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## **HERTZEL COLUMN: Lucas listened to heart, came to West Virginia**

By Bob Hertz, Times West Virginian

[http://www.timeswv.com/wvu\\_sports/x1560865858/HERTZEL-COLUMN-Lucas-listened-to-heart-came-to-West-Virginia](http://www.timeswv.com/wvu_sports/x1560865858/HERTZEL-COLUMN-Lucas-listened-to-heart-came-to-West-Virginia)

MORGANTOWN — We forget sometimes that our athletic heroes are human, too.

They may be big, 6-feet, 4-inches and 315 pounds, as is West Virginia University redshirt freshman tackle Marquis Lucas, but they're more than just flesh and bones. They are people, too, people who have emotional flows, up and down, happy and sad. In the case of college athletes, they are young people, too, still taking those emotions and shaping them into the type of person they are going to be.

Lucas has ridden that roller coaster and learned that man must find a way to survive.

"It is not the strongest of species that survive or the most intelligent," he said the other day in beginning his speech in Dr. Carolyn Atkins' "Athletes Speak Out" session at the Jerry West Lounge in the Coliseum. "It is the one that is most adaptable to change."

And he has had his share of changes. The other day Mike Casazza in the Charleston Daily Mail pinpointed part of it, the college football part, in pointing out that Lucas had originally committed to Rutgers and Greg Schiano, only to find that in his heart his feelings for former WVU assistant coach Randy Galloway and the way he recruited him drew him to West Virginia.

Lucas, one of the nation's top offensive linemen following a year in which he led his Miami Central team to a 14-1 record, had committed to Rutgers before WVU offered him, the 10th of 20 or so schools to give him an offer.

"I knew in my heart the whole time I wanted to go to West Virginia," he said. "I just didn't know how to tell Rutgers."

He waited as long as he could, but finally told Rutgers he was Morgantown bound.

"I felt bad," he said. "I'm a really genuine person, so for me to go back on my word like that really hurt. But West Virginia was where I wanted to be."

And this was important to him, for there had been times when he wasn't where he wanted to be, and that was what he was revealing in his speech about survival.

Lucas had grown up with two younger sisters and an older brother, "a typical family" was the way he put it. Unlike so many of the athletes who come out of Miami, his upbringing wasn't one ruined by a broken home, torn apart by inner-city crime and drugs.

"At the time, life was good and everyone was happy," he said.

Why not? They lived in a five-bedroom, four and a half-bath house, attended what he called "nice elementary, middle and high schools."

But, as they say, stuff happens.

"The first thing that happened was we had some financial problems and ended up losing our home," he said.

The result was that for six months they lived in a 2003 Chevy Suburban. Lucas is big enough alone to fill the truck, let alone the five of them.

“Some nights we were able to afford a hotel room, but if there wasn’t enough money we slept in the truck,” Lucas said. “My dad was always able to get us a meal, so food wasn’t really a problem.”

They’d shower at a friend’s or relative’s house and go about their day from there.

“After about six months things started to get a little better. Things started to turn around, and we had a home again,” Lucas said.

The good fortune did not last long.

“A month later, my dad got really sick. He was diagnosed with kidney failure and had to take dialysis three days a week. His days were Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I could see the dialysis really taking a toll on him,” Lucas said.

So now he had a sick father, was caught up in graduating high school, going through an emotional recruiting. His dad was failing and wasn’t handling it well, often getting angry.

“My mom really had to take control of the family at this time,” he recalled.

On June 4, he arrived at West Virginia.

“I was very excited about my future but very concerned about my father. I could see him deteriorating,” he said. “On July 7, I was in my door at Pierpont at about 11 p.m. when the phone rang. It was my cousin calling to let me know my father had passed away.

“I couldn’t believe it at first, but I could hear my brother crying in the background. I immediately called my Mom and coaches, who were very supportive, and I was on a flight the next morning.”

It hasn’t been easy for this likable, dreadlocked young man.

“I had never felt this way before. Even today I find myself having mixed feelings,” he admitted. “Some days I work hard and want to do the right thing. Other days I feel depressed over losing my father and nothing seems to matter.”

He says he is now in “survival mode.”

And when he is, he reminds himself of a quotation.

“Man can live about 40 days without food, about three days without water, eight minutes without air but just one second without hope ... and I have hope.”

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- See more at: [http://www.timeswv.com/wvu\\_sports/x1560865858/HERTZEL-COLUMN-Lucas-listened-to-heart-came-to-West-Virginia#sthash.E1sQH9hH.dpuf](http://www.timeswv.com/wvu_sports/x1560865858/HERTZEL-COLUMN-Lucas-listened-to-heart-came-to-West-Virginia#sthash.E1sQH9hH.dpuf)