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**She's tough. She's competitive. She's demanding.  
But off the basketball court and in the kitchen, she's ... mom**

*By SHERRI GARDNER HOWELL*

They have the same eyes.

Pat Summitt, head coach of the University of Tennessee Lady Vols basketball team, is kneeling beside her son, Tyler, their heads touching, faces together. Tyler has a basketball under one arm, and it's looks like a pretty typical mother-son portrait.

And then you notice it: Tyler has his mother's eyes, and they are looking at her with that famous Pat Summitt intensity. Not hard, but not soft, either. Focused, concentrating.

She is looking back at him. Her eyes are filled with love.

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Tyler Summitt came into this world with an orange spotlight shining on him. He was born in September of 1990 to Pat and R.B. Summitt, and even the story of his arrival was media and sports-fan fodder. His celebrated mother was on a recruiting trip when she went into labor. As her labor progressed and she was being rushed home, her assistant coach wanted the pilot to land the plane in Virginia, a state with a strong rival basketball team. Pat made it clear that her baby was NOT going to be born in Virginia. The plane -- and Pat -- made it to Knoxville, and Tyler was born on Tennessee soil.

Today, Tyler is 13 and a seventh-grader at Webb School. He is polite and well-spoken, comfortable with adults, loving and protective of the two young children of his nanny LaTina Haynes and a real pro with his 2-year-old yellow Lab, Sally Sue Summitt. He describes his life as "pretty normal," and says the hardest part of being who he is, is "not seeing Mom as much."

"I mean, I love to go on trips with her it's awesome," Tyler says. "But there are so many things like speeches that she does, and the Mystics and announcing, so she's gone a lot. So that's the hardest part. I miss her."

When Pat is in town, family life at the Summitts resembles the days of Pat's childhood, much more so than what many of today's children experience. The family sits down to dinner at home most nights -- no television, no telephone calls.

“I cook every night,” Pat says. “We eat right there at that game table. That is our time. Everybody talks about their day, and the TV’s off ... and, really, most of the time, we just sit and visit. Unless I’m out of town, I cook. That’s our real special time.”

“It’s our most social time,” Tyler says. “We’re a talkative family, and our dinners are my favorite. It’s our most social part of being a family. We’ve eaten out like three times in my entire life when my mom is at home.”

Pat also cooks breakfast for Tyler at 7 each morning. On this particular day, however, it was Tyler who had done the breakfast cooking.

“We had a little disciplinary thing from school that just came in the mail this week -- throwing paper-wads,” Pat says. “So this morning, he cooked his own eggs and bacon and toast while I sat there and read the note and tried to think about what his consequences would be. That hasn’t been determined yet, but he was getting in a good light with cooking his breakfast this morning.”

Tyler says it does him no good to play “favorites” with his parents when he gets in trouble. “In the beginning, when I was younger, my dad was more of the disciplinarian,” he says. “But now it’s beginning to be my mom. I think it’s because she understands college kids and high-school kids, so she knows. But when I get in trouble, I’m in trouble with both of them.”

Tyler has an idea what he thinks some of the possible punishments will be for his paper-wad fight. “I will probably be grounded from television and anything electronic for about a gazillion weeks,” he says.

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Discipline is important to this mom, at home as well as on the basketball court. Pat says her parenting style with Tyler is very different from her coaching style.

Tyler says the two styles are “the same.” When you quiz him more closely, however, it is evident that the differing perspectives have little to do with Pat Summitt’s parenting style and more to do with how Tyler sees her coaching style.

“The players are like her kids,” Tyler says. “When it’s a game or practice, she’s the coach, but when one of her players needs something, the mom part comes out, and she’s just like she is with me. She’ll help them through it. She’ll talk them through whatever’s bothering them.”

But Pat says those who see her as the hard-driving, no-nonsense coach would find she has a very different style as a parent than she does as the intense basketball coach.

“It was very important from the day Tyler was born that he understand from me, from my standpoint, that he know how much I loved him, and what kind of life I hoped he would experience. With that thought, a lot of priorities come to my mind: that he have love, that he have a fun and enjoyable childhood. At the same time, we had to teach him responsibility, and, really, to teach him.”

Pat says she tries for balance in her home life, just as any mother does. Work is to be done. Chores are expected and include Tyler making his bed every morning, keeping things picked up and being responsible for the care of his dog. But she also wants life at the Summitts' home to be fun.

"I want him to have a happy childhood and a fun one," she says. "And that's how we live our life here at home. I think it's high-energy, low-stress, lots of laughter. But he knows when he comes home, he gets his work done, his chores, whatever it is he needs to do."

Part of the fun for Tyler centers around the "bunk house," a pool house with a whole room of bunk beds, a television and wall of video game machines -- including a Michael Jordan "Space Jam" game, a kitchen, an indoor/outdoor room with a huge fireplace and the heated pool. It's a dream getaway for a soon-to-be 14-year-old.

"It's part of helping life to be fun," says Pat, who then admits, "And now that Tyler's a teenager, I had to ask myself, 'Would you rather be dropping him off somewhere to be with his friends, or would you rather have his friends dropped off over here?' It's important to know what he's doing."

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Tyler's mom has high praise for her son. "He's always been a good kid. It's been a joy, as a mom, to watch him grow up and to see his personality. He is his own person."

Who is Tyler most like, his coach mom or banker/businessman father?

"Well," says his mother, "I say R.B. And R.B. would say Pat. I think it depends on whether it's good or bad." But seriously, Pat says she thinks their son has a good mix of their personalities, drive and dedication.

And then there is Tyler and sports.

"A lot of people see Tyler play sports, and they think that's ME, because they see my competitive spirit on the sidelines," Pat says. "But R.B. was a fierce competitor. When we were dating and played racquetball together -- well, it got to the point where we couldn't compete against each other because we had trouble going home together! Tyler is definitely competitive in whatever he does."

And what he is doing now opens up a whole new dimension to the mother/son relationship. He's playing basketball.

Tyler was about 9 years old when he decided he wanted to play basketball. He got serious about it after he tried out for the Webb Middle School team in the sixth grade.

He got cut.

“My first thought was, ‘Who would cut my son?’ I thought of it as coach Pat Summitt. Then I had to laugh and tell myself, ‘You’re not a coach, you’re a parent.’ And I never want anyone to give Tyler Summitt anything because he’s my son or because he is Tyler Summitt. Only if he deserves it, and he has to earn it.”

Tyler’s nanny, LaTina, had given Pat an overview of the event and told her that Tyler was upset. Pat found Tyler sitting in his room, basketballs under each arm.

“He starts telling me, and tears are coming down. And I said, ‘Well, Tyler, you know, there’s a lot of talented people at your school. All I can tell you is that if you wear out both those balls that you’ve got under your arms in the next year, and you really work on your game, you’ll make it next year.’”

How did the coach’s son handle being cut?

“It was no big deal,” he says now, with the typical nonchalance of a young teen. “But I went back to school, and everybody was like, ‘I hate basketball,’ because nobody (among the sixth-graders) made it. I didn’t say that, though. I picked up the basketball and started working.”

This year, Tyler is a point guard on the Webb Middle School B Team. “I’ve, like, started eight or nine times,” he is quick to add.

Today, Tyler wants to practice basketball, so Pat changes into sweats, and they go outside in the cul-de-sac. Mom definitely has her game face on -- and so does Tyler. He shoots from different positions, and he has to make five shots in a row before he can move to the next spot.

“We keep going until he’s made about 100 shots,” his mom explains.

And she’s coaching: “You dropped your hands. ... Get your focus. ... Good one. ... See what you can do when you focus.”

When Pat announces, “Push-ups if you don’t make the next five,” LaTina gets nervous. Her 2-year-old daughter, Rheagan, is running around Tyler, and she thinks it’s hard for Tyler to focus with so much going on. She starts to count the shots aloud, bouncing her son, Will, on her hip. “I am very protective of Tyler,” she explains with a smile.

Having Rheagan and Will as part of the extended family is enjoyable, Pat says. “And I couldn’t do what I do without LaTina,” Pat says of the young woman who, now that Tyler is a teenager, is more of a personal assistant for Pat than a nanny. “She does so many, many things -- not just for Tyler, but for me.”

When Tyler has made four sets of five shots, they take a break. “He’s a good ball-handler,” says his mother, with pride. “And he really has an amazing understanding of the game for a 13-year-old.”

And while they are stopped for a minute, mother and son pose for a Mother's Day shot for the News Sentinel photographer.

Tyler's eyes are intense as he thinks about the 80 shots he still has on his practicing agenda.

And Pat -- who minutes before coached "Concentrate on follow-through. Don't be a lazy shooter" -- is looking at her little boy, and her eyes are filled with love.