



Wiedmer: DeMatteo, Bandy help Mannings

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By:
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In their much-traveled careers as professional football players, former University of Tennessee at Chattanooga standouts Cos DeMatteo and Nate Bandy caught passes from quarterbacks as varied as UTC flamethrower Chris Sanders and Tennessee Titans All-Pro Steve McNair.

This morning finds them catching a few bullets from the best of the best, however. As employees of D-I Sports Training, DeMatteo and Bandy are serving as counselors at the Manning Passing Academy at Nicholls State in Thibodaux, La.

So as they braced to snare a few bullets and bombs off the fingers of brothers Peyton and Eli Manning — who also just happened to have been the past two Super Bowl MVPs — a sports writer couldn't help asking whom the two believed throws a better ball: Sanders or Peyton Manning.

"That puts me in a bad situation," said DeMatteo, who stands second in the UTC record book in career receptions and fourth in yardage. "One is my boss (Manning) and the other is a very good friend. So as much as I love Sanders, he doesn't pay my bills. I guess I'd have to say Peyton."

Asked the same question, Bandy varied slightly, mindful that Sanders has produced some memorable Arena League moments through the years.

"Chris can throw a pretty good ball," said Bandy. "But I'd probably say Peyton's a little more accurate. But the guy I played with who could really throw it was Steve McNair when I was with the Titans. In 2002, McNair could throw that thing 100 miles an hour. I've never seen anybody throw a harder ball than McNair."

The Manning Passing Academy is supposed to help high school quarterbacks, wide receivers and tight ends learn to throw, catch and train well enough to earn Division I scholarships. To that end, DeMatteo and Bandy will help conduct a four-hour seminar today on Speed and Strength Training.

"We'll have about 500 kids a session," said DeMatteo. "We'll work on mirco hurdles, rapid response drills, stuff like that. The more kids we can expose to this the better. Hopefully, they'll take it back to their respective high schools."

DeMatteo and Bandy have known each other since long before high school. In fact, they've been together since Rock Creek Elementary in Winchester, Tenn. It was during those days that DeMatteo's father first educated his son on the greatness of Archie Manning, the father of Peyton and Eli and the senior instructor at the passing academy.

By the time Bandy and DeMatteo were in high school they had both become big fans of Peyton.

When Manning became a co-owner of three D-1 training centers in Nashville, Knoxville and Chattanooga a couple of years ago, DeMatteo became an instructor, followed shortly thereafter by Bandy.

"It's absolutely rewarding," said the 29-year-old Bandy, who also played for Scotland in NFL Europe and several Arena teams. "I wish we'd had something like this (D-1) when I was coming up. I didn't get a solid strength coach until I was a senior in college. It's just great to be able to help pass on knowledge to these high school kids."

D-1 isn't free. Costs run from a few dollars for a team session to several times that for an individual workout. Both DeMatteo and Bandy said that as of Wednesday morning they found no Chattanooga area athletes headed for the Manning camp.

But workout routines and strength and conditioning drills are not all that DeMatteo and Bandy work on with their athletes.

“We talk about their diet, about school, about the choices they make,” said Bandy. “I used to weigh 280. Now I’m down to 260 and I’ve never felt better. I used to be a cheeseburger and pizza guy. Now I eat a fruit salad for breakfast, tuna or chicken salad at lunch and something sensible for dinner. It’s like they say, you are what you eat, and we want to get these kids to eat better.”

DeMatteo says he’s leery of the Cajun cuisine he’ll be surrounded by in Louisiana.

“I’m not good with spicy food,” he said.

Bandy’s excited, however, even if fruit salad and tuna salad aren’t terribly popular down on the bayou.

“Jambalaya, crawfish, I want to taste all of it,” he said.

Beyond that, DeMatteo said he’s finally lost the taste for Hollywood after appearing in both the remake of “The Longest Yard” and movie “Invincible.”

Citing the appropriate degree of sympathy and empathy for last year’s writers strike, Cos said, “I didn’t want to let my face be seen while those writers were struggling. So I guess I’ve retired from my movie career.”

But hadn’t there been a flood of phone calls from Hollywood begging for his return?

“Not really,” said Cos with a chuckle. “The motion picture industry has quit calling.”

Besides, getting calls from the Mannings to help coach kids is far more rewarding.

“They’re really down-to-earth people,” said DeMatteo. “They just make a lot more money than we do.”

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