

sports

Commentary

Trying to be more than a coach's son

Mike Marino

Two coach's sons were in action out at Autzen Stadium yesterday. Brady Brooks, 8-year-old son of Oregon head coach Rich Brooks, was busy playing catch with injured tackle Pete Laughlin. Mike Nolan, though, had a tougher job.

The son of New Orleans Saints head coach Dick Nolan was busy getting a rather quick education at the art of playing free safety in Oregon's defensive backfield.

Aided partially — but not totally — by the departure of Gary Beck and the injury to Ernie Taylor, Nolan has found himself fighting for the starting role. All this in only two weeks — the time he's been practicing following an operation to remove calcium deposits in his knee. Right now, though, it's not the knee, his famous father or even speculation on how the Saints will do this year that's a major concern.

"Out here now, my problem is my (defensive) assignments," Nolan grinned. "I mean the coaches threw about eight at me last week. I've learned most of them, but one has got me totally upside down."

As a result, Nolan usually gets a holler from Brooks or defensive backfield coach Milt Jackson. In other words, it doesn't matter if your father had Brooks on his staff: if you fumble, you're as vulnerable as the next guy.

That's just how Mike Nolan likes it. "A lot of people think that I should know a lot about football because of my father," Nolan said. "But it wasn't like he pushed me. It was my own decision, to play football, and besides, I haven't gotten any jobs because of it that I couldn't have gotten on my own."

The elder Nolan, you'll recall, was a standout defensive back with the New York Giants in the days of Em Tunnell and the umbrella defense. The hookup with Brooks, though, came in his years as head coach of the San Francisco Forty-Niners. Brooks coached Nolan's special teams in 1974, and the defensive backs in 1975. "I met Coach Brooks then," Nolan said. "In the summer I worked for the Forty-Niners and I was kinda his ball boy."

In those Forty-Niner years the emotions ran the gamut. So did Nolan's. "How the team was doing got to affect everything that I did," he recalled. "If they won, I was happy, and if they lost, then I was just terrible."

Nolan made friends among the Forty-Niners, notably defensive star Cleveland Elam and running back Delvin Williams (now with Miami). But when the team started slipping — and the famous Forty-Niner faithful started grumbling — Dick Nolan took the abuse. "A lot of things my dad took the blame for weren't his fault at all," his son defended. "But the management had a decision to make: whether to get rid of him or get rid of a lot of other people."

Rather than houseclean the club, the owners axed the head coach. "It hit me hard," Mike said, "but I kinda knew it; I heard the boos."

"I remember it was the day after Christmas — I remember seeing him walking up the door, and I could just tell that he'd been fired."

That was only Mike's junior year in high school. In his senior year at Woodside High in the Bay Area, Nolan caught a finger in the eye that begat hemorrhaging and a host of other problems. "I wanted to play college ball," Nolan said, "but I thought that it had ruined my chances."

"I was restless; I wanted to play badly," he said. "So I went against the doctors orders and played the last two games and the league championship."

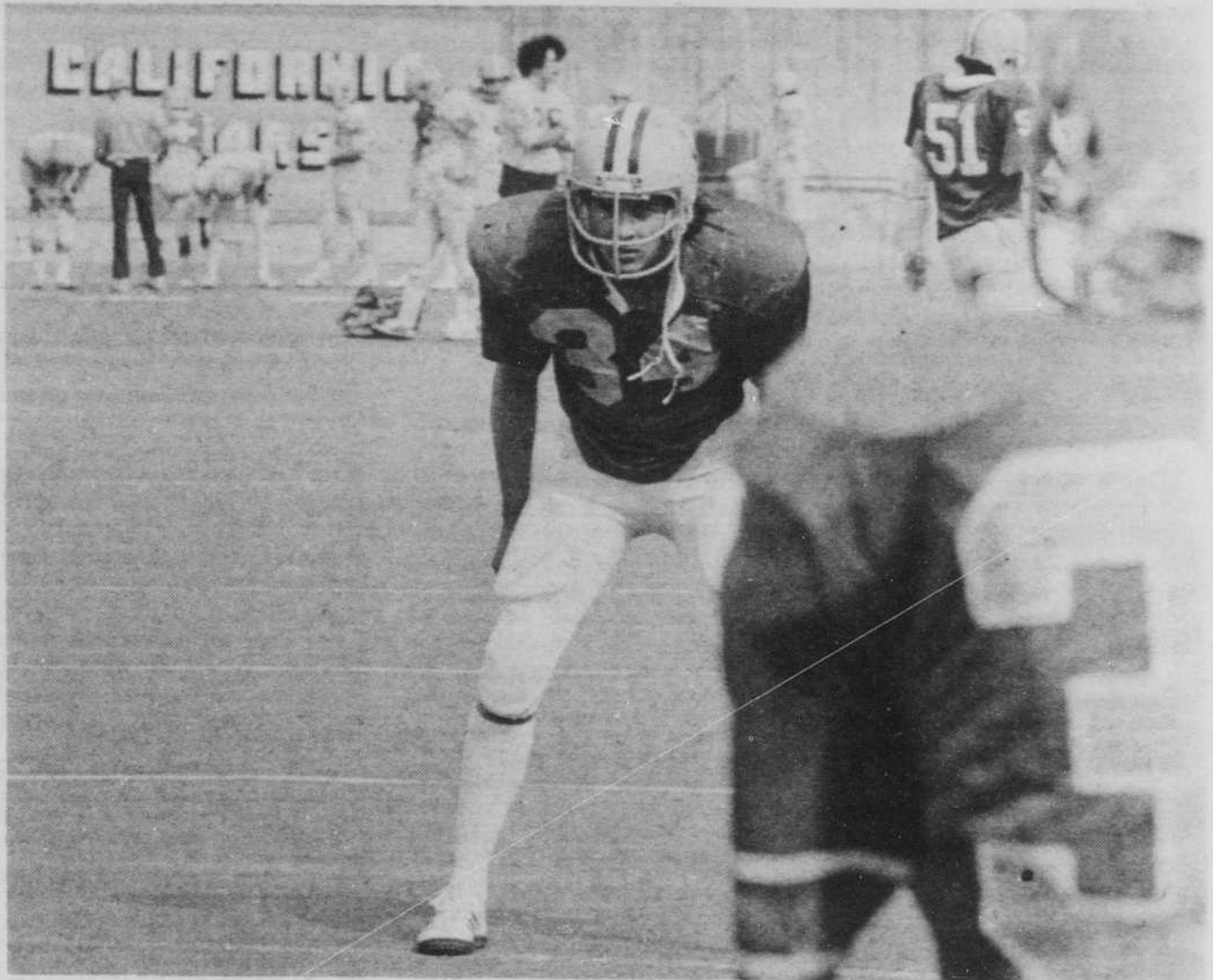
He impressed few, beyond an occasional JC scout. But Brooks remembered the ball boy from his Forty-Niner days. He gave Nolan a chance to learn — which is exactly what he did last season in playing behind David Haynes, Reggie Grant, Bruce Jensen and Kenny Bryant. "I played on the scout teams (the teams that usually take the abuse of the first-stringers) most of the year," he said. "I played in the OSU game on the special teams and made the trips to Georgia, TCU and LSU. But just playing behind those guys really brought me up — I feel like I'm playing better because of those guys."

And now, with Bryant back, he's playing along side them. And liking it, for the most part. "Because of my size (5-11, 160) I like to be the hitter instead of the hittee," he laughed. "I know it sounds a bit hard, but I like to hit people. I played a little wide receiver in high school, but I hated being a target."

Nowadays, aside from an occasional chiding for a missed assignment, Nolan is no target. In fact, he's zeroing in on the starting free safety slot for the Colorado game.

"This time is really important to me," he beamed. "It's given me a whole new inspiration for the summer — and I'll be working for the fall."

Spoken like someone who's definitely his own man.



Mike Nolan doesn't have time to think about being a famous coach's son — not during Oregon's spring football practice, anyway. Instead, the soon-to-be sophomore is eyeing the starting safety job for next year. Photo by Mike Marino

Rose wants kids to see 3,000th

CINCINNATI (AP) — Cincinnati Reds third baseman Pete Rose knows the perfect setting for his 3,000th hit.

"I'd like for 50,000 people to be there when I get it and every one of them to be four or five years old," Rose said.

The 37-year-old Rose was signing autographs last weekend in New York when a youngster dropped a dollar bill for him to sign.

"Hey, when I was a kid, I'd have paid \$1 for Joe DiMaggio's autograph," Rose said. "I know. Don't say it. I'm not Joe DiMaggio."

"Don't you know Joe DiMaggio?" Rose asked.

"You know," he coaxed. "Mr. Coffee."

The boy nodded.

Rose is in the spotlight these days because of his drive to become the 13th player to reach the plateau of 3,000 career hits.

—sportfolio

Lacrosse team wins two

The Oregon Lacrosse team added two wins this past weekend, defeating Willamette, 15-4, on Saturday and dispatching Puget Sound, 19-9, on Sunday.

It was the opening of the home schedule for the team, which this weekend takes a break from league action and travels to Corvallis for the Pacific Northwest Lacrosse Association Invitational Tournament.

Duck sailors fall to Huskies

Oregon's sailing team finished in between Washington and Oregon State over the weekend in a three-way race held at Dexter Lake.

In a close match, Oregon skippers Rusty Kalen, Ted Kraus, Andrew Freeman and James Taylor fell victim to the Huskies' great depth. Oregon State finished a close third.

Women's soccer beats OSU

Oregon's women's soccer team defeated Oregon State, 2-1, in an exhibition match Sunday at Parker Stadium in Corvallis. The Ducks took an early lead with two goals by Lisa Wilson in the first half. The Beavers came back to score one goal in the second half, but it was all Oregon's defense would allow.

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