

by | rose kanaley

Then 12-year-old Stu Stram watched in awe as his dad was lifted up by 46 of the players on the Kansas City Chiefs football team, eagerly carrying him out onto the football field in praise. They'd done it. Led by Stu's father, Hank Stram, the Chiefs won the 1969 Super Bowl.

Fifty years later, the Chiefs will return to the Super Bowl on Feb. 2 for the first time since then.

Quarterback Patrick Mahomes' "magic" throughout the season and the team's ambition to make it all the way has done more than just excite Chiefs fans to hopefully see the \$5,000 rings on each player's hand. Their chance to bring home the shimmering gold trophy engraved with Superbowl LIV has brought the entire city together.

Then Briarwood-Elementary-schooler, Stu remembers running up to kiss his dad after each touchdown. Fifty years later, he's never forgotten the image of the team storming the field, and he knows the same enthusiasm will carry through the new generation of fans.

"This team is providing memories for a whole new generation of football fans in Kansas City," Stu said. "To me, that is the coolest thing that the team and the Super Bowl provides to this community."

At the last game, junior Major Park watched as older fans jumped and shouted as if they were young again in excitement. Amid the 10 minutes straight of red and gold confetti spraying the stadium, Major saw every fan taking the win in different way — screaming, high-fiving, hugging, crying.

Park watched the players rush to the center of the field, hugging and yelling in disbelief. But his favorite part had to be seeing Tyreek Hill and his son jumping around, playing in the sea of confetti that covered the field.

Park realized the atmosphere inside Arrowhead was a reflection of how the entire city felt.

Diego Galicia, an East alum who works with video for the Chiefs, saw the overwhelming support of the team through his season spent sideline filming — he's glad he has a job he's connected to, with the team he's been listening to, reading stats of and drafting in his fantasy football teams since his dad took him to a game when he was eight. Using his Black Magic Pocket Cinema 4K camera, he takes videos to help fans watch and experience those games in the same way he gets to.

Getting to watch and work around the players, Galicia now knows the team beyond what you see from watching the game on TV or in the stands.

Galacia never saw Kansas City as a popular city before, but he thinks a new light has changed the country's perception.



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stu stram | son of hank stram

"Kansas City is a big city for sure, but it's like a small town, too," Galicia said. "So it's kind of cool how our non-major city, compared to like Chicago, New York, L.A. or anything, has so much spotlight on it."

Growing up, junior Meredith McGannon's dad, Pat McGannon, promised that if the Chiefs ever made it to the Super Bowl, he'd take their whole family. He kept his promise.

Before the Chiefs became the top-seed team they are now, Meredith loved it when her dad came home from games and, although they'd lost, hear her dad tell her stories of the crazy drunk fans screaming next to him and the friends he'd gone to the game with since high school. She also loved when he came home with Chiefs jerseys for everyone in her family, branded "McGannon" across the back.

"It's just such a good atmosphere that's fun to be in," Meredith said. "Like, when the Chiefs score a touchdown,

when you're just high fiving all these random people around you, it describes Kansas City as a community."

To Meredith, the Chiefs aren't just an NFL team, they're part of what brings their family together — what gives her older siblings a reason to fly home and her dad the permission to book a 30-person party bus, carting family and friends to Arrowhead.

Like Pat McGannon, East social studies teacher Klein has been going to the Chiefs games with his best friend since kindergarten. Always texting play-by-play updates of their thoughts on the game when they can't attend or watch the games together, over the years they've celebrated just as energetically when the team was led by Todd Haley and Matt Cassel, as when Patrick Mahomes was first signed, according to Klein.

"When the chiefs took the 18-point lead in the fourth quarter and there was a long pass to Sammy Watkins, it just kind of dawned on me that, holy moly, this is actually happening," Klein said. "And all of the sudden it was happening and I didn't realize the extent to which I subconsciously didn't believe it would ever happen during my lifetime."

It's affected more than just the lifelong fans. With an entire city feeling the impact of their success, people like English teacher Amy Andersen are joining the fan base for the first time.

IFEB. 2

AT 7 P.M. THE CHIEFS WILL TAKE ON THE 49ERS

Andersen had only ever considered herself a social football game watcher, always chatting with friends or eating the All-American snacks they'd have during each game — everything from hot tamales to Velveeta cheese dip — instead of paying attention to the game.

But after receiving a red Chiefs jacket for Christmas, Andersen knew she'd feel guilty if she wore it without really watching the game and decided it was time she tried to pay attention. To her surprise, Andersen was sucked in.

"The games themselves have been awesome, full of twists and turns," Andersen said. "Mahomes's big pass in the last game was epic. But also, just as a lifetime Kansas Citian, it's so fun to have something to rally together and celebrate, and I feel the Chiefs fever."

The "Chiefs fever" is everywhere, according to Andersen, from the loudest stadium in the world holding 76,416 screaming fans in red and white to the lifesize bobblehead Patrick Mahomes in HyVee.

Even on a 15-hour bus ride to Winter Park, CO, everyone on the annual Village Presbyterian ski trip was decked in Chiefs red.

With the AFC championship held in the middle of their day on the slopes, sophomore Spencer Newton and his friends, along with the rest of the Chiefs fans in Winter Park, left the mountain three hours early without hesitation to head over to a small bar on the mountain to watch the game — the waiters hadn't seen the bar that packed before, Newton said.

But it wasn't just watching the game with his friends instead of skiing. They all wore their Chiefs jerseys while they skied, and the mountain of strangers became a community. Hearing a "Go Chiefs!" on the chair lift or meeting strangers from Kansas City in the same #15 jersey, Newton found it to be a completely new experience. And this was all happening 675 miles away from Arrowhead.

"It's definitely a different experience, because at the games you know everyone there is going to be a Chiefs fan and the energy is awesome," Newton said. "But being in Colorado and being able to watch the Chiefs and end up around so many Chiefs fans, it's also a great experience. It's definitely like a community, where everyone's just friends with everyone just because they like the chiefs."

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KANSAS CITY CHIEFS | 01/22/20

SPORTS FEATURE | 09

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THE WIN AGAINST THE TITANS WAS THE LARGEST COMBACK IN FRANCHISE HISTORY

*INFORMATION AND STATS COURTESY OF ESPN.COM & THE ESPN APP

50 YEARS IN THE MAKING

The Chiefs have brought the whole city together as they make their way to the Superbowl for the first time in 50 years on Feb. 2