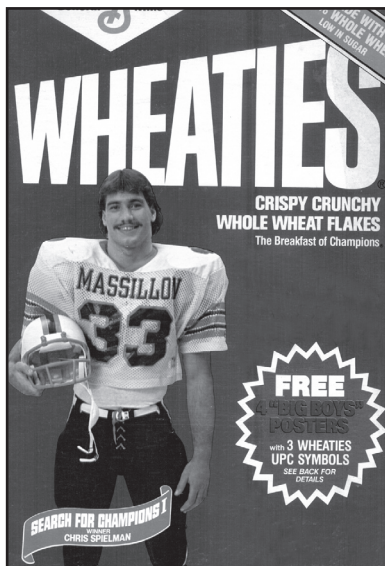


The Boy That Was on the Wheaties Box

No one knew the impact appearing on the Wheaties box would have on Chris Spielman, a shy 16-year-old boy, between his junior and senior year of high school.

When Wheaties sponsored a nation-wide *Search for Champions* contest, Jack Gorius, a local booster, started a city-wide campaign to put Spielman—and the town of Massillon—on the Wheaties box.



Chris Spielman was on the Wheaties box while he was in high school.

thinking nothing would ever come of it. I should have known better. The town kind of caught fire with it and everybody got behind it. It was

just a chance to put Massillon on the map again, to show what a special place it is. I just happened to be the lucky, chosen one at the time.

“Ninety percent of the time it was great, the other ten percent was hard for a kid who’s all of a sudden thrust

“Jack came up with the idea and presented it to me,” Spielman said. “I said ‘Sure,’

into this position.”

There was a defining mo-

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ment that hurt Spielman.

“We were in a parade or somethin’ and I didn’t look quick enough for a picture or somethin’ and there was a yell from the crowd: ‘Hey Spielman, you’ve gotta look over here. What’s a matter with you? Quit acting like that.’”

Spielman wasn’t acting cocky, like the heckler suggested.

“I was just tryin’ to get by. He yelled, ‘Hey, you better straighten up. Massillon *made* you.’

“And you know, I took a little exception to that. I got frustrated.

“I remember lots of times where I basically turned into a loner, a person who really valued privacy, because I had none. I was very shy, and to this day, I think it affects me.

Relatively speaking, I kind of dodge the spotlight when I can. I’m basically shy when I’m out amongst people or in a crowd. I shouldn’t say shy, I’m a little bit uncomfortable.

“That kicked it off and of course everything got escalated when I came to Ohio State. But it started in Massillon. Then again that experience was a benefit because I was able to handle the pressure when I got down to Columbus. So there’s good and bad with the whole thing.

“I want to emphasize that I’m grateful to Jack Gorius and the people of Massillon for giving me that opportunity. It was a wonderful, wonderful experience. But when you have something that is that big—being put on a Wheaties box when you’re 16 years old is big—there’s going to be some trying

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times that a young person has to deal with that he might not be *able* to deal with.

“It’s the first time people started staring at me, and recognizing me. You feel kind of funny because you feel like, ‘*Is something wrong with me?*’ You don’t realize people are thinking, ‘That’s the kid that might be on the Wheaties box,’ or something like that.

So you become very self-conscious.

“Everyone thought it was all great and glamorous and glorified. And it *was* great, but it was also very difficult. I became, overnight, a role model for a lot of kids. And that was great. Don’t get me wrong about that, if

I could go to a hospital and make some kid, a sick kid—even at the young age that I was—feel better or get better or just brighten somebody’s day, I certainly didn’t mind doing that. But sometimes, if you’re not exposed to hospitals, a kid might be in

there with pneumonia or something else. For me to go deal with that at 16, when the worst thing I’ve had is a cold, when

you’re not prepared for it—it was ‘Go here, do this, go here, do that.’ I learned, and I grew up fast, and I saw things that a lot of kids didn’t see. I think I was a good kid. And I did a lot of good things.

“My parents sensed me going into a shell. They kind of stepped in and took control

“It affects me today. I kind of dodge the spotlight when I can.”

Chris Spielman