

QB Rocco Becht's leadership sets standard at Penn State by 'guiding, uplifting and yet always working'
By Andrew Mercer

When Rocco Becht was a junior in high school, he approached his father, 12-year NFL veteran Anthony Becht, and asked, "What does it take to be the best?"

Becht had already been throwing the football at an elite level since his early days in flag football, but when he inherited the starting quarterback role at Wiregrass Ranch High School in Wesley Chapel, Florida, he knew sacrifices had to be made to become the quarterback he wanted to be.

Thus came countless hours of training that prepared Becht for college recruiting. Mental coaching was a part of that, and he developed strong habits that reinforced his determination. By getting up early, watching extra film and throwing more passes, he made it known he was putting in the work.

"That is the standard — there is no other way to do this," Anthony told The Daily Collegian. "Young receivers, other quarterbacks, they see that the example is set at the highest level. I can almost promise you that if you ask any of his teammates, they're gonna say, 'Man, the dude is there always.' He's always guiding, uplifting and yet always working."

As Becht enters his first and only season as a Nittany lion, those traits haven't left him.

Going hand-in-hand with his ambitious reputation, Becht has been known as a fiery competitor since his childhood. Becht grew up in a house where everything was a competition, and he quickly developed an unquenchable thirst for victory.

"He was super competitive," Anthony said. "Anything we did — board games, horse, whatever it may be — the loser was gonna be crying at the end of the day."

Offensive coordinator Taylor Mouser has seen Becht's competitive flame time and time again at Iowa State and now Penn State. He even took the time to publicly oust Becht as someone who cheats on the golf course because of his desire to win.

"He's got competitive excellence. He's a guy that, until the last second ticks off, you're always going to feel like you have a chance," Mouser said on Feb. 4. "When you're playing him in the driveway. It's, 'no, next goal wins.' He'll go until he wins."

Becht was a 3-star recruit out of high school and only had two Power Four offers from Iowa State and Ole Miss. Matt Campbell took a chance on him, and it paid off. He's now the

winningest returning starter in college football and is playing at one of the biggest brands in the country.

“To be able to think of where I am right now at one of the most prestigious, historic programs in college football, I'm super blessed,” Becht said on Tuesday. “This wasn't on my agenda, so now that I am here, I'm super excited to be a part of it.”

In the seasons Becht spent on the bench earlier in his career, he made it a point to study how the starting quarterback acted on and off the field, assessing whether those actions were positive or negative. Through that, he was subconsciously crafting a mental image of what he believed a leader should look like.

When it came time to transition to college football, Becht had the foundational trait required of a team leader: adaptability. He brought his skill at making connections to Iowa State, fostering years-long relationships that carried over to Penn State when many followed Campbell to Happy Valley.

“My leadership style is probably ‘adaptable,’” Becht said at local media day on Aug. 7. “I'm a great connector, in my opinion, no matter where you come from, your background, your history, your ethnicity, your race, I feel like I'm able to connect with everyone. When we go through bad times on the field, I'm able to talk to anyone, lift anyone up.”

It's his adaptability that's allowed him to earn the respect of his teammates. Rather than taking the same approach with everyone, he's learned how to apply specific knowledge about those players to tailor his leadership to them.

“Not everyone's led the same. There will be guys you can get on if you have a closer relationship with them, but there's guys that you have to bring to the side because they may be a hothead and they have to be talked to one-on-one,” Becht said. “Knowing where everyone comes from and knowing their background is huge so that's what I try to do.”

When he arrived in State College, it was a foreign environment he didn't know too much about before transferring. Becht took it upon himself to introduce himself to every new person he saw in the facility, beginning to build relationships wherever possible.

When Becht decided to transfer to Penn State, he asked general manager Derek Hoodjer for any phone numbers he had to reach out to his new teammates.

At the same time, Becht was dealing with lingering injuries to both of his shoulders that temporarily sidelined him. Although he wasn't able to work on his craft, Becht established himself as a key leadership figure.

"Rocco's in a completely different space than I've seen him really in his career," Campbell said Aug. 20. "He's had great command of what we're trying to accomplish offensively, but the biggest thing that a great quarterback does is he leads the team. If the entire locker room is willing to fight for the quarterback, then you got a pretty special leader on your hands."

Campbell had a pyramid of core values installed on the wall of the Lasch Building meeting room with motivational words that demonstrate the kind of culture he's trying to build at Penn State. Becht's teammates have noticed how his growth as a leader closely coincides with many of the emphasized traits, and how he's leaning into Penn State's identity.

"Rocco's Rocco at the end of the day," wide receiver Zay Robinson said. "Rocco's gonna come in and be that leader and be the best teammate every day. You can look at any word on (the pyramid) — loyalty, humility. That man is gritty. He's gonna do whatever it takes for the team to win, no matter what it is."

Running back Carson Hansen also used the word "gritty" to describe his long-time quarterback, but in a different sense. It's in the way Becht handles adversity, yet another one of the concepts on the wall, and is something that his father noted as well.

For Becht, everything boils down to his ability to "stay present." Whether it be at practice, in games or simply spending time with his teammates off of the field, he's voiced that it's important for him to focus on what's happening in front of him.

"You're gonna have bad days, you're gonna have good days, but it's how you bounce back from it," Becht said. "It's how you stay consistent with it."

Additionally, Campbell has made clear his philosophy of being "tied at the hip" with his quarterback. He has connected with Becht on a personal level off the field, noting that his faith in himself is what makes him a special player to coach.

Campbell has emphasized the importance of training elite football players. With Becht buying into the core tenets of Campbell's cultural push, their relationship has only grown at Penn State.

"I believe Penn State football is integrity, character, class, excellence, grit. He embodies every one of those traits," Campbell said on National Signing Day in February. "He's one of the greatest leaders I've ever been around."

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https://www.psucollegian.com/football/qb-rocco-becht-s-leadership-sets-standard-at-penn-state-by-guiding-uplifting-and-yet/article_1baabb5f-5e4c-4240-a40e-b9c4917b98bc.html