

Mullens named Man and Woman of the Year



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Mississippi State University's Head Football Coach Dan Mullen said moving the football program forward promotes the growth of the university and that promotes the growth of the community.

And that vision for positive forward movement for the university and the community is one of the reason's Starkville Daily News readers voted Dan and Megan Mullen the 2011 Man and Woman of the Year in the annual readership poll. See more results in today's special section.

Mark, Rhonda, Katie, Rett, Mary Phillips and Torie Keenum, MSU's first family, congratulate Canon's parents on this deserved recognition. Rhonda Keenum said Hollywood has its "Bradgelina" (celebrity super couple consisting of Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie), but Mississippi State has "DaMegan" (celebrity super couple consisting of Dan and Megan Mullen).

"Individually they are dynamic - as a couple they are impenetrable," Keenum said. "Their professional and personal achievements are remarkable, however their greatest success is their 25-month collaborative gift, Canon H. Mullen," Keenum said.

Lindsey Wiseman, friends of the Mullens, said there could not be a more deserving couple for Man and Woman of the Year than Dan and Megan.

"The Mullens are such an essential part of our community, and we as a community are rallying behind them," Wiseman said. "Beyond their contagious enthusiasm and optimism for MSU football, it is important to note what role models Megan and Dan are on and off the football field. I have often heard Megan describe the team as their family and how, not only do they have their precious son, Canon, but they have 80 plus kids, who will spend many evenings just hanging out with the Mullens. We are truly grateful for their active involvement and support in the community and look forward to an exciting 2011 season!"

Her husband, Starkville Mayor Parker Wiseman, agreed.

"Dan and Megan Mullen are tremendous assets to this community," Mayor Wiseman said. "Their winning attitudes are contagious, and the spirit of civic engagement they promote is priceless."

Megan's role in that vision has moved from one of support to one of action over the course of the year, with about 50 to 60 personal appearances throughout the state and the community.

"Someone once told me, I must be great at recruiting if I can recruit such a great woman to marry me," Dan Mullen said.

Dan said Megan believes in him and has a strong commitment to their family. They have one son, Canon, 2, and the family dog, Heisman.

"I am so fortunate to have Megan as a wife," Dan said. "And I am also fortunate to have a wife that believes in this football team and the program we are building."

Both were excited and appreciative of being named Man and Woman of the Year by SDN readers. This is Dan's second year in a row to be named Man of the Year. This is Megan's first year to be recognized for her increased community involvement and her encouragement to the MSU football program.

She called her mother to tell her the exciting news!

"She is so much more deserving of this than I am," Dan said. "I am just doing my job. She is doing so much. This community has been so good to us, we are happy give back. That has meant a lot to both of us."

Megan said there is no where else in the country would a team have he support the Mullens and the Bulldogs have had over the past two years.

"It has been my main goal this year to thank everyone," Megan said. "No where else in the country can you find the support we have had here. That's why we have been able to do what we have been able to do."

Megan said not one person has criticized the football program to her. In other places, she could not go to the grocery store without someone making negative comments.

"It is the support we have had throughout the community that really let's us build the program and make a difference in these guys lives," Megan said.

While Dan and Megan have one son at home, they both say they have 85 "children" as part of the MSU football program.

"We are so proud our guys are buying in to the program," Dan said. "We want to develop young men into champions in life...we want them to have success overall."

Dan said as of this senior year, the players are going on to bigger and better things in life. He said some will be going on to the National Football League, graduate school and careers.

"We are so proud of them," Dan said. "To have players who come in, unsure of the future, to helping them develop the confidence to go out in the world — it is exciting."

"What we want to do is make people's lives better," Megan said. "And we are in a place, with the incredible support of the community and the state, we can build a program that makes a difference in the lives of these players. This is my calling."

Megan said this year, the community has seen the "highest of highs" in this football program, but also the "lowest of lows."

Losing MSU #36 Nick Bell to cancer this year has been one of the hardest moments for the team, and for the Mullens, this year. Megan planned the memorial service for Bell held at MSU.

"I wanted everything to be perfect for him," Megan said. "I wanted the community, his family, everyone to know how special he was."

Megan said going through the loss of Bell with the team was a defining moment of her life.

Explaining that the 20-year-old who would plop down on the only barstool in the house and visit, would not be part of their lives any longer was hard for the Mullens, and hard for the team.

"Indescribable," Megan said.

When they told the team, Megan said she was with Dan sitting with the team. She said she was able to say things to them, where Dan didn't have the words. He was able to say things she couldn't.

"I hope we helped the players during that time, but they also helped me," Megan said. "They gave me strength."

To go through the "lowest of the lows" and ending with a winning season was an amazing feat for a team that had been through so much heartache with the loss of Bell. But the Gator Bowl was an amazing accomplishment for the team, and a big boost for the football program.

And fans loved it. Megan said MSU fans outnumbered Michigan fans "at least eight to one" at the Jacksonville, Fla. event on New Year's Day.

"They got to prove they are one of the best teams in the nation this year," Megan said. "Chris wore Nick's number 36 and was so proud. It was awesome."

Dan and Megan both said they are proud of the team for so many reasons, and some of those reasons have to do with their performance on the football field.

Dan has a firm belief that if a person is in the position to be a role model, they should do everything in their power to make a positive impact on others.

For the first time this year, the MSU football team took their turn ringing the bells as part of the Christmas Red Kettle Drive for Starkville-Oktibbeha County's Salvation Army.

"They had fun and the Salvation Army said it was a huge day for them," Dan said.

During his time in Starkville, Dan has helped with the Salvation Army's kick-off campaign for the Christmas Red Kettle Drive.

"If I, or Megan or the team, can help make a difference in the community, we should help," Dan said. "It wouldn't be right not to give back."

Megan said Dan was her role model.

"He does everything right," Megan said. "He doesn't take shortcuts, no matter what the cost and that's pretty cool. He believes if you are put in the position to be a role model, you should do it every day."

The Mullins are looking forward to "more fun, more happiness, more success."

"We want to continue to build the program and consistently see success, both on and off the field," Dan said. "We want to keep making a positive impact on young mens lives."

Megan said they are beginning to feel acclimated, and with a winning season behind them, it is an opportunity to "take a breath personally."

"The sky's the limit with this program," Megan said. "It is amazing to be in a position to enjoy our lives. We are so lucky."

And they are enjoying Canon, who learned to sing the MSU fight song, before he learned the word "please" this year, according to mom. Dad reports that Canon loves football, both on the field and on television.

"Canon is the cutest, sweetest guy, and so is his dad," Megan said. "For everyone that thinks he is a good coach, he is an even better husband and father."