

Athletes must keep dreams in perspective

By Barbara Ann Homick
Staff writer

High school athletes are trying to stay ahead of the game.

They are beginning to realize that nothing in life is guaranteed. Although they may have dreams of becoming professional athletes, they also know that it will be necessary to have a good education when the playing field or the court offers no more rewards.

Perhaps no one knows that better than Bob Thomas, a McQuaid Jesuit High School graduate and former kicker for the Chicago Bears, San Diego Chargers and New York Giants.

Thomas, who began his football career at McQuaid in 1967, booted what was then a Section 5 record field goal of 45 yards during his junior year. After graduating from McQuaid in 1970, he attended the University of Notre Dame where he joined the Fighting Irish football team as a sophomore.

After graduating from Notre Dame in 1974, Thomas was drafted by the Los Angeles Rams. He was later released when the Rams decided to keep veteran kicker David Ray. The Chicago Bears then picked up Thomas, and he remained with the Monsters of the Midway from 1975-1984.

He then had brief stints with the Chargers (1985) and the Giants (1986) before he tore ligaments in his ankle. The injury ended his football career.

Thomas knew all along that an injury could occur at any time. So he attended Loyola Law School while he played with the Bears, and he started practicing civil litigation law in 1981.

In 1988, the former professional kicker was elected circuit court judge in Dupage County, Ill. In a phone interview with the *Catholic Courier*, he said he doesn't miss football anymore.

"God blessed me with a wonderful opportunity, but I think I would miss football more if I didn't love what I was doing now," explained Thomas.

Thomas said it is important for young athletes to have dreams, but he advised them not to become too unrealistic in their expectations. His advice to athletes is to enjoy the moment and the friendships that are made along the way.

"The odds of becoming a pro diminish at each level," Thomas said.

Bishop Kearney senior Rene Ingoglia realizes the odds of succeeding. In his case, the odds are even more stacked against him because of a serious knee injury, but the high school football player isn't ready to give up.

Ingoglia is planning to attend a Division 1 college — possibly Syracuse University or the University of Wisconsin — but he



Collage by Lorraine Hennessey

said his main goal in college will be to get a good education. After college, he hopes to get drafted by a pro team, but he is willing to walk on as a free agent.

"Whatever the outcome, I'll try to make it as a pro," said the Kearney student.

Ingoglia plans to major in sports psychology. He will pursue a career in sports medicine if his dreams of becoming a professional athlete fall short. At this point, however, all he wants to do is play football.

Although Bob Grosvenor — a 1989 graduate of Elmira Notre Dame High School — is playing at the college level, he agrees with Ingoglia's thinking that athletes should pursue their dreams.

A sophomore consumer studies major at Syracuse University, Grosvenor plays strong safety/defensive back as a redshirt freshman for the Orangemen. He advised high school students to work hard and keep themselves open to all options.

"If you think high school is hard, wait until you get to college," he warned. "We'd all like to go on to play professionally, but we can't rely on that."

McQuaid junior Jeremy Fioravanti has been playing golf since he was 3-years-old, but he's not relying on becoming a professional, either. Although Fioravanti has the talent to join the Professional Golfers' Association tour — he currently shoots in the mid-70s — the McQuaid student is hoping to become the head pro at a golf course after graduating from college with a degree in business management.

"I don't know if I want to go that route (the tour)," Fioravanti said. "The competition is so tough, and a job at a pro shop is

more stable," he remarked.

But golfer Doreen LaDonna — who is playing the professional mini-tour circuit — is making a living at the game. The 1974 Bishop Kearney graduate didn't start her golfing career until after receiving her degree in psychology and business management from Nazareth College in 1978.

LaDonna moved to Florida in 1980 to work on her golf game and pursue a career on the links. Although she is still trying to qualify for the Ladies Professional Golf Association — she shoots about a 75 — the Kearney grad said she's not sure whether she wants to stay with golf or not.

"I went into golf knowing I had my degree to fall back on," she noted.

The professional golfer who lives in Singer Island, Fla., advises anyone who wants to pursue a career in golf to get a good instructor and stay with that person.

But most of all, she said, don't take the game too seriously.

Taking soccer seriously is what Angelo Panzetta is paid to do. The 1985 graduate of Bishop Kearney is a second-year sweeper for the Baltimore Blasts of the Major Indoor Soccer League. Although he was lucky enough to be a first-round draft, Panzetta said playing professional soccer involves more pressure than he imagined.

Even though Panzetta can always turn to a teaching career in math, he plans on playing soccer as long as he can. He encourages high school athletes to stick to their dreams.

"Dreams can come true," said Panzetta, an Irondequoit native and a 1989 graduate of Rochester Institute of Technology. "And any city can produce a pro."

That's what McQuaid's Jason McKinney is counting on. A basketball player since he was 7-years-old, McKinney is currently starting for the Knights and averaging 20 points per game.

The 6-10 senior center will be playing at Siena College next fall. After his four years of college are through, McKinney plans to try out for a National Basketball Association team.

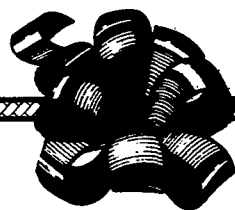
If that plan doesn't work out, McKinney wants to play basketball in Europe. "When I get my mind set on something, I try my best to get it," McKinney said.

Even though McQuaid grad Tom Sheehey tried his best to make it in the NBA — he played three weeks with the Boston Celtics and two weeks with the Chicago Bulls — he ended up pursuing his hoop career over in Europe.

Before attending the University of Virginia, Sheehey averaged about 25 points per game at McQuaid. With Grupo Ifa, his current squad in Barcelona, Spain, Sheehey is averaging about 18 ppg.

Sheehey spoke for many professionals when he offered young athletes the following advice:

"Go to class, don't do drugs and enjoy it until you can't do it anymore," he advised. "And maybe you'll make the big time."



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