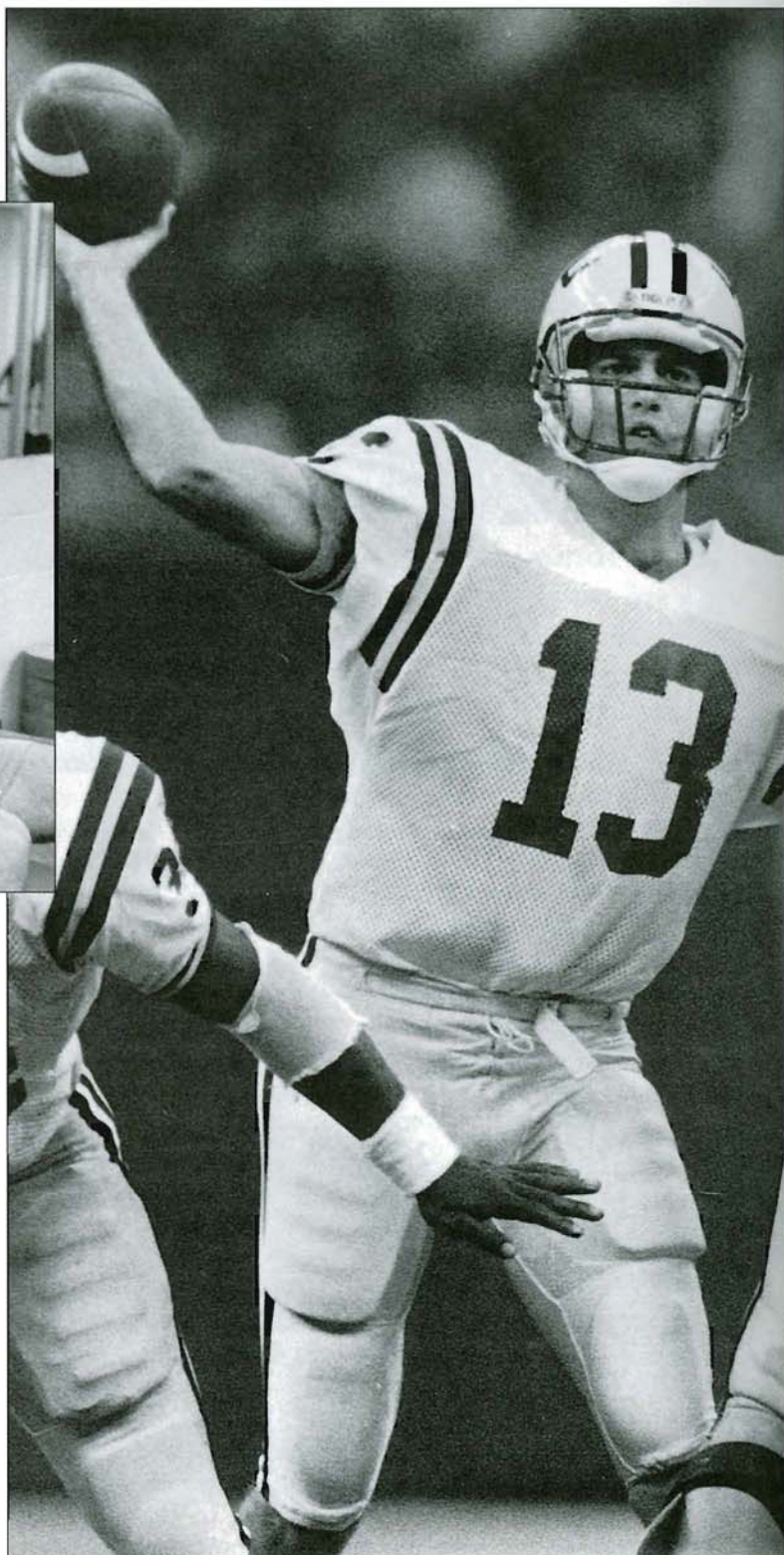
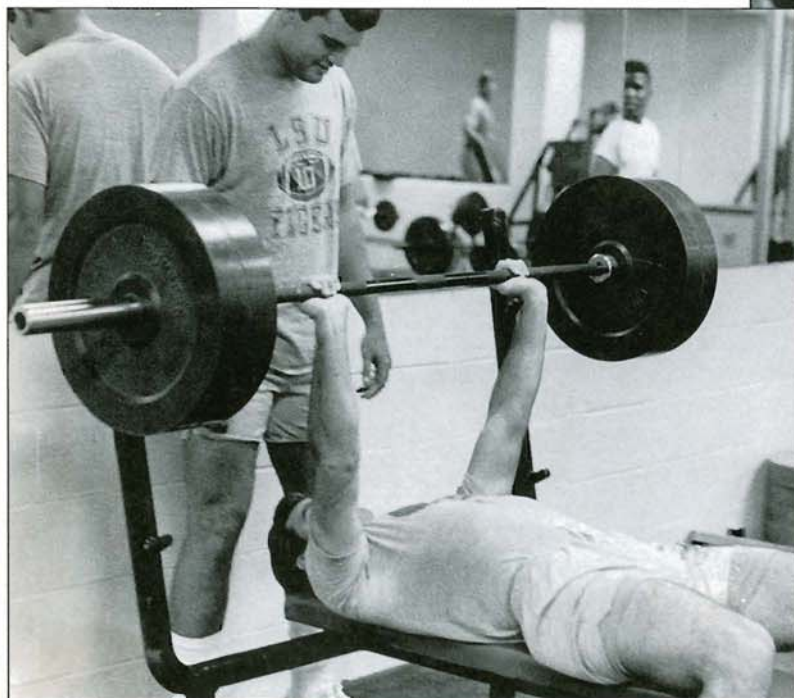
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"The thing that sets Tommy apart is that he makes so many big plays. Physically and mentally, he gets us out of bad situations."

—LSU Head Coach Mike Archer

"Tommy's the last guy off the field. If he doesn't feel good about something, he'll grab a receiver."

—LSU QB Coach Ed Zaunbrecher



alcohol abuse.

Tommy responds: "Kids are getting beat to death on this issue. There's a lot more to it than just saying 'No.' I talk about other things, like getting involved in positive-type activities and even religion. Society is caught up in being 'cool.' Well, I think involvement in positive activities and religion is cool. I'm Catholic and attend Mass once a week but I'm nowhere near perfect. I'm just trying to be the best person that I can be. I think I have an important responsibility to be a good role model."

As we concluded our interview, I asked Tommy where he saw himself 20 years from now.

"Well, Coach Shepard," he revealed, "I'll have a nice wife and kids. I'll have a little money from pro football and be coaching college football. I'm basically a simple guy. I just want a happy family with a small house in a middle class neighborhood."

No one can predict the future and whether Tommy Hodson will ever win the Heisman Trophy. But I do know that Tommy Hodson is very special and that if he does win it he'll be a credit to the award. Tommy Hodson exemplifies everything that embodies the Heisman.

We wish Tommy Hodson and the Tigers of LSU our very best. They deserve success.

Special thanks to Brad Messina for the photos of Tommy Hodson.