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Knowing what a real loss feels like

By Dan Friedell / Special to The Citizen

With a 7-3 loss on Saturday to Stony Brook, the University at Albany football team finds itself in the midst of a seven-game losing streak stretching back to the end of the 2004 season.

On a muddy, soggy field, the Great Danes' offense gave up the game's lone touchdown - a fumble return by the Stony Brook defense. Junior linebacker Marc Angelillo, of Skaneateles, said it was a tough loss to take because it was a game 0-5 Albany planned to win.

"We expected to really dominate the game, which we did on defense, but we had a lot of turnovers on the offensive side. It just didn't go well for us," said Angelillo, who plays mostly on special teams.

Over the phone, the tone of his voice made it clear the loss stung. But a loss isn't something that keeps him down for long.

Only 21, the two-time letterwinner has experienced something that helps him keep a bad grade on an exam, a looming project deadline or a loss on the football field in perspective.

Late on June 19, 2004, Angelillo's 17-year-old brother Matt was killed in a car crash on Route 20 while heading home from a party.

"The small things that would bother me before it happened really wouldn't bother me right now," he said. "I really like to stay focused on everything that makes me happy and what I can do to make other people happy."

That's because he knows the difference between losing a football game and losing a brother.

"It was very painful, it was hard to let it all sink in right there and then," he said. "It probably didn't hit me for a couple weeks. From the time that it all happened, it was hard to even think about what was going on in my life. It completely takes up everything that you think about."

In the 16 months since the accident, the pain has lessened.

"But not a day goes by that I don't think about my brother," he said. "I have a lot of great memories; I think about all the positive times I spent with my brother, and my mom's always been into taking pictures and videos, so I have a lot of great memories with that."

Angelillo remembers going snowboarding with Matt at Song Mountain and salmon fishing on Skaneateles Lake.

"Matt was always a risk-taker," Angelillo said. "He'd go down the hill and find the biggest jump and hit it as fast as he could."

Matt played football for Skaneateles as a junior and he would always make a post-game call to his brother to give him a report. Angelillo also remembers Matt coming to Albany football games.

"Whenever he would come to the games, I could just see in his face how proud he was of me, how great it was for him to come and see a game out here."

Home from school when the accident happened, Angelillo kept working out, preparing for the next football season. He never thought of quitting the team.

"I just knew that it wouldn't help anything if I stopped playing," he said.

Teammates came to the funeral and spent time with Angelillo in Skaneateles to help him through the rough period right after the accident.

”He was down, which is certainly understandable,” long-time Albany coach Bob Ford said.

”(But) if anything, he seemed to have a greater resolve and a greater determination.“

Angelillo said the family-like atmosphere Ford cultivates between the Albany football players and the staff was an important element of the healing process.

”I think it helped me a lot actually, being around the guys on the football team and having a lot of close friends on the football team,” he said. ”It helped me get through the day.

But that characteristic of the Albany football program doesn't just appear when a player faces something as dramatic as losing a sibling. It's evident every day when one player helps another with a class assignment or one with a car makes sure his teammates have a ride.

”Anyone on the football team you could go to with a problem and they would be willing to help you out,” Angelillo said.

Angelillo's roommates Nick Larkin (a Marcellus High graduate) and Ryan Chrobak were friends and teammates who helped him there when he needed them. Just talking with them was helpful.

”I do like to talk about it with some of my friends,” he said. ”It does help to talk about it. Sometimes it's not the greatest time to talk about it, but it does help a little bit.“

And it puts losing a football game in perspective.

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