

Wignette: Redskins, No—Giants, Yes!

By Dave Borowski
Special to The Washington Post

If you were a 14-year-old boy faced with the choice of spending the day with your father or a National Football League team, what would you do? Well, maybe a better way to put that is: Which team would you choose?

My son, David, had a school project to visit the job site of someone whose career he admired and wished to pursue. He had to interview people at the site and write a report. David loves football and played organized ball for the first time last year with the Aumamale Boys and Girls Club's Bulldogs.

As a defensive end, he got to knock kids down and be applauded for the effort. David's not an especially big kid, but he does have drive and he did his job very well—well enough to earn many game awards and have his helmet fashioned with stickers of skulls and other grim icons. These kudos gave him an intense love of the game, dreams of playing college and pro ball... and a career day topic.

Pee Middle School civics teacher Anita Densitrey assigned the career project for completion on June 3. David insisted on visiting a

professional football team while I gently tried to steer him toward spending the day with me sitting at a desk and doing exciting office stuff. But he was a boy on a mission and that mission was NFL football.

He called the Redskins (his favorite team) and asked to spend the day at Redskins Park. After he explained his reasons for visiting the team the receptionist said, "If we do this for you, we'll be overrun with 14-year-old boys." David continued his quest.

Calls to the Baltimore Ravens, Philadelphia Eagles and Pittsburgh Steelers produced similar "You wanna do what?" reactions. When David's mother heard him on the phone with the Denver Broncos, she led him to a map of the United States and told him to keep the dream a bit closer. With the geographic limits set, he called the New York Giants.

David explained his interest to the woman who answered the phone. Instead of the usual "I don't think so," she put him through to the vice president of communications, Pat Hanlon. Hanlon was intrigued by the idea but was understandably reticent to give an immediate green light. "Fax me the school assignment and outline and

we'll see," he said.

We faxed the assignment sheet and also e-mailed all the details. Hanlon called and said okay, and we were off to New York.

Actually, it was off to the Meadowlands in East Rutherford, N.J. My wife, Pat, David and I left after work on Wednesday, June 2. That was the day of the Springfield truck crash that dumped 40,000 pounds of black powder in the way of rush-hour commuters.

After battling the traffic for more than an hour, we finally were on the Beltway, heading north on the beginning of our great adventure.

We got to our hotel around 11 a.m., later finding that the well-documented teenage need for sleep didn't materialize: Our son woke us at around 7 a.m. for our 9 o'clock appointment with the Giants.

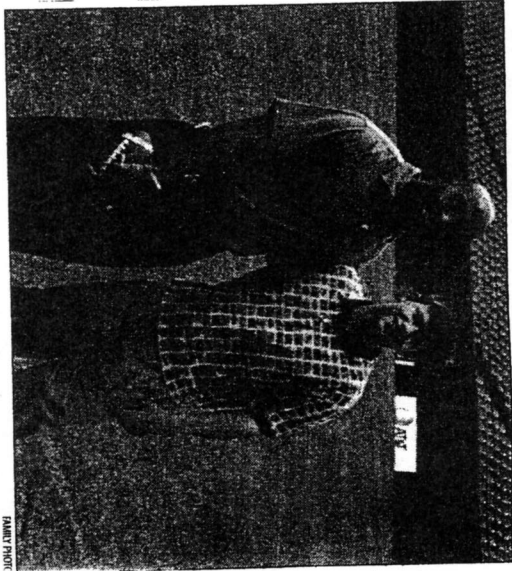
David got his camera, notebook, tape recorder and football (for autographs) and we left for the stadium. Hanlon met us in the Giants reception area. Just in case this was the attempt of a jaded, 50-year-old football fan to bond with a professional team, I, and my wife, were not included in the tour. Hanlon took him through double wooden doors and that was the last we saw

of David for four or five hours.

The report from David was that he got VIP treatment and saw things that only "authorized personnel" see—like the locker room and weight room. He also got to watch the game videos that the players see, and commented that, "You don't get to see the real hits on TV."

They let him try on some NFL-size gear, run out the tunnel onto the field and then meet some of the players. He got to interview several players, including running back Tiki Barber. Barber, a Virginia native, told David that he needed to maintain his grades and that hard work can make up for a less than massive stature. There were a dozen or so players working out in the gym and they all signed David's football. Some were nice enough to pose for pictures and sit for an interview.

Toward the end of the day, Peter John-Baptiste, assistant director of media relations, asked David, "What are you going to be when you grow up?" Without hesitation, David shot back "a professional football player." Having no doubt heard this countless times, and understanding the competitive nature of professional sports, John-Baptiste smiled and asked, "Do you



David Borowski with Giants running back Tiki Barber at the Meadowlands.

have a backup plan?" "Yeah, computers," David said with a bit of the edge out of his voice.

This was a great segue for the business side of football, because his next visit was with Computer Center Director Jon Berger, who showed David the hardware that produces team statistics and other necessary areas of the business of football.

Pat and I sat in the Giants waiting room in the early afternoon

and met a beaming 14-year-old carrying his autographed football and wearing a Giants cap. During the trip back to Washington, David played excerpts from his taped interviews while commenting on how nice everyone was and how cool it was to meet the players.

"Are you going to root for the Skins or the Giants now?" his mother asked. His diplomatic answer: "Maybe both."

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