

Sports

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Kennedy stays focused at Penn State

By Leslie Beth Feffer
Staff Writer

Roosevelt High School football coach Tony DeMatteo likes to bring some of his players to his mother's house for pre-game dinners on Friday nights. He brought star lineman Jim Kennedy there last year.

"She gave him raviolis and he had at least 30, 35 raviolis," DeMatteo said of the 6-foot-5, 340-pound Kennedy. "But after dinner, he got up and helped with the dishes. You know, he's the only one of my players who ever did that. Jimmy is really great, just a nice person."

He's also the most-recruited football player DeMatteo has ever had. After being pursued by many top collegiate football programs — including Syracuse, Indiana, Rutgers and Pittsburgh — he chose Penn State and the opportunity to work with legendary coach Joe Paterno.

"I have full confidence that he'll do well athletically," DeMatteo said. "He's one of the best football players I've seen. Academically, he'll need a little help and he promised me that he'll get that help."

Kennedy scored 810 on his last SAT attempt, qualifying him for a full scholarship, but it may not be enough for him to do much more than practice during his freshman year. The cut-off score for playing in games is 820, so he is anxiously awaiting a final ruling from the NCAA, due by August 10.

"I'm looking forward to making a name for myself, to be coach DeMatteo's first pro player and mostly to get an education," Kennedy said. "Whatever I decide to do and put my mind to it, I know I will be successful."

For someone who didn't make the football team in seventh grade and was cut from the squad the following year, he was

one of the most sought-after linemen in the country by the time he graduated from high school.

"He has the whole package," DeMatteo said. "But what really separates Jimmy from the pack is his quickness. He also loves to train and work out."

Although Penn State's training camp doesn't open until August 10, an eager Kennedy is already there, working toward his next goal — winning a national championship.

"I love it here, mostly because I'm out of the New York area and the senseless violence," he said. "I get to work out and go to classes. It's my type of atmosphere."

Although receiving his college degree is important, Kennedy hasn't yet decided what he'd like to study. He's interested in a variety of subjects, including art and computers.