

# MAKING NEWS



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Sportswriter **IVAN CARTER '97** is moving up from the *Kansas City Star* to the *Washington Post*.

By Mike Ludwig '03

**F**ormer Ole wide receiver Ivan Carter '97 will have a banner year in 2005. Not only is he marrying his St. Olaf sweetheart, Serene Senkler '97, a high school science teacher, Carter has left the *Kansas City Star* and taken a sports-writing job at *The Washington Post*. He'll report to *Post* editor Emilio Garcia-Ruiz, a former *St. Paul Pioneer Press* sports editor for whom he did a summer internship in his senior year at St. Olaf. It's a dream job for Carter, who will cover University of Maryland football and other college athletics.

"The internship at the *Pioneer Press* led to my first job covering high school sports at the *Kansas City Star*," says Carter, a beat reporter who recently has covered the Kansas City Chiefs football team. He spent three years as a writer, sports editor and managing editor on the St. Olaf student newspaper, the *Manitou Messenger*. "I loved it," he says, "although it did get a little hectic when a typical day included class, football practice, coverage of a sporting event and then a few hours at the paper. Somehow, I managed to squeeze in study time and plenty of trips to the Rueb. It's all about time management, baby."

Born and raised in Minneapolis, Carter moved to Red Wing at age 15 to live with his grandmother, Sheila Vogland. "Basically, I had no direction and was getting into a lot of trouble in Minneapolis, so my mom sent me packing *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*-style," he explains. "I started high school in Red Wing, and sports took over my life. I played basketball and some football, but the best thing was that I got involved in the Upward Bound summer program following my freshman year."

Upward Bound is one of six TRIO programs at St. Olaf that provide academic support, guidance and intensive summer enrichment programs to under-represented students. The programs lead 85 students to and through the doors of higher education every year.

"Ivan caught hold of his potential when he was at St. Olaf and strove to take advantage of the opportunities he had," says Bill Green '77, director of Multicultural Affairs and Community Outreach and a friend and mentor to Carter. "He's always been a very outgoing guy, always has had a passion for sports, and he's made it a career."

Recently, we caught up with Carter between football games.

**Q: How did you first hear about St. Olaf?**

My grandfather, Leonard Vogland, attended St. Olaf for two years in the early 1920s and played football for the Oles. I remember looking over some old pictures of him and the football team. And I was part of the first-ever Upward Bound summer program at St. Olaf. All of us came from low-income families, with parents who never finished college. While I was always academically inclined and was an avid reader with goals, the program forced me to formulate a real plan of action.

**Q: What impacted you most as an Upward Bound student?**

As a young African-American who grew up without a father around, it was refreshing to see 18- to 22-year-old African-American men who were in college, doing the right thing. They were my surrogate role models.

Because the program drew rural white students and Native American students from Red Wing and Latino, Hmong and black students from St. Paul, I was exposed to a bunch of different cultures, languages and customs. We were all lumped together for

six weeks on this beautiful college campus, and we formed some pretty tight bonds we would never have had in our hometown high schools. You come away from that experience with a curiosity about other people and their lifestyles.

**Q: Not all Upward Bound students attend St. Olaf when they complete the program. Why did you?**

After four years in the program, I probably was as comfortable with the campus as any current St. Olaf student. Also, my grandmother loved the place so much. She was thrilled when I picked St. Olaf, and anyone who has been raised by a grandmother will tell you that making her happy is priceless. I loved the location, loved the size of the school, the buildings, the people I had already met and just the overall vibe of the place.

I just “fit” there. I was able to play sports, which was important to me. The classes were small, and that fit my academic style. I did experience some feelings of cultural isolation. The black students were very tightly knit. It bothered me when whites would ask: “Why do you guys all sit together in the cafeteria?” My response was: “Why do you guys all sit together in the cafeteria?” That would usually draw a blank look.

**Q: Who influenced you most during your years at St. Olaf?**

Oh, man, so many. It’s amazing when you look back and figure out how many people impact your life. [Professor of Philosophy] Gordon Marino was a real thinker, and he was also a wide receiver so we had a lot of cool talks about football and how sports fits into the overall fabric of society. I had a professor in Mass Communications named Adrian Hacker-Daniels. Wow. She had to be the most informed, most well-read person I’ve ever been around. I learned a lot from her courses on modern mass media. I also talked regularly with a couple of former Ole football players and good all-around guys, Bill Green ’77 and [Assistant Treasurer] Mark Gelle ’76.

**Q: What qualities do you admire most in another person?**

Open-mindedness. I love having conversations with people who are well-rounded and well-read. I picked that up at St. Olaf because I was exposed to so many people from so many different racial, economic and educational backgrounds. I had friends on the football team, but I also had friends who

didn’t know if a football was stuffed or pumped and didn’t care. They had interests in other areas.

**Q: What is your most marked characteristic?**

I’m curious and observant, and I try never to assume anything about anyone. As a journalist, I always want to know more, and I’m seldom satisfied with surface answers. The next question might be the one that lands the most interesting answer.

“The guys are always giving me a hard time because I’m sporting a St. Olaf football T-shirt or sweatshirt. I’m a proud alum.”

**Q: What would you say to a young person considering St. Olaf?**

If you are curious, if you want professors who will challenge you and if you want a well-rounded experience, go to St. Olaf. The guys in the Chiefs locker room are always giving me a hard time because I’m sporting a St. Olaf football T-shirt or sweatshirt. I’m a proud alum.

**Q: Who is your real-life hero?**

Jackie Robinson, without question. If I’m ever fortunate enough to have a son, I’ll name him Jackie Robinson Carter. To me, he represents everything that’s potentially great about human beings. He was educated, he was a great athlete and he had courage. The man put up with a whole lot of garbage so that the people who followed in his footsteps wouldn’t have to. Plus, you just have to respect a man who can steal home on a regular basis.

**Q: How have your St. Olaf experiences helped you in your career?**

We weren’t the best football team in the world while I was there, so I learned how to handle failure. That can be one of life’s harshest lessons. Things aren’t always going to go your way, but if you keep showing up every day and keep a positive outlook, things can

and will happen. And then, there is nothing in the world like coming together with a group of people and getting something done. Upsetting St. John’s when nobody thought we had a chance is something I will never forget, and ending that long losing streak to Carleton was one of the highlights of my life. Sports really can impact a person in a fundamental way.

**Q: What is the biggest challenge in your work?**

It’s great to be in a packed stadium or arena with the crowd going nuts and two teams going at it. I still get goose bumps. However, it’s not always so fun to walk into a somber losing locker room and ask the quarterback why he threw that interception. And it’s not always easy walking into that locker room when you’ve written something critical about a team or athlete. You’d better have a thick skin, and you’d better know how to communicate at all times. I learned a long time ago to never take myself too seriously.

**Q: How do you find balance when you’re stressed?**

I grab a basketball, find a hoop and start shooting. I’ve never had a bad vibe that couldn’t be fixed with a game of basketball. To me, the game is spiritual.

**Q: Who’s the most interesting person you’ve met in your career?**

I shadowed Hank Aaron the first time he visited the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City. Here was the home run king, a legend, and he was looking at photos of himself from when he was a kid. At one point, Aaron stopped in front of a photo he’d never seen: He was 16 and about to board a train from Mobile, Alabama, for Indianapolis where he would play for the Indianapolis Clowns of the Negro Leagues. He was holding a sack lunch and a small bag that contained “the only clothing I owned in the world.” Next to the photo was a letter written by the scout who signed Aaron. It read: “I think this boy has real potential.” That was an amazing experience.

**Q: What’s your motto?**

My football coach at St. Olaf, Don Canfield, had a saying, and it has always stuck with me: “The grass is green. The sky is blue. It’s a great day to be alive.” That’s what it’s all about. ■

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