

# JUPITER

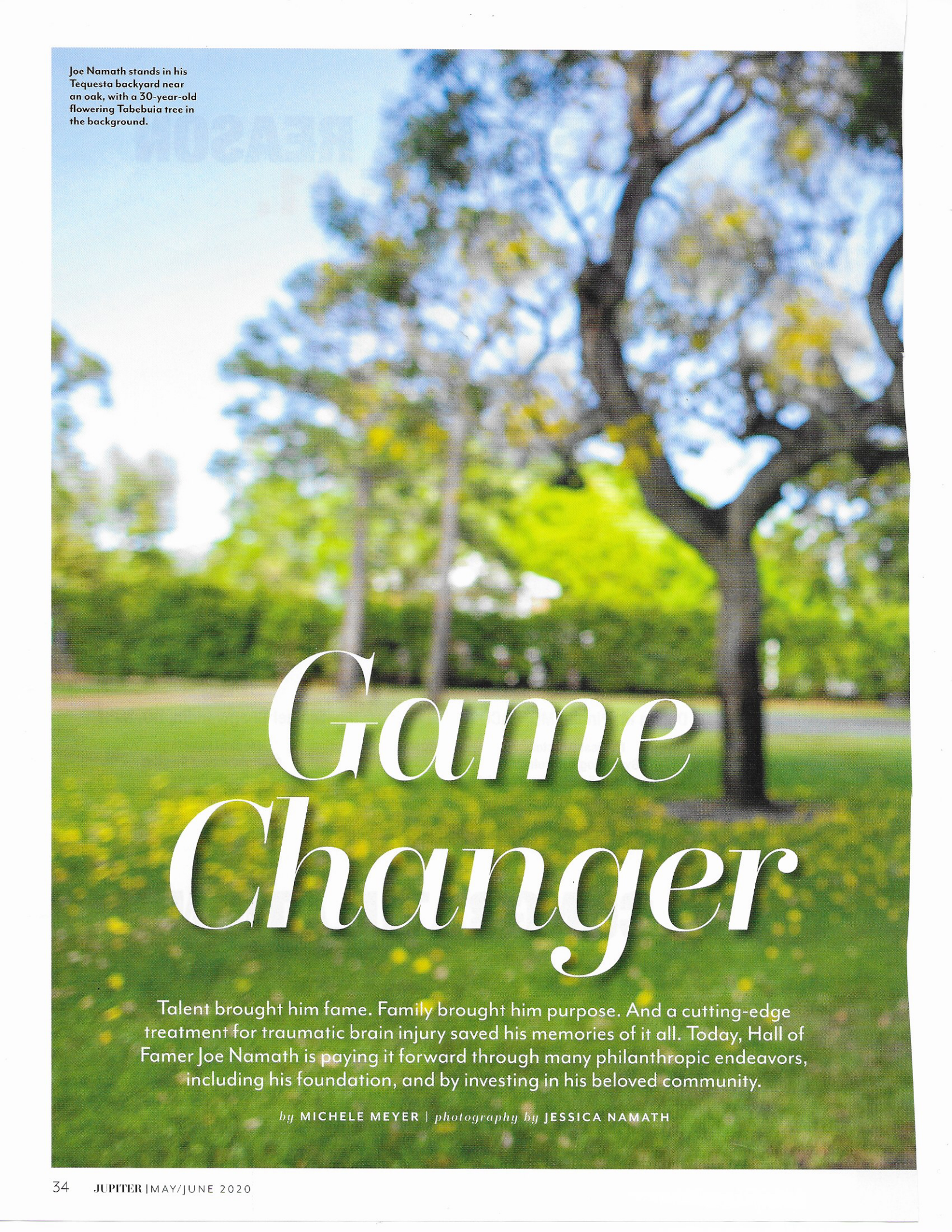
MAGAZINE

**JOE  
NAMATH**  
"OUR HEALTH IS  
OUR MOST TAKEN  
FOR GRANTED  
LUXURY"

**TOTAL  
WELLNESS**  
WONDER HERBS,  
NUTRITION TIPS,  
AND MORE

**MINDFULNESS  
MEDITATION**  
THE HEALING  
POWER OF  
STILLNESS





Joe Namath stands in his Tequesta backyard near an oak, with a 30-year-old flowering Tabebuia tree in the background.

# Game Changer

Talent brought him fame. Family brought him purpose. And a cutting-edge treatment for traumatic brain injury saved his memories of it all. Today, Hall of Famer Joe Namath is paying it forward through many philanthropic endeavors, including his foundation, and by investing in his beloved community.

by MICHELE MEYER | photography by JESSICA NAMATH







“Our health is our most taken for granted luxury.”

—JOE NAMATH

When the New York Jets upset the Baltimore Colts to win Super Bowl III, it was one of the most surprising moments in NFL history to many fans. But not to their quarterback. The 26-year-old from Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania had, now famously, “guaranteed” that his team would pull it off. The year was 1969, and it forever cemented “Broadway Joe” as an American football superstar.

These days, Joe Namath is one of the area’s most famous residents, living a quiet life in Tequesta and caring more about family and philanthropy than the trappings of fame. The 73-year-old’s idea of a party is celebrating his grandson’s

birthday in his kitchen with family and longtime friends. And his biggest challenge, after 13 years in pro ball, has been his health.

Injuries sustained on the field throughout his career led to broken bones, torn hamstrings, and knees so battered he underwent multiple surgeries. Repeated concussions left him with traumatic brain injury (TBI) post-retirement.

“Our health is our most taken for granted luxury,” says Namath, who had both knees replaced in 1992. “Our bodies are not designed to have head trauma or our knees going sideways.”

Back in Namath’s day on the gridiron, blows to the noggin were almost joked about, referred to as “getting your bell rung,” not serious concussions. His memories of his head injuries: impact followed by waking to smelling salts. In other words, disconcerting, but no big deal. Over time, though, he began witnessing other players experiencing declining brain function, including a former teammate. “Here was this tough guy with fear in his eyes, voice, and face,” he recalls thinking at the time.

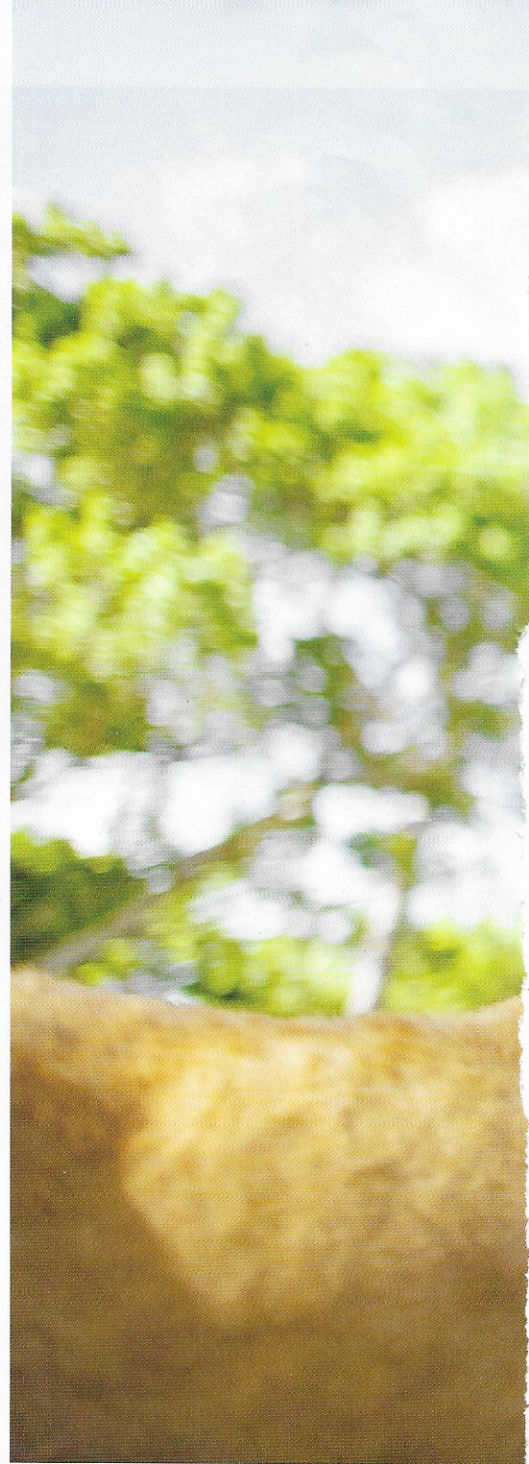
Knowing that he had lost consciousness multiple times, Namath began to question his memory. The bad news: Initial brain scans in 2012 showed minimal blood flow to the left side of his brain.



Namath with his friend and neighbor Dr. Lee Fox (left); giving some love to his beloved American dingo, Alexander—aka “Zander” (above).

The good news: “I could do something about it.”

That “something,” he says, is called hyperbaric oxygen therapy. The medical treatment has long been used for scuba divers who suffer from decompression sickness. Since injured brain tissue needs increased oxygen to thrive and heal, local radiologist Dr. Lee Fox (Namath’s neighbor and friend) and general surgeon Dr. Barry Miskin believed the therapy would help Namath’s TBI.







Over eight months, the former NFL star took 120 multi-hour “dives” in a chamber with triple the normal air pressure. The therapy did indeed restore blood flow, and, says Namath, “my brain has stayed healthy.” He credits the treatment for substantially restoring his memory.

Before playing football at the University of Alabama under legendary coach Paul William “Bear” Bryant, and before becoming pro ball’s top-paid player when he joined the Jets, Namath led a modest life as the youngest of five

children in the steel-mill town of Beaver Falls, north of Pittsburgh. His parents each juggled multiple jobs and divorced when Namath was 12. By then, his siblings, 6 to 12 years his senior, had already moved on. Namath spent his summers working part-time as a caddy as well as for the parks and recreation department, and he played basketball, baseball, and football throughout high school. “Sports were my entertainment and escape from the rest of the world,” he says. He was athletic, but a lack of

height handicapped his success on the field. Raised Catholic, he would pray to Saint Jude for a growth spurt—and before graduation, he had sprouted about six inches, to 6-foot-2. “I prefer to think of St. Jude as the saint of difficult tasks, not hopeless causes,” says Namath, who has worn a medallion of the saint around his neck ever since.

As Beaver Falls High School’s star quarterback in 1960, Namath led his team to a state championship with a 10-0 record. “I worked hard, was quick









Above and left: Namath loves horsing around with his grandchildren, 9-year-old Jemma and 3-year-old John.

on my feet, and had good hands and eyesight," he says. Unfortunately, his college entrance exam scores blocked him from his dream to play at the University of Maryland. But then coach Bryant brought him to Tuscaloosa. He arrived in Alabama amid racial tension and segregation, which was a shock and a huge adjustment for Namath. "There was one table in the cafeteria where we 'Northern guys' sat," he recalls. That's where he met fellow student Jimmy Walsh, whose mother was Hungarian, as were Namath's grandparents. "We've been friends ever since," Namath says of Walsh, who is now vice president of the Joe Namath Foundation.

Namath's time at Alabama wasn't perfect. In fact, Bryant benched him for the final two games of his junior year for carousing. But he has also called the footballer "the greatest athlete I've ever coached." And Namath says his time spent with the Crimson Tide provided many life lessons, as he reaffirms in his autobiography, *All the Way: My Life in Four Quarters* (Little, Brown and Company, 2019). "Coach Bryant always said we remember the times we lost quicker than the times we won," recalls Namath. "It's so true." In 1964, however, Alabama won the NCAA national championship—and the Saint Louis Cardinals and the

New York Jets both came calling.

Namath decided to go with the Jets because of its leadership. Coach Weeb Ewbank, after all, had won two consecutive NFL championships, in 1958 and 1959, as head coach of the Baltimore Colts. When Namath started with the Jets, his right knee was already shot. "I was lucky to even get into pro football with my knee injury from my senior year in college," he says. But his determination led him to complete a record 4,007 passing yards in a 14-game season that year. And just four years into his pro career, he won a Super Bowl.

He was a sports star living in New York City, with green eyes, dimples on his cheeks and chin, a dazzling smile, and a head of curly hair. All of which didn't hurt him off the field. He quickly became one of the first athletes to pitch products, including popcorn makers, bedding, Ovaltine, Noxzema shaving cream, and Hanes pantyhose—the last memorably worn by himself in a television ad along with his No. 12 Jets jersey and emerald satin boxer shorts. He also acted in a string of '70s and '80s films, including *C.C. and Company*, *Chattanooga Choo Choo*, and *Avalanche Express*, and appeared in a slew of television shows—*The Brady Bunch*, *ALF*, *Married...with*



“Without people to rely on, we’d be lonely, and without people to share it, how good would happiness be?” —JOE NAMATH

*Children, The A-Team, Fantasy Island, and The Love Boat* to name a few.

Despite his fame as Broadway Joe, he says, “what stands out most [about that time] was feeling lonely in New York City’s hubbub. It made me feel really small.” Florida, on the other hand, had been calling his name for years. His love affair with the state began back when he was still in college. He recalls the day in 1963 when he flew from Pittsburgh to Miami for a New Year’s Day Alabama game. “Silver dollar-size snowflakes were falling when I left Pennsylvania, and when I stepped out of the plane in Miami, I couldn’t believe what I saw,” he says. “I just took to the greenery, blue skies, and fresh air. The tempo here agrees with me physically and mentally.”

He decided to move to Florida in 1970, while still playing for the Jets, settling on Miami Springs. Later, he lived in Fort Lauderdale, where he owned a nightclub. In 1988, a realtor suggested another move—to Tequesta—and he’s been in his home on the Loxahatchee River ever since. “There’s nowhere else in the world I’d rather be than right here,” he says.

Namath’s football career ended in 1977, after he left the Jets for the Los Angeles Rams and decided to hang up his cleats after just one season with his new team. And before getting to the place he is now, he admits, he struggled a bit personally over the next stretch of his life. He married then divorced 16 years later, had two daughters—Jessica, now 34, and Olivia, now 29, whom he raised with sole custody—and faced a battle with “Slick,” his nickname for alcohol. “It was a tough time for all of us emotionally,” he says of those years. “But we’re all healthy. That’s the important thing.” He quit alcohol for good in 2003. “I’m sure as heck not proud of everything I’ve done,” he says. “I’ve made so many mistakes.... In the shame, I found strength. You’ve got to try to be your best for your family, friends, and everyone around you.”

Since then, he has focused his attention on his daughters, his five grandchildren, and helping others. “There is no love stronger than the love

you have for your family and they have for you,” he says. “Without people to rely on, we’d be lonely, and without people to share it, how good would happiness be?”

“Not all folks are as fortunate as we are,” he continues. “Those who have the wherewithal and desire need to help those born into humble circumstances. We need to make this a better world for everybody.” To that end, Namath has participated in the March of Dimes’ March for Babies (formerly called Walk America) and contributed to the Special Olympics and United Way. And in 2017, he launched the Joe Namath Foundation to benefit the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, other children’s charities, and neurological research. The Pro Football Hall of Famer—whose second sports-career choice was golf—holds three celebrity golf tournaments annually, raising millions at resorts in Jupiter; Birmingham, Alabama; and Bethpage, New York. He credits teamwork for what his foundation is able to accomplish. “Without the sponsors, pros, and entertainers, we wouldn’t be able to do this,” he says. “It’s us, not me.”

Here in Jupiter, he’s also involved with the much-anticipated Love Street project. As an investor, he’s behind two restaurants that are scheduled to open before year’s end as part of the \$30 million waterfront marketplace—one casual and family-friendly and the other more upscale. “It’s a happening area,” he says of the two-acre site near the Square Grouper that will also include retail spaces, commercial offices, and boat slips.

He certainly keeps himself busy these days, but he always makes time for his family. “Thank God for FaceTime,” he says when his phone rings. He answers with a smile: “Yes, ma’am.” It’s his daughter Jessica, who has video-called so he can watch his grandson John ride on a carousel. “Nice going, buddy,” Namath encourages him. “You ride that horse!”

Returning to the interview, he reflects on it all: “I’m a very lucky man and am so thankful for the life I’ve been able to live.” ♦





Namath sits out on his porch in Tequesta.