



Taking Charge

The Spanos brothers continue a legacy of success and service.

By Whitney Butler | Photos courtesy of The San Diego Chargers

You may have seen them cheering on the Chargers from the sidelines. Maybe you've seen them golfing at the La Jolla Country Club? Perhaps strolling by the shore of their favorite beach—on the local news or ESPN.

Wherever you may have glimpsed A.G. and John Spanos, you've never seen them like this. Sports politics and public opinion can be as fickle as the tide, but when it comes to homegrown community leaders, this San Diego team is steadfast about their family, their community and their

desire to win a Super Bowl. In an intimate interview with A.G. and John Spanos—the former the CEO and executive vice president of the San Diego Chargers, the latter the executive vice president of football operations—the siblings reveal their close bond, both as businessmen and brothers.

“We grew up in a Greek family and family is very important in Greek culture,” John Spanos explained. “We had dinner with my grandparents five, six, sometimes seven nights a week. We would go over there with my grandma and grandpa,

aunts and uncles, cousins... It was a big family deal.”

The Spanos name has been connected with the Chargers since 1984, when Alex Spanos bought a majority of the company after making a fortune in real estate development with the A.G. Spanos Companies, based in Stockton, Calif. The two brothers smile widely as they recall their first memories of their grandfather and growing up with a self-made billionaire.

“He would always give us a big kiss on the cheek,” John Spanos recalled. “That



was his signature move.”

“It was two-handed,” A.G. Spanos added.

A real Renaissance man, their grandfather has a rich history of eclectic stories to tell—from WWII aircraft pilot to an amateur golf career. Estimated to be worth more than \$1 billion, the A.G. Spanos Companies have become a hallmark of his legacy and the family’s motivation to succeed on and off the field.

“You could definitely feel his presence when he walked into a room,” A.G. Spanos said. “He spoke with a very loud voice and used his hands when he spoke—a larger-than-life personality.”

Like any legacy, the stories and life-lessons that pass from one generation to the next are an expression of past, present and future. As the brothers look to the past for guidance, they are humbled by the support they received as they paved their individual paths to success.

“A lot of the lesson that our dad has taught us are lessons that he learned from

his dad,” John Spanos explained. “If you don’t know something, don’t ever be afraid to ask. That’s the best way to learn something. Our grandfather was a self-made man and he learned by doing—by doing the work.”

A.G. Spanos agreed.

“John and I worked our summers in high schools while a lot of our friends were at summer camp or going to the beach,” he said. “It instilled in us a great work ethic and makes you appreciate a hard day’s work and a paycheck.”

As teenagers, the brothers attended different high schools. Less than two years apart, John laughs as he describes the rival football game that brought them head-to-head during a La Jolla Country Day vs. Bishop’s School football game. They poke fun at each other over whose varsity football record was more prolific as a playful jest. When asked about sibling rivalries, both laughed simultaneously.

“What do you mean, ‘Were there any rivalries?’” John Spanos exclaimed.

“Those never end!”

“I was always so much bigger and stronger, so there wasn’t any competition,” A.G. Spanos quipped.

“And I was so much wittier with my words,” John Spanos replied.

Joking aside, the brothers communicate on a frequency all their own.

“We’re very close,” A.G. Spanos said. “He’s gone a lot of the time—his travel schedule is grueling—but when he’s here, we’re always catching up. He’s asking me business stuff and I’m catching up on football with him...and it never stops with us. At home, at family dinners, the conversation is often business and the Chargers come up all the time.”

The duo is presently becoming more integrated with the San Diego Chargers on all fronts, as John Spanos steps up and out of his previous college scouting position and into the executive seat, overseeing all of the team’s operations. A.G. Spanos continues to grow his responsibilities in managing the day-to-



day business operations. They're taking on several of the tasks formerly handled by father, Dean Spanos, who became the CEO of the Chargers in 1994. While living in San Diego, Dean and Susie, his wife of 35-years, have led philanthropic lives, contributing to several organizations including the Huntington's Disease Society of America, which presented the couple with its top award in 2011 for their outstanding generosity.

The Spanos family has left an impression beyond the reach of the Chargers franchise. While business is clearly at the forefront, they are still, first and foremost, a family—and one that enjoys working closely with the people that matter most to them.

"I can be honest with my brother and he can be honest with me. At the end of the day, one of the benefits is that we're all looking out for the company's best interests," John Spanos explained. "There's no hidden motive. We are all family. Our priorities are all aligned."

Looking to the future, the brothers bring with them a fresh perspective to the Chargers as they embrace the recent changes made in the team's management.

"Our number-one priority is to win a Super Bowl," A.G. Spanos said.

John Spanos said he is excited about the management changes.

"With youth sometimes can come a little more energy and new ideas, really," he said. "I was part of the group that hired the new GM and new coach. They're both around 40 years old, which is younger than we have had in the past. If your in one system too long, potentially things can get a little stale. Invigorating new life into the building was important."

Keeping things fresh is important, A.G. Spanos agreed.

"I try to be very open-minded," he said. "I think we have a great staff of people here, and I challenge them to come up with new ideas and new ways of doing things so we can keep getting better."

Aside from heading the San Diego

Chargers, the brothers work with several local charities, including the San Diego Police Foundation, which A.G. currently represents on the Board of Directors. With the help of their mother and father, the Spanos family also operates one of the most successful blood drives in the country.

"When I think of our family and what would the legacy be—[it's] commitment to success for the San Diego Chargers, not just on the field but off the field as well," John Spanos said.

A.G. Spanos said he is glad to be filling his current role.

"It was always my childhood dream to do what I am doing now," he said. "I've never really wanted to do anything else."

To bring a dream into fruition is perhaps the greatest gift a family member can bestow on posterity. A.G. and John Spanos walk not in the shadow of their predecessors, but in the light of their legacy—sharing this gift with San Diego as fans, philanthropists and brothers. ■