



BIO



A Small Man in a Big Man's Game

To appreciate the Hero's Journey that is JJ Birden's life, you must first know a few important facts:

- **Less than 6%** of high school seniors go on to play college football
- Of the 150,000 draft-eligible college football players, only 253 (**less than 1%**) are selected in the NFL draft
- The average NFL career is **less than 2 years**
- The average NFL player is **6'2, 245 lbs.**

The odds of making it to the NFL are staggering. The odds of staying in the NFL are even more amazing. The odds of doing both are the most astronomical of all when you're undersized and play one of the sport's most physical positions. Good thing JJ Birden never cared about the odds of success.

Despite being the #1 high school wide receiver in Oregon, JJ didn't receive a single D1 scholarship offer. He was fast enough for sure, but at 5'9 and 133 lbs., JJ was just too small to play with the big boys. At least that's what the naysayers thought; JJ knew he was good enough, and he set his mind to achieving the impossible. All he needed was an opportunity, no matter how small, even if it meant making his own.

After receiving a scholarship to the University of Oregon for track & field, JJ earned a walk-on spot with the football team his sophomore year. He was at the bottom of the depth chart and nowhere near seeing actual playing time on the field, but his coaches and teammates didn't know how hard he was willing to work. It didn't take long for them to find out: JJ became a starter the next season, his junior year.

But like all long-shot stories and underdog tales, JJ's trials were just beginning. The remainder of his college career was plagued with injuries and unimpressive stats. Still, JJ's speed and toughness were enough to earn him an invite to the NFL Combine, a yearly gathering of the top 300 college prospects in the nation. Unsurprising to his teammates, coaches, and fans, JJ dominated the Combine. His performance earned him the 216th pick in the 8th round of the 1988 NFL Draft. That's when the going got really tough.

A series of injuries and failed physicals culminated in one of the darkest moments in JJ's early career, and one of the hardest weeks imaginable for anyone: JJ was rejected by 4 NFL teams in 5 days. He could have walked away from the game and given up hope in spite of what seemed like insurmountable odds, but JJ didn't even flinch. Instead, he did what he's always done when faced with adversity—he found a way to win.

JJ would go on to play 9 seasons in the NFL (remember, the average career is less than a quarter of that) despite never being the biggest, strongest or most physical guy on the field. What kept JJ on the field for almost a decade wasn't just how he *played* the game but rather how he *approached* every day like it was game day. JJ was willing to put in the work and do whatever it took to improve.

Now a motivational speaker and performance coach, JJ shares lessons from his life that help audiences of all ages, backgrounds, and professions realize the most important thing about success—it is never given, but always earned. JJ's inspiring keynote presentations outline the principles and strategies that helped an undersized wide receiver overcome spectacular odds; the same principles and strategies that can help anyone perform at the highest levels in all walks of life.

JJ is a best-selling author, entrepreneur, motivational speaker, husband and father. He has been married to his college sweetheart, Raina, for 30 years and has 8 children (3 biological and 5 adopted nieces and nephews). He and his family reside in the Phoenix area.

JJ Birden is an engaging communicator, passionate presenter, and a leading authority on helping individuals seize their opportunities in life. Request more information to speak with JJ and to learn how he can tailor his motivational keynote presentations to empower your group to achieve greatness.

