

Bryan Schaaf:

Back here on the Meat Speak podcast, powered by the certified Angus beef brand. Bryan Schaaf sitting in the inner sanctum of the Amelia Island Omni. It's not a resort, it's actually a plantation.

Josh Ennis:

I suppose, yeah.

Bryan Schaaf:

Which I think is just a nice way of saying resort. It makes it sound a little more prestigious. Right?

Josh Ennis:

Yeah.

Bryan Schaaf:

Sitting with me across the table with only a delightful key lime pot de creme sitting between us, chef Josh Ennis, who is from Buckhead, Atlanta. And you actually just told me the specific title and the only thing that stuck up here is chef. So can you tell us specifically what is your title? You're a chef at Buckhead, Atlanta. I shouldn't say that. You are the chef at Buckhead, Atlanta.

Josh Ennis:

The chef and 14 other different words behind my name. So Cisco has gotten rid of that corporate chef designation within our specialty meat company. So I'm the functioning chef for Buckhead Atlanta, but my actual title is Program Sales Manager.

Bryan Schaaf:

Right on. But as program sales manager, you cook a lot of stuff, right?

Josh Ennis:

I cook almost every single day and I host chefs and other people that come in and give them tours and kind of show off our fancy facility.

Bryan Schaaf:

Before we get to our specific topic of the day, if you could tell, us a little bit about your background. You're a Georgia boy, right?

Josh Ennis:

100%. So Atlanta is a interesting term. There's about a 60 mile radius that people identify from Atlanta.

Bryan Schaaf:

I think if you're from Chattanooga, you still say you're from Atlanta, right?

Josh Ennis:

Yeah. So if you're in California and you meet somebody that says they're from the South and then where? From Atlanta. Where? And then you kind of shrink the circle until you don't know what they're talking about.

Bryan Schaaf:

They're actually from Montgomery.

Josh Ennis:

Exactly. So I'm from about 15 miles outside of Atlanta proper, Gwinnette County and born and raised and yeah, that's about it.

Bryan Schaaf:

Outstanding. So you kind of got into the culinary field in a roundabout way. First and foremost, I hate to say you were an athlete, because you never really lose that.

Josh Ennis:

Right.

Bryan Schaaf:

It's sort of like, you're a former chef. Well no, you're not a former chef. You still know how to cook. But you had real athletic aspirations before getting into culinary. Tell us a little bit about them.

Josh Ennis:

So there was always a food community around my family. My grandfather and my granny were farmers and ranchers, so they had their thing, and I understood that side of it. And then when I was about 13 I started in restaurants, busing tables, making salads, 50 bucks a night, because it bought a lot of baseball cards. And then once football camp and baseball started, I stepped away from working in restaurants to focus on that. Worked on playing in college and then that went away pretty quick. My freshman year I tore my rotator cuff again.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah, playing football?

Josh Ennis:

Yeah.

Bryan Schaaf:

Right on. What position did you play?

Josh Ennis:

I played offense and defense, so I was a quarterback and then strong safety.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah. So the rotator cuff is kind of necessary, right?

Josh Ennis:
Pretty important. Yeah.

Bryan Schaaf:
Understandable.

Josh Ennis:
Strong safety you can probably get away without having good shoulders as long as your hands and arms work. But quarterback, it's pretty much.

Bryan Schaaf:
Oh, you can't really turn around and throw it left-hand.

Josh Ennis:
Exactly.

Bryan Schaaf:
At least without looking silly doing it.

Josh Ennis:
Yeah. Unless you're Michael Vick and then you look really good doing it.

Bryan Schaaf:
That's right. If you want to make even the toughest man alive look completely silly, just have him try and throw some to the left handed.

Josh Ennis:
With his other hand.

Bryan Schaaf:
Yeah, that's all it ever takes.

Josh Ennis:
Yep.

Bryan Schaaf:
It's a great humbling experience.

Josh Ennis:
Exactly.

Bryan Schaaf:

Okay. So talk to us about football. This was your thing. When you commit and you become a college athlete, it's not something that you just get to overnight obviously.

Josh Ennis:

Sure.

Bryan Schaaf:

Not only is there an ability, but then there's also the want to do it, because when you get to the college level, it's, you hate to say it's like a job, but it is like a job.

Josh Ennis:

I don't even know that it's like a job. It's a job.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah.

Josh Ennis:

We're in a different stage of life now where we're dealing with it with our kids. And we went to a school that, I don't know if I'm supposed to name specifics right now, but they were very upfront and they said, look, one of the parents asked about what are they supposed to do about getting a job? And they said, they're not supposed to get a job. This is their job. We're giving them \$100,000 over their career to dedicate to us, and we're going to feed them, we're going to take care of them, we're going to give them medical care, we're going to do all these things. And so for me, at that stage in my career, that was kind of an eyeopening experience, if you will. It's waking up early, it's lifting, it's eating properly, it's eating on a schedule, which is a weird thing to normalize to a kid that's 18 years old that's like, I don't know, ramen noodles and peanut butter and jelly sound fine. And they're like, nope, that's not going to work for your diet.

Bryan Schaaf:

That's all you really need.

Josh Ennis:

Yep.

Bryan Schaaf:

You were a sought after athlete. I was a division two college soccer player and it was kind of a throw them ... I'd say throw them enough money. It was more like, no, we'll buy a Burger King every once in a while if you come play for us.

Josh Ennis:

Right.

Bryan Schaaf:

Like, all right, I'm sold.

Josh Ennis:
A Whopper, I'm in.

Bryan Schaaf:

Right? Can I get the cheese with it as well? But obviously things didn't work out. The rotator cuff wasn't your friend, but tell us how stepping away from sports and having to come to grips with that and how did you get into culinary following that?

Josh Ennis:

I decided once football went away, I decided that I had always wanted to go to the University of Georgia. That was my ultimate goal. I grew up just huge fan and anyways. So once football went away, I transferred up to Georgia just to go to school and was obviously needing to figure out how to pay my bills and everything else. So kind of fell back on what I was comfortable with and got into restaurants and realized that either I was pretty good at cooking or I was pretty good at tricking people into thinking I was good at cooking. But either way-

Bryan Schaaf:

Either way it's a win, right?

Josh Ennis:

Yep. So I went from a kind of average restaurant, a little bit upscale to more upscale, and just kind of strategically worked to find the best chefs I could in Atlanta and then expanded to the Southeast, expanded to the greater region after that. And just whatever I could do to hone my craft and get better at it.

Bryan Schaaf:

Outstanding. Being a native of that region, one of the things that we love to dive into are those regional cuisines. When you think about those foods that are really centric upon Georgia or the Southeast US, We've touched on it in another podcast with our friend Chris Lilly, talking about Alabama white sauce and what constitutes Alabama barbecue and all that. But what are some of those foods that as you have progressed in your career and you've traveled, you realize, man, those really were kind of special just to where I was from.

Josh Ennis:

You know, it's funny. So I still say, and I've worked for some absolutely incredible people, but I still say my grandmother was the best cook I ever saw, I was ever blessed to be in her presence. My grandfather's farm, we'd wake up at dawn, we'd go out and we'd work, and then we'd come home for lunch or come back to the house for lunch. She'd have a full spread of biscuits, fried chicken, fried pork chops, creamed corn. You name it. It was there. So to answer the question in the most roundabout possible way, I think that that's it. It's that that true Southern table. So maybe it's not one specific dish, but that Southern table, if you will.

Josh Ennis:

But then moving to the low country and getting to see how special food is to the Gullah community and working with those people. And obviously Sean Brock and those people have really done an incredible

job with shining the light, the appropriate light on that. But that's I think what I'm most proud of is the embracing, but also the melding of all the different cultures that it took to create Southern cuisine, especially low country cuisine, whether it's the African American, the Gullah, even the English and the French. It's truly a beautiful melting pot of low country cuisine.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah. So talk to us about, you worked in some restaurants. How did that transition take place in terms of where were you cooking at? And then ultimately, I guess, what was it that happened that sort of led you on the path to where you're at now, working obviously in Buckhead in Atlanta in one of the largest markets in the US?

Josh Ennis:

So I did an apprenticeship at a private country club. It's a TPC club in Metro Atlanta. And the chef that I worked for is without a doubt one of the best chefs in the Southeast. He's also tragically one of the least recognized because that's just not his thing. He doesn't do anything for fanfare. He does it for the love of food and the quality. Basically just he kind of took a spark and dumped napalm all over it and really just created that fire within me. So he was the one that said, man, you've got something, you should really go after it. So once I caught that spark it was kind of a rededication and for lack of a better term, it replaced athletics for me. It allowed me to be competitive even within the kitchen. And anybody that works in the kitchen will acknowledge there are few things aside from an athletic field that are more competitive.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah, it's intense.

Josh Ennis:

Yeah.

Bryan Schaaf:

Now previous life I was a sports writer. I was in the locker room when LeBron James was drafted for the Cavaliers and things like that. There are so many similarities, and I'm sure you've seen it, that there's a similar mindset between professional athletes and chefs in terms of in a way there's a healthy ego that has to be fed. There's a competitive fire that if you're not, I mean you read some of the stories. Anytime that you're in cities like New York city, when Michelin rolls into town, it really kicks in tenfold. Surely although Michelin is not in Atlanta, you surely felt that just being in Atlanta with all the fantastic restaurants around you.

Josh Ennis:

Absolutely. We definitely did being in the private club scene and then obviously I don't think I've mentioned, I moved from Metro Atlanta to the Caribbean and then to the Charleston low country area, and in the Caribbean we were the number one restaurant in the Caribbean. And then when I moved to the low country area, we were the number one resort in North America. So we weren't Michelin, but we were rated by Conde Nast and all that. So while not Michelin people rolling in, it was still that New York Times, it was all the big boys that were rolling in. So there was that, for lack of a better term, that pucker factor, where you're like, oh, it's real, right now. Guys, I'm not going to freak you out and tell you to be on point, but you better be on point.

Bryan Schaaf:

Don't mess it up.

Josh Ennis:

Yep. So coming out of restaurants, we were, honestly soul bearing kind of moment. I got laid off and I was at that crossroads and I decided, you know what, my resume is all right. I'm going to send it off to places that I think would be cool to live. So we sent it to France, Hawaii, the Caribbean, just everywhere. And we were very blessed. God was very good to us and he decided that I deserved an offer in every place I sent it. So we were able to just kind of lay the papers out and say, where do we want to live? So we moved to the Caribbean. We lived there for about a year. We moved back once it was, my wife became pregnant with our second child. So we moved back and I was staying in restaurants and honestly, man, it was just breaking me physically, mentally, emotionally.

Josh Ennis:

I was just working 90 hours a week. It was just not a healthy thing. And I miss the restaurant world like a lost relative. I truly do. So when I got the opportunity to come to a place that I used and I really held in extremely high esteem, like Buckhead Atlanta, I was just, I couldn't, my feet wouldn't move fast enough. So I went there, I applied and I don't think I was out of the parking lot before I called and asked if my application was good and if I needed to do anything. And being the corporate chef at Buckhead is a pretty sought after position, it really is. I've got chefs all the time that are restaurants that I really respect, saying that they're willing to knock me off to take my job.

Josh Ennis:

And I tell them each time, that's about what it's going to take to get me out of my job. Buckhead is one of those where we're extremely proud. We've got a culture within that building. We've got a culture obviously with certified Angus beef where when you walk through our halls, it looks like certified Angus beef threw up in our hallways. There's just stuff everywhere because we've got awards that are 28 years old. We've got, you name it and we're putting it all over as much as we can to show how proud we are of the brand, but also of being the premier meat purveyor in the Southeast.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah. Talk to us a little bit about what a typical day looks like for you there. And I say that understanding there probably is no typical day for you.

Josh Ennis:

Yeah.

Bryan Schaaf:

But can you talk about the breadth of the things that you could do? Because it seems like you do a lot of teaching, you work with a lot of chefs. You're an innovator, you're showcasing things and you kind of have the worlds list of ingredients at your fingertips anytime you want.

Josh Ennis:

Yeah. So I think that's why chefs that come in and they kind of can see the bigger picture threaten to bump me off and take my job because they see just how cool it is. I tell people whether it's a one on one

conversation, like what we're doing right now, or if it's in a public setting, I tell people all the time, I've got the coolest job in the whole Cisco corporation. So we get to work with all the coolest stuff we could want. People want us to carry their products. So they're showing us amazing items weekly. They're coming in like, hey, we really want you to show this. So I've got the best of every possible world and I get to hang out with incredible chefs all the time. I've gotten to work with, not to name drop, but I'm about to name drop, I've got to work with Jose Andres and I've got to work with Eric Ripert and just things that are pinch me moments as a chef. Because I'm just a guy from Snellville, Georgia. What am I doing in these guys' company? These are the best chefs in the world.

Josh Ennis:

So an average day doesn't really exist because it could be hanging out with Mike and Christy McCravy and the McPeak family in Georgia. Or it could be in Boca Raton working a Hilton thing with Eric Ripert, or it's really just kind of roll the dice and see what shakes out that day.

Bryan Schaaf:

Excellent. What is the, and obviously there are a lot of things about your job that get you excited, but when we look internally at certified Angus beef, and you look at the things that motivate you, and one of the things that a lot of people talk about is that rancher connection, that it is, I mean it's a direct link. It's understanding meeting the people who are raising those animals that get into to certified Angus beef. What does it mean to you to be kind of that next to last link in that chain of conception to consumption in the beef industry?

Josh Ennis:

So I love where we sit within that entire chain you just mentioned. We talked about my ideal or my average day. My favorite day is a much easier thing to define. My favorite day is actually getting to go and work with ranchers and farmers, and especially to bring people out there and to get to make that connection. Because I think I, we take for granted understanding what ranchers and farmers are, where a lot of chefs are disconnected. I've had people that just, they don't understand that an animal, that it was an animal that's on that plate. And as a chef, that was always paramount to me. I needed my cooks to really understand, because I need you to respect the ingredients. If you respect the ingredients, then you're less likely to be careless about overcooking something or sending something out that's not perfect.

Josh Ennis:

And if it's not perfect it's wrong, and the microcosm of one plate translates all the way back two and a half years to a rancher in Georgia or in Alabama or in California. It doesn't matter where they are. It's a two and a half year investment for those ranchers that these never were, but certainly now gone are the days of the dumb farmer. These ranchers are geneticists, they're scientists. They're making sure that they're buying the right genes to produce what they need to create and sustain that certified Angus beef brand. So I tell people, I've told people multiple times throughout the course of this conference, man, if you want to, I try really hard to be a really nice guy, but if you really want to upset me, talk bad about a rancher, because the American rancher and farmer is who I am most proud to work with and work for. These guys do a thankless job that doesn't pay a lot. And their whole goal is to support their family and feed the world.

Bryan Schaaf:

Well said. So when you look at where you're at, what you get to do on a daily basis, and you're sitting at, full disclosure, it's the food service leader summit from certified Angus beef, which is made up of an amalgam of, of food service sales folks and chefs and folks like yourself really from around the world.

Josh Ennis:

Sure.

Bryan Schaaf:

We like to focus domestically, but there are folks here truly from around the world. To come to an event like this every year, and you're somebody who gets to teach and learn and do all that all the time. What is your motivation to come to events like this where I guess in a real sense you're sitting across the table from sometimes competitors or just industry folks in general. What are the things that you take away from times like this? Is it a chance to get together with a lot of folks who are like minded, whether they work for Cisco or Buckhead or they don't, and the educational stuff?

Josh Ennis:

I think the question we just hit on as far as with regards to the ranchers, I think that that's the common thread that runs through everybody that's at this conference and everybody committed to the certified Angus beef brand. I think that regardless of who we've worked for, and I'm actually going to steal this from a competitor that I've become friends with at this specific conference, I didn't know him until 48 hours ago, but he called it brothers in the brand, and he and I, that stemmed, that saying stemmed from he and I having a conversation about, one of my favorite things is getting to know people that on last Friday we were competitors, but on Monday we're brothers in the brand and we've got a common goal. We are not competitors because we don't work in the same market.

Josh Ennis:

So we all have to hopefully hit a switch and have our lights come on. We want to feed our families and we want for the American rancher to be able to do the same thing. So my favorite thing about this is to truly get the knowledge, the market trends, the things like that. To me, that's my favorite part. That's why I probably obnoxiously beat up my boss about, I've got to be there, I've got to go, I've got to go. So it's just one of those things where it's amazing because whether it's this conference where you've got 250 people or it's an annual conference where you've got maybe even close to twice that number, regardless, everybody's committed to the same goal.

Bryan Schaaf:

Excellent. Couple of final questions as we approach having to sort of put a bow on where we're going here. In Atlanta, and I realize given the nature of what you do in the people that you work for, this is really a question that's just asking you to step in it.

Josh Ennis:

Sure.

Bryan Schaaf:

But we're going to ask it anyway.

Josh Ennis:
I love these.

Bryan Schaaf:

So many of our listeners, at last count, and I'm not the statistics guy, I think we've got listeners in like 25 different countries all over the continental United States. But a lot of folks travel. a lot of people in all different regions. Atlanta, right?

Josh Ennis:
Beef travels, man.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah. as far as I'm concerned, you're the aficionado on Atlanta. If I'm in Atlanta, where do I need to eat?

Josh Ennis:

Oh, man. That's tough. So, like I said, I had a great time, about almost a decade, living in the low country. So I've got a love for that area and I don't live there anymore. So I could recommend places and not feel the wrath.

Bryan Schaaf:

Fair enough. Fair enough.

Josh Ennis:

But Atlanta, man, there's just so many. I don't feel like ... So Charleston is just, I can't imagine a place being hotter than Charleston for a food scene right now.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah.

Josh Ennis:

And I think that Atlanta is equal. However, for whatever reason it doesn't get the respect. We've got some incredible places, whether it's a place like Kevin Rathman, his whole culinary empire, for lack of a better term. We've got James Beard places, Kevin Gillespie's places. We've just got some incredible places. My favorite place right now as far as the general concept is a place called Governor's Gun Club. I know that sounds weird, because it's got the word club in there, but it's they have rebranded themselves as a guntry club, so they serve all wild game. They understand their clientele perfectly. They serve all wild game and the beef that they have, they're committed. It's all CAB or CAB prime, certified Angus beef prime. And you can go in there and you can rent a 50 cal sniper rifle and then go have a 50 ounce porterhouse or a Tomahawk rib eye. It's a pretty amazing place.

Bryan Schaaf:

That's the most American thing I think I've ever heard of.

Josh Ennis:

Right? I feel like your steak should come out and the potatoes should spell 'Merica.

Bryan Schaaf:

It's served to you from George Washington himself.

Josh Ennis:

Exactly.

Bryan Schaaf:

One of the places that, and I'll give my own selfish plug on there, some of the best dudes you'll ever meet and some of the best barbecue you'll ever have, you guys get Fox Brothers.

Josh Ennis:

Fox Brothers, man. Absolutely.

Bryan Schaaf:

All day long.

Josh Ennis:

Absolutely.

Bryan Schaaf:

You know what Fox Brothers also has, not only just fantastic eats, right?

Josh Ennis:

Yep.

Bryan Schaaf:

And of course I'm partial the brisket, but they've got the best swag.

Josh Ennis:

They do.

Bryan Schaaf:

I think of any of the hats, the tee shirts. I've got a Fox Brothers bandana hanging on my wall in my office.

Josh Ennis:

Yeah. So those guys are amazing. They really are. And having been to Austin, and I feel like ... Shameless plug, shameless namedrop. I've become good friends with the folks at Black's Barbecue out there in New Braunfels. But man, if I can't be in Texas and I want brisket, I'm going to Fox Brothers.

Bryan Schaaf:

Oh yeah.

Josh Ennis:
They're incredible.

Bryan Schaaf:
Yeah. Have you done the stadium concept?

Josh Ennis:
I have.

Bryan Schaaf:
How is it?

Josh Ennis:
I don't know how they do it. I don't know how it's still that good and it's in a stadium, honestly.

Bryan Schaaf:
They're amazing.

Josh Ennis:
Yeah.

Bryan Schaaf:
They're amazing. And they do ... You know, it's funny they're known for their barbecue, but they do some super high end bites. Nick Melvin, that was one of their guys behind the scenes. Nick is on the most innovative chefs I think I've ever been around.

Josh Ennis:
Sure.

Bryan Schaaf:
And he makes fantastic pickles.

Josh Ennis:
Yeah. Well, so they're quickly becoming the barbecue Chick-fil-A for Atlanta.

Bryan Schaaf:
And they're open on Sundays.

Josh Ennis:
Yeah, and they're open on Sundays. If you can't get a chicken sandwich, go get some brisket or some Frito pie.

Bryan Schaaf:

I feel like that should be our new tagline for certified Angus beef.

Josh Ennis:

That should be it, yeah, did we just, I think we just became best friends.

Bryan Schaaf:

That's right. Right? We're going to propose that to the marketing, right on.

Josh Ennis:

Yeah, Exactly.

Bryan Schaaf:

So chef Josh Ennis from Buckhead, Atlanta. I was just going to go into your title again, but then I was like, I'm going to mess it up if I say it. Can you say it one more time?

Josh Ennis:

Program Sales Manager, Corporate Chef, head trash taker outer guy.

Bryan Schaaf:

And if you want to boil it down, dude who cook stuff every day.

Josh Ennis:

Every day, all day.

Bryan Schaaf:

Glorious. Chef, we appreciate you taking time for joining us on the Meat Speak podcast. If this is your first time tuning into the Meat Speak podcast, know that you can find us across all major podcasting platforms, Google, Apple, Spotify, or by going to certifiedAngusbeef.com and it's a backslash, not a forward slash.

Josh Ennis:

Backslash.

Bryan Schaaf:

Backslash podcast. Chef, we appreciate you taking time. Thank you, sir.

Josh Ennis:

My pleasure, man. Thanks for having me.