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Stanford teammates pick up Williamson

By Ivan Maisel
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After Stanford kicker [Jordan Williamson](#) missed a 35-yard field goal at the end of regulation that would have won the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl, and a 43-yarder in overtime that allowed Oklahoma State to win 41-38, he reacted in a way that any teammate who felt as if he let down his teammates would react.

Williamson took the weight of the loss on his 170-pound shoulders. And if you've ever seen a kicker in a weight room, you know the result. He crumpled beneath it.

Williamson sobbed in a corner of the Cardinal locker room. And then he sobbed some more. Williamson had made 12 of 15 field goals during the regular season, 10 of 11 inside 40 yards. He missed three of four against Oklahoma State. Any kicker who has steeped himself in his art knows the pitfalls of it. But to experience what Williamson endured last week is the difference between reading about the power of Manny Pacquiao's fists and getting in the ring with him.

Only one person in the world had the license to feel worse than Williamson. If there is an agony greater than that felt by a kicker who missed the game-deciding field goal, it belongs to his mother. Laura Burton could do nothing but watch, ache, and when her son returned home to Austin, Texas, try to lift his spirits.

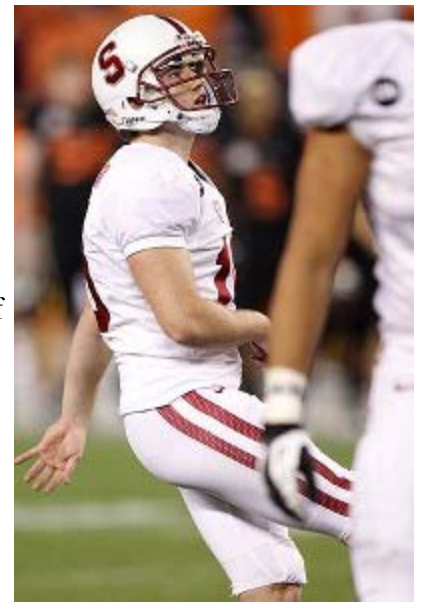
It turns out she didn't have to. His teammates did that for him.

No one in the Cardinal locker room pointed a finger at Williamson. His teammates shielded him from the media after the game. They patted him on the butt, tapped him on the helmet, hugged him and encouraged him. They emailed and texted and called. The Internet and Twitter cornered the market on vitriol. Williamson didn't have to draw from those poisoned wells.

Laura Burton watched the effect the members of the Stanford team had on her son. Over the course of three days, she saw Jordan sink and she saw him rise anew, buoyed by the concern and, yes, the love of his teammates. At the end of the week, she sat down and wrote an email to the parents of the other Stanford players.

First of all, let me express my utter sorrow for how things played out the other night. All of your families were affected, and despite the sincere and tenacious deflection of blame that the players have insisted did not fall on any one player, Jordan would give anything in the world to have contributed positively to the outcome of that game. He takes his job very seriously, and by far the biggest disappointment he has felt over the last few days has been that of letting down his teammates.

"It was sort of an awkward situation," Burton said on the phone Wednesday night. "It was unfamiliar territory for us as a family. People said, 'You didn't need to apologize to us.' It was not the intent for it to feel like an apology. When he missed the kick, we knew it was going to be a life-changing experience. In many ways, it



Stanford kicker Jordan Williamson missed three-of-four field goals in the Fiesta Bowl.

became life-changing for the better."

The main thing I wanted to communicate to you all is that, while our family has learned many powerful life lessons over the last few days, one key message that has come clear like no other is 'WE ARE IN A SPECIAL PLACE.' Never in my life have I seen the kindness, maturity, and love that has been displayed by this Stanford family, and in particular your AMAZING boys. As you can imagine, Jordan felt he wanted to dig a hole and hide, and watching the players seek him out to give bear hugs and encouragement, despite their own disappointment, has touched us and warmed our hearts beyond believe (sic). So many times he has shaken his head and said to me, 'People are just so nice. I just can't believe it.'

The outpouring of support, Burton said, "renewed our faith in the human spirit. ... It's been such an unexpected surprise." As is the reaction she has received to the email, which has begun to go viral in the Stanford community.

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He is looking forward to getting back out there. He knows what he is capable of. He feels strongly he'll have a great year.

” -- *Laura Burton on her son Jordan Williamson*

Now, more than ever, Jordan knows that he is among friends and he feels motivated to work hard, humble himself, and never EVER let them down again. Of course there will be missed field goals and bad days along the way, but his commitment to this team has drilled through to his core. With each day that passes I see less despair in his eyes, and instead an understanding that things happen for a reason, and a determination to learn what he can from it and prepare even harder to do his part in 2012.

In the locker room after the game, Stanford coach David Shaw defended Williamson, said the experience would strengthen him and predicted that someday he would kick in the NFL. The day after the game, he called Williamson to check on him. Asked about Burton's email Wednesday, Shaw confirmed that he had read it. However, he declined to comment.

Williamson did not respond to an email Wednesday night.

To the seniors who won't be here with us, I can't thank you enough. The love and leadership displayed by those boys has been beyond compare. We are thankful to be in a community of special champions, both on and off the field, who understand that life is about higher level things than one football game, and that despite wishing things had played out differently, they are a family and a team that will go to great lengths to not let any one player fall. It has been a beautiful thing to observe and has touched our hearts beyond words. I wanted to say thank you to all of you for raising such an amazing group of boys.

Two months ago, Jeremy Shelley and Cade Foster of Alabama combined to miss four field goals in the Crimson Tide's 9-6 overtime loss at home to LSU. Foster is from Southlake, Texas, and he and Williamson are friends. On Monday night, Shelley made five field goals in Alabama's 21-0 victory over LSU in the BCS title game. Williamson, who was traveling back to Stanford on Monday night, didn't see the game. His mother updated him via text, and he reveled in Shelley's achievement.

"The good news is he's got three more years," Laura Burton said of her son. "He is looking forward to getting back out there. He knows what he is capable of. He feels strongly he'll have a great year."

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