

Pettinelli embodies Owls' winning spirit
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PHILADELPHIA -- With three majors, Finance, International Business and Risk Management and Insurance, it is hard to believe that Temple senior Mike Pettinelli even has time for football. Somehow, though, he makes it work. "It gets kind of rough sometimes," Pettinelli said. "Like this summer when I had an internship with Marsh Insurance downtown. I'd get up and do our off-season workout from 6-8 a.m., shower, change and take the subway to work. I'd work from 8:30-5:30, take the subway back, get something to eat, work out some more and then go to bed."

Even though Pettinelli has never played in a game, and the odds are that he will never get a chance to kick for the Owls, all the hard work has been worth it. The reward came earlier this year when first-year coach Al Golden awarded the fifth-year senior from Marple Newtown a scholarship.

"I'm very appreciative of what Coach Golden did for me," Pettinelli said. "It's very rewarding. It means that all my hard work and what I've done for the last five years has not gone unnoticed."

Golden noticed. He saw how hard Pettinelli worked in spring ball and then learned that Pettinelli carries a 3.52 grade point average along with his three majors.

"He's representative of what I'm trying to get done," Golden said Tuesday, three days after the Owls ended a 20-game losing streak with a 28-14 victory over Bowling Green. "Here's a kid who's a good student. He stuck with the program. He made the team better at the sacrifice of his own glory. He's always there to help us at practice. He went through the off-season conditioning program. "He's a team player. He is an integral part of the team chemistry as all those kids are. They all add something so I wanted to send a message that it is important to stick with the program. It is important to get good grades. I want kids to say, 'Wow, Mike got a scholarship and he isn't even starting.'"

Make that not even playing. One has to wonder why a player would continue to plug on even though the prospects of playing are slim to none. It's understandable at a Notre Dame or a Penn State, programs with a tradition of success, while it might be difficult to grasp when playing at Temple. Temple has won just eight games in the five years Pettinelli has been on North Broad Street.

"It's a question I've been asked 100 times and one that I've asked myself," Pettinelli said. The answer is simple.

"I'm a goal-oriented person," Pettinelli said. "I'm driven and I'm persistent and I came here with a number of goals. The first reason I came here was to receive an education, which would lead to a good job. I've accomplished that goal. I'll graduate in December and I'll go to work for Marsh (Insurance) in January.

"But I also wanted to be a Division I-A scholarship football player. That's why I walked-on. I knew that if I played well, it could lead to a scholarship." As it turned out, Pettinelli did not have to play football to accomplish his third goal.

"It's a reward for loyalty," Golden said. "It says that the head coach appreciates and values loyalty. It says that the head coach appreciates and values academics. That's the message and Mike is kind of the bell tower for that."

How fitting is it that Golden would refer to Pettinelli as the "Bell Tower" of what he is trying to do on North Broad Street. This is because as every Temple student and graduate knows, the Bell Tower is the most recognizable symbol of success and respect. The Bell Tower stands like a beacon in the center of campus and is a hub for many student activities and organization gatherings.

"There's a difference this year," Pettinelli said. "There's no doubt about it. You can see it and feel it. In past years, once we lost a couple of games guys would start to hang their heads, but not this year. Everything has been upbeat. Everyone holds his head high, even after loss. We're disappointed, but not embarrassed. Football is a lot more fun." But it's not all fun and games. Golden is a taskmaster who demands excellence, on and off the field.

"He preaches accountability," Pettinelli said. "We're responsible for our actions. It's a point to pounds home all the time. You have a responsibility to yourself, to the program and to the university to be the very best you can be on and off the field. If you mess up there's no place for you here."

And if you toe the line, do what you're supposed to do as a student an athlete and a citizen, the reward at Temple will be great. Just ask Mike Pettinelli. "I still want to play," Pettinelli said. "That's the one thing I haven't done and that's what keeps me going." I go to practice every day with the hope that I'll get a chance to play. I can't imagine what it would be like, but I still dream about it.

"But even if I don't play, I can say that I accomplished every goal that I set out to achieve. I came here to get an education and a job, and to be a scholarship athlete and I've done that. It wasn't easy. It took a lot of hard work, but I take pride in sticking it out and accomplishing what I set out to do. It's very satisfying."