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Agency Profile: Gridiron Star Becomes Key Agency Player

Whether he's winning college championships or winning business for Sterling Seacrest Partners, Bartley Miller's competitive edge has driven his success as a top Georgia agent.

"I like to win—that's my makeup. And frankly, if you look at the Millers, that's the way we all are. We really like to win," proclaimed Bartley.

His father J. Bart Miller, a hospital administrator for 25 years, decided one day in 1988 that he wanted to get out of hospital administration and join a friend in the insurance business.

"I was five years old at the time," recalled Bartley. "I still remember the day my dad came home and said to my mom, 'I quit my job and I'm getting into insurance.' My mom thought my dad had lost his mind for quitting his career and taking a sales job."

The decision paid off for Bartley's father, who became an accomplished producer, writing physician business for a major agency in the market. Bartley's brother John later joined his father at the agency after a year working as an underwriter.

In 2003, father and son announced yet another move that was viewed as risky at the time: the founding of their own agency—Sterling Risk Advisors.

"It was a shock to everyone, but they started a successful firm," said Bartley. "At the time it had about \$2 million in revenue and ten employees."

Looking Downfield

Bartley's own path to the insurance industry came through an entirely different route. His interest in insurance took shape in college while playing football as an offensive guard for the University of Georgia.

"I was highly recruited coming out of high school, with offers to play football all over the country. I grew up going to a Catholic high school here in Atlanta. I turned down the opportunity to go to Notre Dame on a football scholarship." Bartley added with a chuckle, "One of the priests still hasn't forgiven me for not going to Notre Dame."

He explained the best advice he received throughout the college recruitment process came from his father.

“He said to me, ‘Bartley, where do you want to live when you get done with football?’ And I told him Atlanta. And he replied, ‘Well, you are crazy if you don’t go to the University of Georgia because the network of people that you will build throughout the Southeast at the University of Georgia is going to have a dramatic impact on your future career.’ And that was great advice he gave me, and it’s held true.”

Bartley signed a letter of intent to attend the University of Georgia and arrived at football camp that summer. Once classes began, his father imparted more wisdom on him.

“When I started school, my dad encouraged me to get a risk management and insurance degree, with the thought that if football didn’t work out, I could join him and my brother in the insurance industry and we could build our business together,” he said.

And that’s exactly what Bartley did—but not before the 6’4”, 300-pound lineman won the SEC Championship in 2002 and the Sugar Bowl, and was named to the All-SEC Academic Football Team.

Protection Scheme

Shoulder injuries eventually put an end to his football career, and he joined the family business where he was quickly motivated by the competition.

“Once I got into it, I realized that it was the competition that I really needed in my life,” explained Bartley. “I’ve been a sports guy my whole life and been driven by having success in competition. I came into the insurance game in 2006, focusing on the physician and surgeon space, and we’ve been fortunate to watch our firm skyrocket in recent years. We went from writing 800 physicians to now more than 4,000 across the country. I’ve been blessed to work with an extremely talented group of people and it’s been fun watching our firm grow.”

His approach to winning business was transitioning the mentality he used on the football field of protecting his quarterback to using risk management to protect his clients.

“I would say if there’s something paramount about what we have done to build our firm, it’s that we are physician advocates,” described Bartley. “My sole job is to help protect physicians in all walks of what they do.”

Elaborating further, Bartley said, “I think if you ask our clients, they’d tell you, ‘I feel protected because I don’t ever talk to a 1-800 number. I’m talking to an individual who knows me, knows my practice, and knows the way I want to handle situations.’ So our clients are confident that we know our craft and are always going to make decisions that are in the physician’s best interest.”

Sterling Risk Advisors has continued to attract top talent across the insurance industry. In July of 2017, they announced a merger with Seacrest Partners. The combined agency, now known as Sterling Seacrest Partners, is now the largest privately owned insurance firm in the state of Georgia, with \$35 million in annual revenue and nearly 175 employees.

Team Playbook

Bartley said they have a strategy of adding proven team players to their employee roster.

“We have 11 producers that played sports for Division I schools—from football to baseball to soccer.”

He acknowledged that the approach is a critical factor for the success of the agency, because as much as football is a team sport, so is insurance.

“I’m only as good as the people around me. Oftentimes the client looks at the broker and says, ‘Well the broker’s the one doing all the work,’ but the reality is, it’s not solely the broker—it’s someone else on the team, and we have such a great team around us. And being a team helps with the clients too—we’re a part of their team. We tell our clients all the time we hope to become an extension of their management team. We want to be their outsourced risk manager because most of these medical practices do not have the budget to hire somebody to solely handle risk matters. And we like to be able to wear that hat for our clients. That’s a big part of being a member of the team.”