

Matt Stillwell

COUNTRY ARTIST · SONGWRITER · STORYTELLER

Matt Stillwell's first touring network was a collection of former baseball teammates with spare rooms, open couches and friends willing to come out to a show. He traveled with a guitar, a sound system and an email list, building a circuit around Western North Carolina and East Tennessee before stretching it toward Atlanta, Charlotte and whatever town would have him next. His teammates showed up and bought beer. The venues liked that. Stillwell got invited back.

That modest circuit became a national career: more than 3,000 shows across 47 states, nine albums and more than 18 million streams. Stillwell built it with a ballplayer's work ethic and an entrepreneur's willingness to find another way forward. Now, with new music nearing release and BEAT ALS bringing his audience and relationships together around a larger purpose, the country artist from Sylva, North Carolina, is putting those years of experience to work on an ambitious new chapter.

Stillwell played baseball at Western Carolina University, where he became an all-conference player and helped win a Southern Conference championship. When he moved to Nashville, he entered another kind of training ground. He was learning the guitar, finding his footing as a songwriter and sitting across from Music Row writers who knew considerably more than he did.

For several years, he wrote two or three times a day. At first, he played writers' rounds at night. As the bookings grew, he settled into a demanding rhythm: writing through the first part of the week, leaving Wednesday or Thursday to play shows through Sunday, then returning to Nashville to do it again.

The writing sessions were his batting practice. On the road, he put those lessons to use, learning how to hold a room and give people a reason to remember him after he left. Each week fed the next. He returned to Nashville with more experience, more people on the email list and another chance to write something that might travel farther than he could.

Then he and his longtime co-writer Lynn Hutton wrote "Shine," and the dream that had brought him to Nashville got bigger.

Released independently, "Shine" became the first of three Billboard-charting country singles, followed by "Sweet Sun Angel" and "Ignition." The "Shine" video climbed to No. 2 on GAC's Top 20, and several of Stillwell's videos reached the CMT Pure Top 10. A national country radio tour introduced him to programmers and listeners far beyond his regional circuit. He performed at the ACM Awards' Fremont Street Experience in Las Vegas, played major festivals and built a national touring schedule.

The music also opened doors beyond radio. “Shine” helped create a relationship with Ole Smoky Moonshine as the company was getting started. A feature on CBS Sunday Morning placed him alongside NASCAR legend Junior Johnson, connecting his music to a world of moonshine and racing with deep roots in his home state. A relationship with Kevin Harvick and KHI Management eventually led to a seven-year partnership with Budweiser, national tours and a custom-wrapped bus.

That period brought two appearances on Fox & Friends and a turn co-hosting Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives with Guy Fieri. Stillwell was building a platform that reached across music, television, sports and business—and learning how to sustain the relationships behind it.

Around the beginning of the Budweiser partnership, “Hey Dad” gave that momentum a deeply personal dimension. Rooted in love and loss, the song invited listeners to bring their own fathers, memories and unfinished conversations into it. As his touring reach expanded, it connected him with people who heard their own lives in his music.

“Hey Dad” would become one of his most enduring songs, reaching more than five million streams and 15 million video views across platforms. Its life continued well beyond its release, carried by listeners who found it when they needed it and shared it with someone else.

Stillwell’s ability to turn those connections into new opportunities became essential when the pandemic disrupted live music. He developed the Hometown House Party Tour, taking his songs directly to listeners in intimate settings. It grew to more than 300 shows across 31 states, creating a way to keep performing and earning a living when the traditional touring business had largely stopped.

The experience brought him closer to the people listening. Hosts and their families became part of the shows, and conversations around the performances revealed what the songs meant in their lives. Years of building an audience one person at a time had led him quite literally to those people’s homes.

Through it all, Stillwell came to a simpler description of the work: storyteller.

His songs draw from the mountains that raised him and the life he has built beyond them. Family, friendship, loss and belonging recur because they remain present in his own experience. “I’m a Vol for Life Y’all” gives that sense of belonging a communal voice, drawing on the traditions and loyalties that make a team part of a family’s identity. Stillwell understands that attachment as both a fan and a former athlete. The song gives people a way to share it.

His ties to sports reach deeper still. At Western Carolina, he played for Keith LeClair, whose death from ALS left a lasting mark on an extensive community of players and coaches. That experience became a driving force behind Stillwell’s founding of BEAT ALS, an initiative of

the nonprofit 723 Foundation dedicated to mobility support, hope experiences, telling ALS warriors' stories and supporting research.

The mission brings together people from across his life: former teammates and coaches, fellow artists, business partners and fans. It also draws directly on his experience. Hometown House Parties have evolved into Hometown Hope Parties, while his Castle Sessions have become The Hope Sessions. Formats he developed to bring listeners closer to music now help bring support to families facing ALS. The people who helped him build a career have become part of what that career can give back.

Stillwell brings that same drive to his next recordings. Following Matt Stillwell's 7 Series, Vol. 1, he is nearing completion of Vol. 2, with its first single, "If I Could Fly," planned for fall 2026. "Something New" for Twiist and "Stay Wild" for Moon Child add to a season of new music and creative partnerships.

From his home in Knoxville, where he lives with his wife and two daughters, Stillwell continues to write, record and take his songs on the road. His ambitions have grown with the audience. So has his understanding of what a song can set in motion.

He once relied on former teammates to fill a room. Thousands of shows later, this country music lifer is still earning that connection—and giving people new reasons to show up.