

BY DAN EMERSON  
PHOTO BY MARSHALL FRANKLIN LONG



## Pads to Pavement

Bryan Cipala leaves the gridiron behind to tackle the custom-concrete business.

**BRYAN CIPALA LOVES FOOTBALL.** That doesn't exactly make him unique in Viking-crazy Maple Grove, Minn. But Cipala REALLY loves football. He loves the game enough to have spent seven seasons knocking shoulders with 300-pound offensive tackles in the Mid-America Football League for no pay while working 40 hours a week as a concrete laborer. Along the way, he sustained broken and dislocated fingers and a torn knee ligament.

Cipala, who played defensive end and outside linebacker through high school, college and the MFL, finally chose to retire after last season. Now that he's reached the age of 30, the bruises and aches don't heal as fast, and he's also spending more time on the business he launched in 2007: Cipala Decorative Concrete.

While it's considered by some as a semi-pro football league, the MFL—the premier nonprofit minor league/amateur football organization in the Midwest—is made up of players participating solely

for the love of the game, while some hope for opportunities in the National Football League, Canada or Europe. Cipala, who spent his early years growing up in Texas and played football since age 6, attributes his love of the game to the same reasons that have motivated amateur athletes since ancient times: the thrill of competition, the challenge—and the dream of being a pro, someday, somehow.

A Maple Grove resident for the past three years, Cipala was an All-Conference and All-State defensive end/outside linebacker at Robbinsdale High School, graduating in 1998. At the University of Minnesota-Rochester, he captained the team and helped win a national championship. In 2002, Cipala turned down a scholarship offer from Winona State University for his final two years of college eligibility, opting to stay home in the Twin Cities to play semi-pro football with the St. Paul Pioneers (North American Football League) and work for St. Paul-based Hage Concrete

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Works. Later that season, he switched to the Twin Cities Lumberjacks team and went on to play six more seasons. “My first two years in the league, I was hoping to get the opportunity to move to the next level—either Europe or the NFL,” Cipala says. “But after the third season, I realized that wasn't going to happen.”

At the semi-pro level, Cipala was slightly undersize for his position, at 6-foot-1 and 240 pounds. But he's tough. And it's debatable which is tougher: semi-pro football or breaking and hauling concrete by hand eight hours a day. Regardless, the two careers dovetailed.

In college, Cipala had also worked summers as a concrete laborer to stay in shape for football. The job provided better conditioning for football than lifting weights in a gym would have, he notes. The various movements involved in lifting and carrying concrete were a closer match to throwing body weight into a football opponent. And working under a hot sun obviously provided a better fit for football conditions than an air-conditioned gym.

Cipala Decorative Concrete produces custom installations for homeowners, using concrete that is colored and stamped with designs, such as a faux-stone appearance. “I like to put a special twist on everything I do,” he says.

Since concrete is a seasonal business in these parts, Cipala spends the winter months working as a supervisor for Barrett-Jackson Automobilia, an auction house, in Scottsdale, Ariz. He got the job through a referral by the Lumberjacks' owner, Rory Brinkman, who says Cipala has certain qualities that should help him succeed as a business-owner: “As a player he was extremely driven, and he has a very good work ethic. He was always one of the last guys to leave the practice field. That carries over to his life.” //



To learn more about Cipala's custom-concrete business and see examples of his work, visit [cipalaconcrete.com](http://cipalaconcrete.com).