



# Beyond the sidelines

Laurier's Michael Faulds, the top university football coach in Canada, is a man for all (two) seasons

BY PHIL ANDREWS

PHOTOGRAPHY • ALISHA TOWNSEND

**I**n the household of Canada's best university football head coach, there are two seasons.

"In-season" is the shorter of these – at least according to the number of calendar days it takes up. It's the period that sees Michael Faulds present far less frequently as house-chef, husband for his wife, Stacey, and doting dad to his young children – Chloe, 3, and Lucas, born on Jan. 1.

"There's completely different sides to my year," says Faulds, 33, head football coach of Wilfrid Laurier University's Golden Hawks

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The Faulds family – Chloe, Michael, Stacey and Lucas – loves spending time in the backyard of their Kitchener home.



**TOP:** Laurier football coach Michael Faulds talks to his players during a practice at University Stadium.  
PHOTOGRAPHY • MATHEW MCCARTHY

**LEFT:** Western quarterback Michael Faulds is tackled in 2005 during a loss to the team he now leads.  
PHOTOGRAPHY • MATHEW MCCARTHY

**RIGHT:** A proven winner, Michael Faulds helped hoist the Ontario championship Yates Cup twice as a Western quarterback. He did it again last fall as coach of the Laurier Golden Hawks.

and the most recent winner of the Frank Tindall Trophy for Canadian university football coach of the year.

Standing in a corner of the family's kitchen, on an "off-season" Saturday morning, Faulds speaks matter-of-factly of the remarkable "in-season" work-day hours he often tackles. They tend to see him arrive at the office at about 4 a.m. and roll home around 10 p.m. He logs these "extremely long days" from his team's August training camp until its final game. In good years, such as last year, when his team won the Ontario championship, the final game is played in November.

"If it's 5:30 or 6 a.m., that's where I've had a good sleep. But there have been many occasions where it's 1:30 or 2 a.m. and I'm into the office then," Faulds says.

That said, heading into the office is not considered going to work.

"I very rarely ever wake up to an alarm.... I'll just wake up with an excitement about what I have to accomplish that day. So, 'in-season,' that could be game planning. That could be scripting plays. That could be booking buses for an away-game at Carleton (University), in Ottawa. That

could be calling to make meal plans for the players. It could be any number of things – alumni relations, game-day marketing. So there are many different hats you wear as a head football coach in Canada. And I also enjoy all those hats I have to wear."

Faulds says he squeezes in family time while "in-season." Ironically, one place that happens is on game days at the Golden Hawks' stadium – with a few caveats.

Stacey is no stranger to university football games. She was even a Western University cheerleader back when she struck up a relationship with the Mustangs' star quarterback of the day – whom she later married.

"We were friends through friends," says Stacey, 33. "I was pretty against ever wanting to date Michael because of that cliché: cheerleader-football player. But he kind of stole my heart and it went from there."

Stacey has continued going to football fields to cheer on "Michael," even as he's become "Coach Faulds." Stacey and Chloe were regular parts of the coach's local game days last year – and Lucas is to be a part of that this season. But while the Faulds family flock gathers to watch the Golden Hawks' field boss work, they don't interact with him "ever" before the game – or during it, says Stacey. Post-game reunions, however, are prized.

"Other times of the year is when I really get my family fix, and in the summer there is a ton of time for that, which is great, in the lead-up to the season," Faulds says.

The family also cherishes travelling.

Stacey, an events manager for a London-based marketing-support business, says they work to have a vacation to a hot destination each year and also an annual trip that offers "adventure." Correspondingly, their passports feature stamps for such locales as Jamaica, Mexico, Chile and Europe – not to mention several short getaways to places such as Boston, New York and Chicago.



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Stacey also travels frequently for work – a gig that has seen her engaged in such marquee events and marketing functions as a past Super Bowl and NBA All-Star Game.

The Fauldses say they couldn't swing her work-travel and his "in-season" schedule without their parents helping out on domestic duties. The family resides about equal distances from Michael's folks, in Eden Mills just east of Guelph, and from Stacey's mother and father, in London.

"We get a lot of help from our support system," says Stacey.

They also savour retreating to a special spot of their home property – their wide, forest-encircled rear yard.

"The biggest thing for us is the backyard. We love being outdoors and just having a forest, looking at the greenery," says Stacey. Their home is at the end of a quiet cul-de-

sac in the West Laurentian area of Kitchener and the property backs onto a sprawling conservation space. Faulds says a lot of people wonder why he doesn't live closer to the Laurier campus. But he says the 15-minute commute is good for him. The drive offers him thinking time – as do five- and 10-kilometre runs he makes certain to get in regularly. And, he says, the length of the drive to Laurier also makes it less tempting to sneak into work – particularly "on a family day."

It is clear Faulds can quickly lose himself in pondering how to keep building momentum surrounding the Laurier football program. And time scrambles by when he does. Even in "off-season."

He says the members of his coaching staff sometimes think he's "crazy" for things he jumps into at work. One such instance was

two years ago when Faulds solo-shovelled the team's snow-glaciered practice field – in February – so the team would not have to cancel its regular spring camp in March.

"And my players think I'm crazy too – like we'll practice in blizzards. We'll practice when it's a monsoon coming down of rain. Just not having any excuses is big for me and not having any regrets. So what I don't want is for something bad to go and happen that following season and for me to say, "Well, if we didn't have to cancel all those practices, then, maybe, we could have done this or that."

Faulds says he tries to teach his coaches and players to live a regret-free life by making "good decisions" and finding ways to solve challenging problems.

Faulds says he also believes in setting structures that maintain accountability for

him and for the team – with no "cutting corners."

Some of these structures come home too – so he's accountable and available as "Daddy" and husband Michael and taking a break from being Coach Faulds. For example, there are rules for his at-home cellphone use.

"No phones at the dinner table," says Stacey, offering one example. "And, he's good at that."

Faulds says it's not keeping up with the considerable volume of work email that sees him needing forced breaks from his smartphone. Rather, he says, the recruiting end of what he does obliges him to be vigorously engaged in social media and texting to woo and relate to potential future players.

"When we try to convince 17-, 18-year-

olds to come to Laurier, you have to be able to communicate with them. So, even in my short time in coaching, it used to be, you know, you call the family house and you make a call (at the house.) No longer will 17-, 18-year-olds respond to that."

Surveying tweets from @MichaelFaulds provides evidence he's fluent in the ways and messaging of 2017 recruiting.

Having the constant connection to individuals in the 17-to-23 age range that his job requires keeps him young "physically and mentally," Faulds says. Not that he's ever finding himself feeling old.

"Not yet," he says. "But let's see where I am after my kids get a few years older."

And, after a run of "in-seasons" that stretch into Novembers, if Faulds has his way. 📞

#### FAULDS FOOTBALL FILE

- Won two Yates Cups as a Western University Mustangs quarterback
  - Ended career at Western in 2009 with 10,811 passing yards
  - Served as York University football team's offensive co-ordinator from 2010 to 2012
  - Hired as Golden Hawks head coach 2013
  - Regular season win-loss record with Laurier: 16-16 (as of 2016)
  - Won Yates Cup as coach (2016)
  - Named Ontario and Canadian universities coach of the year (2016)
- Source: Laurier Athletics



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