

## **NFL Star Eric Decker Urges Kids to Put Down the Phone and Get Outside**

His friends would call his house on summer days, and if Eric Decker wasn't home, they knew exactly where to find him.

Decker grew up in a small town in Minnesota called Cold Spring. At the outer edge of this sleepy Midwestern suburb stands a baseball field named Springer Park, the town's treasure and what Decker lovingly refers to as his second home. An ivy-covered fence surrounds the park, and just beyond the outfield stands a sizeable oak tree that Decker used to hit with his home runs. Most of the time he was practicing with his team, but with any free moment he had, he and his pals could be found gathered around first-base playing a game: One of them would fire a tennis ball against the wall adjacent to the dugout, and anyone who fumbled it three times in a row was then pegged with the ball.

Today, Decker, who is the new face of Adidas' campaign *Beyond the Screen*, is entering into his ninth season in the NFL as the Patriots wide receiver. He has previously played for the Denver Broncos, New York Jets, and Tennessee Titans. Decker contributes a lot of his athletic success to his upbringing and the countless hours spent at Springer Park.

"My parents never really let me watch TV so my friends and I would always go to Springer Park to practice or make up games to play," Decker says about his childhood.

"Having three of my own children now, I really want them to have that same experience of spending time outside, creating games, and having fun using their imagination instead

of a screen. That's why I really wanted to be a part of Adidas' new campaign; I truly relate and believe in their message to kids."

On March 1, Adidas announced that, in an effort to promote a less technology dependent youth, it will partner with the father of three to launch *Beyond the Screen* in May 2019.

The campaign will bring together kids, ages five through 13, for a touring event that will get them outside, interacting, and playing games lead by Decker, including football scrimmage, capture the flag, kick ball, tug of war, and much more.

When approached by Adidas to become a part of *Beyond the Screen*, Decker jumped at the opportunity. "I was very excited to hear about this initiative because I believe a lot of kids growing up in this age of advanced technology are being robbed of certain traits that are developed when you get outside and play with your friends," he says. "My life was shaped through those years at Springer Park and I'm very excited to help these kids find the fun in putting down their phone and getting outside."

Decker also speaks enthusiastically about raising his own kids the same way he was. "My oldest is four now and she has never touched an I-Phone or tablet. She has this wonderful imagination and is always making up new games." As for his three-year-old and five-month-old sons, Decker says, "I can't wait for them to get a little older so we can start throwing a football or playing catch. Those are some of my favorite memories with my dad growing up."

*Beyond the Screen* will hold its first event at Icahn Stadium located on Randalls Island in the borough of Manhattan in New York City. It will run from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. on Saturday, May 4.

Decker's life has come a long way since his days at Springer Park, but he still speaks of those early years with genuine gratitude for making him the athlete and man he is today. "Even though we didn't have all of this technology back when I was growing up, I truly admire my parents for never just sticking me in front of a TV," Decker says. "I would spend countless hours outside playing sports with my friends because that was our only entertainment. Now looking back, it was so much more than that; it was a lesson in building relationships, using your imagination, and, ultimately, learning the hard work and dedication needed to become an elite athlete."

When asked if he will pass these lessons down to his kids, Decker paused for a moment, then with a slight smile he says, "I want them to find their own Springer Park. I want them to experience that magic on their own. The lessons will come organically, that I know for sure."