



Collegian File Photo

Senior Chris Colasanti (53) tackles former USC running back Stafon Johnson (13) in the 2009 Rose Bowl. Colasanti will make a larger impact this fall after a successful offseason.

Senior linebacker Colasanti to take on bigger role in 2010

By Andrew J. Cassavell
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Sifting through his mail one day, Al Fracassa came across an envelope sent from Penn State linebackers coach Ron Vanderlinden.

Inside, the football coach at Brother Rice High School found a hand-written letter and a handful of foldable football schedules with a cover picture of the linebacker/fullback who led his team to a Michigan class 2 state title in 2005.

That player, senior Chris Colasanti, is now the starting middle linebacker in Happy Valley, and the resulting publicity surrounding him comes as no surprise to his high school coach, who never doubted he would see his former player's face representing the program.

Colasanti wasn't as sure. He was forced to wait for his opportunity, spending three years backing up a slew of NFL-bound linebackers including Josh Hull, who beat him out for the middle linebacker spot in 2008.

"He was pretty discouraged there for a while," Fracassa said. "I said, 'Look, you gotta hang in there because eventually if you work hard enough good things will come.' And he did."

Not only is Colasanti the starting middle linebacker, but he's also a potential captain. Vanderlinden raved about his dedication and work



Colasanti

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Al Fracassa
Brother Rice High School football coach

ethic both during practice and off the field.

For Colasanti, his chance to show that has been a long time coming.

"I've been waiting three years for this, and I'm ready to go," said Colasanti, who was forced out of redshirting last year because of injuries to Sean Lee and NaVorro Bowman. "I'm just ready to get out there and make plays, and I'm really excited."

He played in 11 games, finishing the season with 18 tackles — nine solo and nine assisted.

"He was too good to redshirt as any part of his career," Vanderlinden said of Colasanti, one of the top linebacking prospects coming out of high school. "Yet he had the misfortune of playing behind some great players."

But Vanderlinden clarified that the "misfortune" was only in the sense of playing time. The experience he got learning under players such as Lee and Paul Posluszny proved very valuable in Colasanti's development, Vanderlinden said.

"He has the same intangibles those two guys had," he said. "He had really good instincts in getting to the football and always has. As he's gotten more comfortable in the system, he's put it all together in the preseason."

Colasanti said the lessons he took from the recent additions to Linebacker U's legacy, have been essential in his preparation for the season.

"I've had three years to learn from all of them," Colasanti said. "Learn flow of the game, learn different techniques from watching film, different techniques out in practice, the intensity that they've all shown."

Fracassa said Colasanti "has all the tools and intangibles to be a great player," citing the combination of his smarts, work ethic and athletic ability.

When he found out in Vanderlinden's letter Colasanti will likely start in the Sept. 4 season opener against Youngstown State, Fracassa immediately gave his former player a congratulatory call.

Fracassa reminded Colasanti to hit with his head up, and the response, Fracassa said was simply a humble, "Yes, coach. Yes, coach."

That humility, Vanderlinden said, characterizes Colasanti and his leadership during fall practice.

"The guys really respect him," Vanderlinden said. "He works really hard and he backs up his words with performance."

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Rotation

From Page 13.

Hodges and redshirt sophomore Michael Yancich bring to the defense rivals its defensive line, which uses a heavy dose of bodies to stay fresh.

Even Penn State football historian Lou Prato said he doesn't ever remember the Nittany Lions being as deep at linebacker as they are this season.

Part of that depth is Mauti, who pushed Hull for the starting middle linebacker spot last season before tearing the ACL in his right knee in preseason. He spent much of his rehab time studying film and believes the year out has helped him grow as a player on the field.

"Things slow down a little bit when you know what you're doing," Mauti said. "It's just one step quicker to the ball, one step faster."

Vanderlinden said younger players have also stepped up along with older linebackers, such as Mauti,

"They've both played since freshman year, and so, I think they both feel like they're good players, and they've just been waiting for their opportunity."

Ron Vanderlinden
Penn State linebackers coach

Colasanti and Stupar. Vanderlinden didn't think much separated the older players from the younger ones, aside from experience.

"The guys taking over, like Bani and Chris Colasanti, have been here now, Bani four years and Chris three years, and I think they're very confident players," Vanderlinden said. "They've both played since freshman year, and so, I think they both feel like they're good players, and they've just been waiting for their opportunity."

Though starters have yet to be identified, Gbadyu holds down the weak-side position, Mauti and Stupar compete for the strong-side spot and Colasanti is the frontrunner in the middle.

Despite all the talk, the deep line-

backer contingent doesn't guarantee a rotation will be implemented. On Media Day, Colasanti wouldn't say whether a rotation was likely or not.

The competition at linebacker has pleased head coach Joe Paterno, and he said he isn't counting on one guy to carry the load.

"Hopefully they'll play up to their potential, that a couple guys will come to the front," Paterno said. "But I don't have any, 'This guy has got to make X number of tackles. This guy has got to make three interceptions,' that kind of stuff. Hopefully we have a couple of kids that are going to make some plays in the clutch because of their ability."

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Beachum

From Page 13.

satisfies "the parent in me," Lock said.

He added the coaching staff has been "very supportive" of his son's rehabilitation over past nine months. This doesn't make the decision any easier for the running back,

who carried the ball 24 times for 113 yards and one touchdown last season.

The loss of Beachum takes away a proven goal line back and special teams player but doesn't make the depth at running back thin.

Evan Royster has proven back-up Stephon Green to sub in, and newcomers Curtis Dukes and Silas

Redd opened eyes in the spring and summer season.

But if going through an entire fall without football proves nostalgic, at least Beachum's got his new hobby.

"I couldn't sit down and play a song in front of people or anything, but I can strum a little bit," he said of his guitar skills.

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Spikes

From Page 13.

pitch but in his defense, spiked fastballs are the hardest pitch to block... It happens."

Pounders took the loss after allowing the two runs on the wild pitch.

"Tonight they just played better than us," said Zack Von Rosenberg, who started the game but lasted only three innings.

"We just didn't get that timely hit. We just didn't make that timely pitch. You have those days where

"We're going to continue to play hard and do what we can to win each game in the season."

Zack Von Rosenberg
Spikes pitcher

you're going to win and where you're going to lose and this we just happened to lose today."

After concluding a .500 homestand, including a series loss against the Scrappers, the Spikes now embark on a three-game road series at Mahoning Valley (27-36), which starts at 7:05 tonight.

"We'll face some of their same

relievers and I think us going to Mahoning Valley, we'll definitely take our 'A' game and try to take the series from them like they did from us," Von Rosenberg said.

"We're going to continue to play hard and do what we can to win each game in the season."

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Maggi making mark with Spikes

By James Nicol
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

In Drew Maggi's short time as a shortstop with the State College Spikes, he has already made an impression on the team.

The energy Maggi has brought has the team excited about the rest of their season. Spikes pitcher Zack Von Rosenberg is among those who have been impressed by Maggi in his short time with the team.

"Electric player, great shortstop. Everything he does is with quick feet and he's lightning with his hands" Von Rosenberg said. "Great defense, just another spark plug in our offense in my opinion."

Maggi went 1-for-3 with a walk and a stolen base in last night's 4-1 loss to the Mahoning Valley Scrappers.

Maggi was a 15th round pick of the Pittsburgh Pirates in this year's MLB amateur player draft out of Arizona State, but did not join the team until after he signed late with the team.

During his two seasons with the Sun Devils, he set the record for steals in a season by an Arizona State freshman, surpassing Barry Bonds and Steve Garabrants. Last season he led the Pac-10 conference with 34 stolen bases.

Spikes manager Gary Robinson said the Spikes had a lot of speed on the base paths before the addition of Maggi and his play will only help the team.

In only his fifth game with the Spikes he stole his first base of the season. Maggi led off the sixth inning with a walk before advancing to second on a throwing error by Scrapper second baseman Kevin Fontanez. Maggi stole third base uncontested on a pitch to Spikes third baseman Chase Lyles.

During his time in the Pac-10, Maggi used aluminum bats, which are not permitted in Major League Baseball but are common in NCAA baseball. Many young players take time in the minor leagues to adjust to wooden bats. Maggi seems to have overcome those struggles rather quickly, and has recorded hits in four of his first five games.

The first single of Maggi's professional career came with two outs in the bottom of the third, when he lined a pitch by Scrapper's starting pitcher Casey Gaynor back up the middle. All of Maggi's previous hits for the Spikes had been doubles.

Maggi brings "energy, energy, energy," to the team, Robinson said.

"And a lot of ability. He likes to play. He really likes to play."

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Mauti

From Page 13.

Lee, who came back from the same injury, and the rest of the linebackers take care of business.

Mix in an excessive amount of film, and Mauti said his knowledge of the position has improved.

"I probably watched more film in the last nine months than I ever had in my life," said Mauti, who was competing with Josh Hull for last year's starting middle linebacker spot before the injury. "I tried to slow things down a little bit and back up and look at things from a different perspective, especially while I was sitting there watching."

But Mauti's dedication to film and his relentless work ethic don't come as much of a surprise to those who know him well.

Mauti's time spent at Mandeville High School was enough to leave a long-term impression on his high school football coach Guy LeCompte.

After accepting the job after Mauti's high school sophomore season, LeCompte said one look at Mauti's game film was enough for him to realize he would be coaching a special player.

The no-nonsense attitude Mauti brought to the team, coupled with his work ethic, is something LeCompte said the two talked about when Mauti went down with his knee injury last August.

And it's the relentlessness Mauti shows in all facets of his game, giving LeCompte and Penn State hope he will return to form.

"I don't know that any injury is ever good," LeCompte said. "But I think the experience will help him, and if there's anybody that can overcome it, I think he's definitely that one player."

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