

## *EXECUTIVE PROFILE*

### **Josh Kraft: Someone to look up to**

**Kraft scion right at home as president of Boys & Girls Club**

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He wears a tie loose around his neck, decades older than the boys sitting around the table with him, but the age difference — even the tie — fade into the surprising ease of Josh Kraft.

From across the room, a teenager walks over and says little, yet says it all, as he and Kraft launch into a complicated series of handshakes that might confuse someone who is not from the neighborhood.

“How’s your sister?” asks Kraft, 41, their clasped hands dance through the greeting. “Are you still working?”

Moments later Kraft rallies a group to take a picture with him. Craig, Justin, Hank, Alex — he calls them by name as they crowd around him, excited. “Josh has a million-dollar smile,” says Melvin, 15, joking with Kraft as he watches from nearby.

Son of Patriot’s Chairman and CEO Robert Kraft and an heir to the Kraft Group fortunes, Josh Kraft’s upbringing was starkly different than those of the youth he was with that afternoon in the **Jordan Boys & Girls Club** in Chelsea. In the late 1980s, Kraft traded silver-spoon comforts for passion and street savvy that, inside the Club, have earned him both popularity and respect.

In July, Kraft, who had been the executive director of the Jordan Club since 1993, was named the Nicholas President and CEO of the parent organization, Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston, taking over from Linda Whitlock, who stepped down. His new role makes Kraft the rare nonprofit leader whose raw enthusiasm for the organization’s mission comes from so many years spent at its grassroots level.

“They think he’s nobody working at the Boys and Girls Club in the projects and now he’s running all the Boys and Girls Clubs,” says Melvin. “He’s someone to look up to.”

“Am I surprised about where Josh is now? Absolutely not,” says Bob Monahan, director of operations at Julie’s Family Learning Program in South Boston.

Monahan was executive director of the **South Boston Boys & Girls Clubs** when he first met Kraft. “Josh has the (whole) package: youth development skills, relationship skills, fundraising skills. He came to the Boys & Girls Clubs with some of that, but he learned a lot of it along the way.”

As Kraft took the reins this summer, the organization was completing a \$100 million fundraising campaign — leaving it stable but with an endowment, like every other nonprofit, rattled by the crumbling economy.

This economic backhand poses unexpected challenges for Kraft as he maneuvers to maintain the organization’s base of donors and foundations while also meeting a goal of doubling the number of youth who regularly attend the club over the next five years. He hopes to keep the organization, as he puts it, “level funded” this year and acknowledges that the “business plan takes on more urgency now.”

The organization is exploring the possibility of opening more clubs in shared spaces — elementary and middle schools, for example — as a way to bring services to communities at a lower cost.

Kraft, who brings with him a wide network of new contacts and potential supporters, knows he will be fundraising harder than ever. What makes the Boys & Girls Clubs model unique, he says, is that many youth attend the clubs from the time they are children until they are 18 years old.

“I have no problem going out and selling the way we do it because I have seen firsthand how the clubs can change kids and their families,” he said.

As to whether his last name makes it difficult for him to ask for donations, Kraft said his family, in some ways, makes it easier, “I’ve always seen how much my family contributes and volunteers — I would think maybe it’s my family where I get it from.”

Like the youth he works with, Kraft has grown up, albeit professionally, in the Boys & Girls Clubs system. To that end, he chose a career path separate from his family’s Kraft Group and Patriots operations, with the exception being his current role as president of the New England Patriot’s **Charitable Foundation**, the philanthropic arm of the sports franchise.

He toyed with the idea of law school, but after working as an intern teacher after graduating from **Williams College**, he decided to work with youth.

“Josh would have been miserable doing anything but something in this range,” says Myra Kraft, his mother and one of Boston’s most active philanthropists, who has been involved with the board of directors for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston since the 1980s.

Seeking a less-structured setting than a classroom, Kraft started with the Boys & Girls Clubs in two of South Boston’s housing projects. He walked through classrooms everyday

to ensure his cohort of 30-or-so youth — “some of the toughest kids in South Boston,” Monahan said — showed up at school.

He went on to **Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education** and, when he finished in 1993 with a master’s degree, another Boys & Girls Clubs opportunity awaited: launching a Boys & Girls Club location in Chelsea, which opened in the basement of a public housing project. The Club caught on and expanded. Kraft helped spearhead the campaign to build the \$11.2 million Jordan Boys & Girls Club in Chelsea, which opened in 2002.

The project was a success, but the community, as Monahan points out, put Kraft “through his paces.” He remembers when Kraft rented a bus and invited some project skeptics — elected officials and business leaders included — to South Boston so they could see what a Boys & Girls Club building looked like.

“There was a real testing. ‘Are you going to be around for a while or will you be like others who will come and go?’ ” Monahan said.

Kraft stuck around. Now based in the organization’s downtown office, Kraft has an opportunity to shape it in a new way. But he still gets out to the clubs as often as he can.

“I miss being in the community directly everyday,” Kraft said. “On the flip side, I believe so strongly in the mission and supporting kids and family. And I have a great opportunity to be in a role where I can support the kids on a greater level.”

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