

FORMER NFL PLAYER MARK PATTISON GOES FOR SEVENTH SUMMIT ONE STEP AT A TIME

By Sabina Dana Plasse
Photos by Ray J. Gadd



When Mark Pattison decided to make Sun Valley, Idaho, his home three years ago, he was not just moving to be and live in a beautiful place, he wanted to set some goals in high altitude—one of them a 29,032-foot goal. Pattison, a former NFL Los Angeles Raider and New Orleans Saints wide receiver and current executive for *Sports Illustrated* has been in training, for quite some time, with plans to summit Mt. Everest in May 2021.



Mark Pattison in his at-home "fitness center" on a Peloton.

However, Pattison also added the extra challenge to summit Lhorse within 24 hours of summiting Everest, an already mystifying pursuit in itself. His objectives are part of his quest for his seventh summit, Everest, and to conquer and complete his goal of successfully climbing the Seven Summits—Everest, Aconcagua, Denali, Kilimanjaro, Elbrus, Vinson, and Mt. Kosciuszko. If he succeeds, he will be the oldest and first NFL player to do so and one of 40 or so people who have added Lhorse to the task. However, Pattison is not an ego-tripper or peak-bagger, he's a man on another mission.

Pattison has dedicated the addition of his Lhorse climb to his daughter Emilia, who battles epilepsy. He has already raised over \$27,940, the height of Lhorse, and has combined the goal with the height of Everest, 29,032 feet, to raise \$56,972, with all proceeds benefiting Higher Ground, a national nonprofit organization based in Sun Valley, Idaho, with locations in Los Angeles and New York. Higher Ground uses recreation, therapy, and continuing support to give people of all abilities a better life, bridging the gap between disability and belonging by using the principles of therapeutic

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Mark Pattison’s Everest-Lhotse summit workouts include skinning up Baldy several times a week.

recreation in a completely inclusive way, including epilepsy.

Backing Pattison, the Las Vegas Raiders have pledged financial support and the NFL Foundation has provided a social grant for Emilia’s Everest-Lhotse Challenge to Higher Ground backing Pattison’s pursuit and philanthropic goals in summiting Everest and Lhotse. In the past, Pattison has partnered with retired NFL Player Chris Long, Howie Long’s son, to raise more than \$47,000 to build water wells for the people of Tanzania through his foundation, waterboys.org, and brought awareness to the cause by climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro with other NFL Players and War Hero veterans in 2017. Last year, Pattison raised over \$30,000 for the Epilepsy Foundation and also raised \$10,000 for inner-city kids of Los Angeles during his Mt. Kilimanjaro climb in 2013.

“It’s a passion with a purpose,” says Pattison. “I’m on a personal and professional philanthropic mission. I connected with Higher Ground and their specialized staff of trained professionals, because they help those with disabilities, including epilepsy, reach their own summits.”

Supporting Pattison in his training are Bill Nurge, owner of HardCore Training Center, and former UCLA Head Football Coach Jim Mora. “Having been a teammate, climbing partner, and friend of Mark’s for over 35 years, I can say without hesitation that he is a man of tremendous integrity, moral conviction, and mental toughness,” says Mora. “Mark has a vision and an energy that others are naturally drawn to, his ability to inspire others with his words and actions are beyond comparison. This is a man who has reached the highest peaks professionally as an NFL player, in business as an entrepreneur, as a father, and as a high-altitude mountain climber.”

So, how does Pattison do this? “It’s the pyramid of success,” he says. “It’s competitive greatness for yourself. You can only attain your top goal if you do everything else to support it—the individual plus team goals. Every day I wake up with my celery juice, before that I drink 32 ounces of water, I am on the Peloton riding, and then I have my Seven Summits smoothie. Whatever it is, ultimately, if you don’t love the process, which is the core of it all, it’s difficult to reach the end goal.”

Pattison was a high school All-American football player as wide receiver and quarterback at Roosevelt High School in Seattle, Washington. He was inducted into his High School Hall of Fame in 2005. At the University of Washington, Pattison played in two Rose Bowls, two Aloha Bowls, and one Orange Bowl where he had the winning catch to beat Oklahoma. He played under legendary hall of fame coach Don James and was inducted in the University of Washington Hall of Fame in 2016. Pattison played in the NFL for five years. He was drafted

in the seventh round by the LA Raiders and also played for the New Orleans Saints.

A lover of the outdoors, mountaineering, and a fitness challenge, Pattison has found himself on numerous occasions having to re-start or redirect his life. “I saw the pandemic as an opportunity,” he says. “I love being in nature and skinning, skiing, and hiking up the mountains in Sun Valley, which tends to be my down time. If I had not been through a tough time and activated a plan for living, it would not have happened. It’s all connected.”

Mark has been up and down Baldy 40 times so far this winter, well beyond last winter’s record of 31 times. He has created his own fitness center in his garage with motivational markers and other items as well as earned ones to drive his passion. “I like the idea of once a year going to a far exotic land I have only read about,” he says. “It’s not elite, it’s the next goal. It’s something I love to do and there’s no ego involved.”

Pattison will undertake his Everest and Lhotse climb challenge with America’s premier Everest climber and guide Garrett Madison, owner of Madison Mountaineering. Madison’s first Everest expedition was in 2006, since then he has returned 14 times. He has summited Everest ten times.

“It’s been a challenging year for everyone,” says Madison. “I’m glad Mark is following through on his goal of climbing Everest. I met Mark in Antarctica, and we have done training together in Sun Valley. All the mountains Mark has summited add into the training and experience. There will be less than half of the normal climbers because of the pandemic and travel. I enjoy the camaraderie and people achieving lifelong bucket list goals, which have a profound impact on their lives.”

They will have a crew of Sherpas and a Nepalese team, with whom Madison has been working for some time and does several expeditions with throughout the year. And he says that weather and route conditions are always a determinant factor. “With adding Lhotse, the fourth-highest mountain in the world, which I have climbed three times, it’s a big effort. Usually everyone is depleted after the Everest summit. To climb another peak almost as big as Everest especially with only a few hours rest in between is a challenge. However, high camp, camp four on the ‘south col’ makes a Lhotse climb possible. It’s very beautiful to look back at Everest from the summit of Lhotse.”

It’s a two-month experience for the expedition upon arrival in Kathmandu on April 2, then to base camp to acclimatize, train, and summit Everest in mid to late-May. “I am lucky to go on climbs and share experiences with like-minded people who love these adventures,” says Madison. “The summit is never guaranteed for numerous factors and reasons, but the

people I climb with and whom I form relationships with are positive, motivated, and goal-oriented. This is why I love it.”

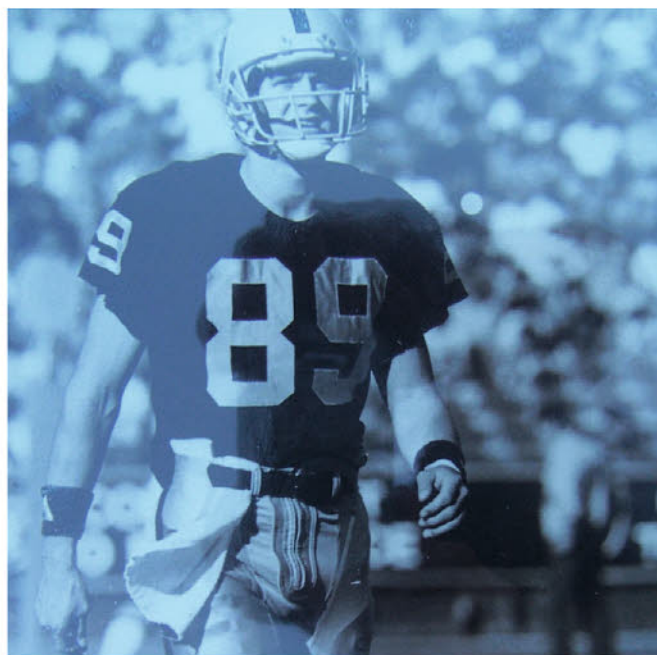
The experience of a backed-up line to summit on May 22, 2019, is something no mountaineer would want to endure. Madison was able to summit the next day, which was also busy, but because of his team’s fitness and experience, they were able to move forward where as others were much slower. Pattison’s climb will include an international community and a variety of people. “On all the major expeditions I have participated in, the same thing happens over and over. Alpha dogs and all types of personalities show up. There are also always people whom you can count on when a situation becomes dire. It’s so interesting to see how this evolves,” says Pattison.

Madison is one of Mountain Hardware’s elite athletes and in support of his cause, the company has launched the Garrett Madison Collection this year, which is everything you need for high-altitude mountaineering tested and tried by Madison and his teams. “This is the best high-altitude equipment and clothing ever made and I use it, and so do our teams,” he says. “Mark will be using it and since he has been training with extremely good cardiovascular fitness to perform at high altitude along with strength training to carry a heavy backpack and muscles to climb up steep ice and rocks, he will do great. He has been focusing on fitness, working out with Bill Nurge, skinning Baldy and other peaks, snowshoeing, skate skiing, and resting as well as eating protein-rich foods for recovery from his workouts and building muscles, and eating iron-rich foods to build red blood cells before going to Nepal.”

There are two sides for climbing Mt. Everest, from the north through China, which is colder, and the south through Nepal. China’s border will not be open for Mark’s ascent. “I wanted to do the south side,” says Pattison. “It’s terrifying, but with confidence and being bold and careful, all the training will come through.” The Khumbu glacier on Everest moves three to four feet every day, so Pattison knows he will have to climb as agile as he is able and trust the process.

“You don’t go in super storms,” he says. “You train, so you are aware of what’s to come. I have been on multiple peaks, and it’s much like how I go up and down Baldy all winter.”

Pattison will be streaming and updating from the Himalayas throughout his journey to summit Everest and Lhotse. Follow his summit attempts on his website at MarkPattisonNFL.com and on Instagram @[markpattisonnfl](https://www.instagram.com/markpattisonnfl).



Mark Pattison, Los Angeles Raider, 1986. Courtesy photo



Mark Pattison has been featured on NFL Network: Life After Football, John Foley’s podcast, and The High Performance Zone Podcast. In addition, Pattison host’s his own weekly podcast, Finding Your Summit Podcast, which features ordinary people accomplishing extraordinary things. Guests include celebrities, sports legends, and other remarkable people.