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PACKERS ROOKIE DAVID BAKHTIARI'S FAMILY WILL BE THERE FOR HIS DEBUT AT CANDLESTICK PARK – THEY'RE 49ERS SEASON TICKET HOLDERS. (BENNY SIEU-USA TODAY SPORTS)

PACKERS' DAVID BAKHTIARI FROM FAMILY OF DIEHARD 49ERS FANS

PAUL IMIG | Published: Friday, September 06, 2013, 6:09pm

GREEN BAY, Wis. -- When Green Bay Packers rookie left tackle David Bakhtiari steps onto the field Sunday in San Francisco for his first NFL game, he'll feel right at home. Growing up less than 10 miles from Candlestick Park, Bakhtiari's family has been 49ers season ticket holders his entire life.

Bakhtiari has been to countless games at that stadium and has donned the San Francisco red and gold colors on many occasions. It was his favorite team growing up. And even though he was drafted in the fourth round by the Packers earlier this year, Bakhtiari's parents might have mixed emotions if their son gives up a sack.

"I think my dad said he's going to wear my jersey with a Niners jacket over it," Bakhtiari said.

Sitting near the top of the first level on the visitors sideline, Bakhtiari will know just where to look if he wants to give his family a wave from the field.

While his family might be rooting for both teams, Bakhtiari had to let them know that his

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allegiance has officially switched.

"I grew up in (the 49ers') backyard, but I'm a Packers fan now," Bakhtiari said with a smile. "I just want to put that out there. My heart and soul is with the Packers. But when I was younger, yes, my whole family was (49ers fans). It's a little different for my parents."

"It'll be cool. I'll see how my emotions are on Sunday."

There will be more friends and family of his at this game than there ever were at a typical 49ers game during Bakhtiari's childhood. Of course, childhood wasn't that long ago for the 21-year-old who left the University of Colorado early to make his NFL dreams a reality.

Unlike in January 2012, when Bakhtiari watched from the crowd as his 49ers beat the New Orleans Saints in the divisional round of the postseason, it's now his responsibility to not let Aldon Smith, Justin Smith and Ahmad Brooks take down Aaron Rodgers the way that those three each sacked Drew Brees in that game 20 months ago.

"If anything, I've gotten early scouting three years prior from watching them play," Bakhtiari said. "For four quarters I get to go against elite pass rushers, both sides. The Smith brothers and Ahmad Brooks on the other side. Their whole front, they're a good team, so it will be a good test for us in our preparation how we are."

Playing for a Colorado team that went 1-11 during his junior season, Bakhtiari hasn't had many big games in his life. He described the upcoming Packers-49ers matchup as "probably the most hyped game" he's been a part of. But after the season-ending knee injury to starting left tackle Bryan Bulaga during training camp, the Packers opted to give Bakhtiari the challenging assignment of protecting the blind side of Green Bay's \$110-million quarterback.

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Preview: 49ers vs. Packers

"David is a very confident guy who has a good set, and he just needs to trust his fundamentals," Rodgers said this week. "He's up against a Pro Bowl guy (Aldon Smith) who's one of the best in the business and is continuing to get better."

"If you want to be considered an elite player at your position -- like I know David does down the road, he's a confident guy -- then these are the kind of matchups you want."

Rodgers' message to Bakhtiari and the rest of the offensive linemen was simply "Block those guys, please." Coach Mike McCarthy reminded Bakhtiari that "it's a team game" and that he should just "do his role and play his position."

Bakhtiari isn't sure how he's going to react to the moment Sunday afternoon. Based on training camp and preseason, he seems physically and mentally equipped to handle it well. At this early stage in his career, he's a better pass blocker than run blocker, but McCarthy and the



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Packers' coaching staff didn't hesitate after Bulaga's injury to give Bakhtiari that very important role on the team.

"Whatever happens, happens," Bakhtiari said. "It's my first game. I'm just going to go out there and play fast, play hard and play to the whistle. That's all I know how to do. If good things happen, good things happen. If bad things happen, bad things happen. It's the first game."

WHO WILL WIN IN WEEK 1?

- ☐ : PACKERS BY 7 OR MORE
- ☐ : PACKERS BY LESS THAN 7
- ☐ : 49ERS BY 7 OR MORE
- ☐ : 49ERS BY LESS THAN 7

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Unless the Packers and 49ers meet in San Francisco again in the playoffs later this season, this will be the last time Bakhtiari plays at Candlestick Park. It's being demolished and replaced by Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara after this NFL season. But Bakhtiari won't mourn the loss of the stadium where he and his family spent many of their Sundays.

"I think I can say from when I was there at a young age, it will be a breath of fresh air for the fans coming from that stadium to have a new one," he said.

Bakhtiari understands that the circumstances of his first NFL game are unique. He described all of it as "very surreal." But he's not thinking much about it yet. He won't allow himself that luxury until, well, until what he hopes are his plans the night of Feb. 2, 2014.

"Maybe when we win the Super Bowl and I get to -- for like two seconds, because I'm a rookie -- hold that trophy, that's when I'll maybe take a couple more minutes and reflect on 'Wow, what a journey,'" Bakhtiari said.

That journey officially begins Sunday.

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Paul Imig is the Green Bay Packers beat writer for FOXSportsWisconsin.com. He also has covered other state sports such as the Brewers, Bucks, Badgers and Marquette basketball for FS Wisconsin since 2010.

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Siblings trained Packers' Bakhtiari for test

Eric Branch

Updated 11:47 pm, Friday, September 6, 2013

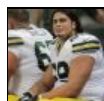
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Green Bay Packers offensive tackle David Bakhtiari sits on the bench during the second quarter of an NFL football game against the St. Louis Rams Saturday, Aug. 17, 2013, in St. Louis. (AP Photo/Tom Gannam) Photo: Tom Gannam, Associated Press



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As the youngest of three ultra-competitive football-playing brothers, Burlingame's [David Bakhtiari](#) unwittingly began training for life in the NFL's trenches at an early age.

His oldest brother, Eric, 28, is a free-agent NFL linebacker who is seven years his senior. Their age difference, however, didn't protect David from harm. Eric's unassailable reasoning? His kid brother was pudgy.

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"It looked like he had some cushion, so he could take more abuse," he explained.

Eric eventually left for college, but the hits kept on coming. David's other brother, Andrew, 23, is a former defensive end at the [University of San Diego](#) who also treated him like a blocking sled.

His formative years were filled with bruises, but perhaps they shaped Bakhtiari, 21, the Packers' 6-foot-4, 300-pound rookie left tackle who will make his debut Sunday when Green Bay visits the 49ers in the season opener at Candlestick Park.

His first assignment will feature one-on-matchups against two All-Pros, 49ers defensive tackle [Justin Smith](#) and outside linebacker [Aldon Smith](#). In Eric's estimation, though, there's really no punishment they can deliver that David hasn't withstood.

"The biggest scar they could give David," Bakhtiari said, laughing, "would be the traumatization of bringing him back to his childhood."

The youngest Bakhtiari, a fourth-round pick from Colorado, is bound to have some more pleasant flashbacks to his youth Sunday. He attended Serra High in San Mateo, 16 miles from Candlestick, and grew up rooting for the 49ers, who employed Eric for five games in 2012 and for two previous practice-squad stints.

Now, David will protect quarterback [Aaron Rodgers](#)' blind side against his boyhood team before a crowd that will include about 30 friends and family members.

"It almost seems like it was set up," he said.

The dream situation could turn nightmarish, given his daunting task. The No. 109 overall pick in April's draft repeatedly will deal with top-10 selections in Aldon Smith and Justin Smith, who are a migraine for even experienced left tackles.

Eric regularly reviewed video for his little brother when he was at Colorado, offering tips on how to handle his upcoming opponent. So what's his Week 1 advice before David faces Eric's ultra-talented ex-teammates?

"Play the best game you've ever played in your life," Eric said.

And Eric, now the fiercely proud older brother, believes David is capable of doing just that.

David was in high school when Eric began an NFL odyssey in 2008 that has included stops with seven teams over five seasons. Eric's jump from non-scholarship USD to the NFL inspired David, who believed his dream would be realized if he committed himself to the sport.

At Colorado, which went 9-28 in his three seasons, he routinely pored over game video on weeknights while many of his teammates partied.

"It became his obsession and passion," Eric said. "He put blinders on. He never got into anything that wasn't progressing him as a football player and what he wanted to do in his career. He took the things that I did well and did them better. And he took the things I didn't do so well and avoided them."

David's beyond-his-years maturity became evident when Green Bay left tackle [Bryan Bulaga](#) sustained a season-ending knee injury in early August. Bakhtiari has since taken every practice snap at the position and frequently has gone against Green Bay's All-Pro outside linebacker [Clay Matthews](#).

During his baptism by fire, Matthews has been struck by Bakhtiari's quiet confidence and response to adversity. When Matthews has won their one-on-one matchups, Bakhtiari has sought him out for how-can-I-improve counsel.

"You talk to him and think he's not a rookie," Matthews said. "It's as if he's been around here for awhile. And he knows what he wants to accomplish. You don't see that from



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FROM OUR HOMEPAGE

rookies a lot of the time. They get kind of burnt out and they focus on what's now. But for him, he has a bigger picture."

Bakhtiari is aware he'll arrive at Candlestick as a decided underdog. A pregame story line has centered on the inexperience of Green Bay's tackles (right tackle [Don Barclay](#), 24, is expected to make fifth career start) against the 49ers' withering pass rush.

He didn't make any predictions this week, other than pledging not to shrink from the challenge.

"No matter what, I'm going to go in and give it everything I have," Bakhtiari said. "That's kind of been my mentality. I've never let things to get too big for me. I'm going to go in there and I'm going to what I do best. I'm going to do what I know. And I'm going to make sure I give max effort."

For his part, anxiety won't allow Eric to join the rest of the family, which includes a sister, Danielle, 23, at Candlestick on Sunday. Instead, he'll watch the game from his parents' house in Burlingame.

His nerves shouldn't be confused with a lack of confidence, however. David Bakhtiari matched against two older guys who are hell-bent on beating him up? Eric laughed. His kid brother has been here before.

"He's been doing it his whole life," Eric said. "He's used to constantly being challenged and picked on. And he's had to hold his own. This is no different from his childhood. He's the typical little brother. He just happened to be a lot bigger."

Eric Branch is a San Francisco Chronicle staff writer. E-mail: ebranch@sfgate.com Twitter: [@Eric_Branch](#)



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