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Bills' draft pick Wang made for this moment

By Tim Graham
ESPN.com

Robert and Nancy Wang were determined to produce an athlete.

Even before their firstborn was conceived, they had plans. They were members of the Chinese track and field team but emigrated because they



Fifth-round pick Ed Wang could become the first full-blooded Chinese player to make an NFL roster.

knew training methods and opportunities were superior in the U.S. The Wangs had a son, and when he was 6 they started him on speed work. He lifted weights when he was 10.

The NBA was their dream, but that was dashed before he entered high school. They traveled back to the motherland for bone scans to predict his height. The results were disappointing, but not derailing.

If they couldn't manufacture a basketball player, then they would concentrate on football.

And if football didn't work out, then they would've switched to track and field or to hockey or to powerlifting or to the Iditarod.

"They've had my back 100 percent ever since I was a little kid," [Ed Wang](#) said of his parents. "I could have moved to Alaska and they would have followed me there and trained me."

Thankfully, the Wangs' vision quest didn't come to that. The switch from hoops to football sufficed.

Two weeks ago, the [Buffalo Bills](#) drafted Ed Wang, an offensive tackle from Virginia Tech, in the fifth round. If he makes the roster as expected he will become the first full-blooded Chinese player in NFL history.

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It is very important to him and to us to change the history of the NFL.

"-- Robert Wang, father of Buffalo Bills' fifth-round pick Ed Wang

"We're really proud of this kid," Robert Wang said. "He's been working hard since he was very little, setting his goal with us. He always keep it in his mind what needs to be done. It is very important to him and to us to change the history of the NFL."

Ed Wang will strap on his Bills helmet for the first time Friday, when new head coach Chan Gailey conducts the first rookie camp.

For the Wang family it will be a milestone in validating the master plan they set forth two decades ago and continue with Ed's little brother, David Wang, a redshirt freshman guard at Virginia Tech.

"Ed understands how important this was for his parents." Robert Wang said. "We came from China to the States with our goal that our kids were going to be athletes.

"We educated them since a very early age. We always told them 'You have potential to be athletes, whether it's football or basketball or shot put. You're going to be athletes. To be among the top athletes, it's going to take a lot of effort.' So we've been teaching them since they were very young: 'If you want to get a better life, better results for your future, you better work hard at an early age.' They understand this."

As obsessed as Robert and Nancy Wang might seem to ordinary folks, they probably shouldn't be confused with overbearing parents such as Marv Marinovich or Mike Agassi, men who drove their sons to greatness and then to the brink with obsessive methods applied in the cradle.

Todd Marinovich is the ultimate cautionary tale of a father pushing his son too hard to be a great athlete. Marv Marinovich had a great career at USC but flamed out in the NFL. So he bred his son to be an NFL star for him.

That doesn't seem to be the case with the Wangs, even though Robert and Nancy left China without being able to compete in the Olympics.

"I'm grateful that they did it because what I went through as a child, a lot of the stuff that I did was harder than anything I've done even at college or high school," Ed Wang said.

"This is what we've been working for ever since I was a little kid. I can say 'we' because they have been a part of this journey since Day 1. My parents remind me to keep striving and keep working."

Robert Wang was a high jumper with a personal best of 7 feet, 2 inches, but he claimed Nancy was the star. He called her a "dominant" 100-meter hurdler, China's greatest. She should've appeared in two Olympics, but didn't. She was denied that opportunity in the 1980 Moscow Games because of the international boycott protesting the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. She suffered an injury before the 1984 Los Angeles Games and couldn't participate.

Ed Wang insisted he has no knowledge of his parents' track exploits. They've never been discussed, and he never has been compelled to ask.

While some might be alarmed by the Wangs' training philosophies for children, there are cultural reasons for them.

Dr. George T. Haley, author of "The Chinese Tao of Business" and professor at the University of New Haven (Conn.), explained competition is paramount in Asian cultures. Haley mentioned, for example, the gratitude speedskater Apolo Ohno shows for his Japanese father's rigid training demands at an early age.

"Winning is tremendously important to Asian cultures in general," Haley said. "If an individual is successful, then the way you got there was acceptable. It proves their moral worth to be successful."

Also to consider: Ed Wang's parents were products of a national sports program that identifies star athletes at an early age and isolates them for training purposes.

"They're surrounded by nothing but other kids being trained to be Olympic athletes," Haley said. "It's all they know, people training for world competition."

Ed Wang's parents haven't steered him wrong yet.

Those bone scans performed for the Chinese junior national basketball program before Wang's freshman year of high school proved correct. Wang did grow to be 6-foot-5, inadequate for a center, the position he'd played almost since he learned to dribble. It was too late in his development to learn a new position. There aren't many 300-pound point guards anyway.

With the concentration shifted to football, Ed Wang's opponents went from delivering racial insults to respecting him -- even fearing him. He became a star tight end and defensive lineman at Stone Bridge High in Virginia and earned several scholarship offers. Parents started asking Robert Wang to train their kids.

"I can tell in high school, the first year, lots of other kids saw him and me working a lot," Robert Wang said. "I noticed coaches had different feelings, so I left them alone. I didn't push them. Sophomore year, Ed got a scholarship offer, and everybody understands what I did for Ed was worth the work.

"Ever since then I've been working with high school kids left and right. They recognized. I don't see any criticism from parents. A lot of parents don't know the sport or know what needs to be done. They don't understand what we're doing until they see the results."

The Bills might turn out to be most indebted to Robert Wang's tutelage. They've needed help at tackle for three years and surrendered 46 sacks last year.

Ed Wang was the first offensive tackle the Bills drafted since 2008, and the earliest they've drafted one since they took [Mike Williams](#) fourth overall in 2002.

Ed Wang said he thinks he'll remain at left tackle. If so, then he will compete with incumbent starter [Demetrius Bell](#), who is coming off a knee injury.

Breaking into the starting lineup in many ways is more important to Ed Wang than making NFL history. While his Chinese heritage is tremendously important to him, he knows if he doesn't establish himself as



Ed Wang says he won't be content just making the Bills' roster. "If I don't play, it's not going to matter if I was the first Chinese-American player in the NFL because I didn't do anything."

a football player, his notable entry will be rendered a football footnote.

Yao Ming, the NBA's first Chinese star, wouldn't be a national hero if he were riding the pine in Houston.

"I wouldn't mind people knowing me as the first Chinese-American football player," Ed Wang said, "but when it comes down to it I have to perform for the Buffalo Bills.

"My objective is to be a football player in the NFL. If I don't play, it's not going to matter if I was the first Chinese-American player in the NFL because I didn't do anything. My perspective is I have to accomplish something first."

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