

THE DAILY
Collegian ONLINE

Published independently by students at Penn State

Posted on April 23, 2008 12:49 AM

FOOTBALL

LB Colasanti makes strides

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If you call him the "Italian Stallion" -- like his high school football coach did -- he'll probably respond by calling you sir or ma'am.

At least that's what Chris Colasanti's dad, Chris, Sr., saw after the Blue-White game on Saturday -- his son signing autographs for kids and fans, answering questions and responding politely.

After the game, reporters saw a humble Colasanti answer questions about his six-tackle, one forced-fumble performance. As he responded, the whole time the sophomore linebacker blushed and grinned as he answered a question about cracking into the starting lineup.

"I feel like I have a lot of work to do," Colasanti said. "I feel like I'm making good strides, but I have to sharpen up and fix my mistakes."

This has been the constant theme for Colasanti, a highly recruited player out of Brother Rice High School in Bloomfield Hills, Mich. He decided to come to Penn State after he spent just four days working on his technique at a football camp put on by Penn State coaches.

During those four days in Happy Valley, the summer after his sophomore year at Brother Rice, Colasanti met Joe Paterno. He also met Penn State linebacker coach Ron Vanderlinden and he met kids that he got along with and looked up to -- Paul Posluszny, Dan Connor and Sean Lee.

"I don't think 'Linebacker U' had anything to do with it," Colasanti's dad said. "I think he looked at Paul and the types of kids that were there and that's what he gravitated to. Good kids. Old-school, stand-up, do-it-right type of guys. I think that had more to do with it than turning out great linebackers."

Colasanti's dad said his son kept close with Lee that summer and the two would keep in

touch while Chris finished high school.

When Lee's season was cut short earlier this spring by a knee injury in practice, Colasanti's dad said his son was upset for his friend and didn't think about the opportunity to start in his place.

"Every time I've talked to him about it, he just feels terrible for Sean," Colasanti's dad said. "I know he never wanted to take the spot the way it happened."

Either way, Lee said in a press release earlier this spring that his injury would provide "a great opportunity for a young guy."

Vanderlinden, who has grown close to Colasanti since the two first met -- he played high school football in the same Catholic league as him -- echoed Lee's opinion. The linebacker coach said Lee's position was the only one that was "settled" this spring. Vanderlinden has helped Colasanti improve his pass coverage skills, his footwork and his tackling form.

Penn State defensive coordinator Tom Bradley said he was encouraged by Colasanti's performance in the Blue-White game and his effort this spring.

"He's a hard-nosed kid," Bradley said. "He works awful hard on it. He's extremely prideful. He likes to play. He has good places to start, it's just we got a lot of ground to make up because of the experience we lost in Sean. It's just hard to get that back."

Even though Colasanti had one of the better defensive games for Penn State on Saturday, he said it would be in the coach's hands whether or not he starts this fall.

"I'm just going to keep working hard and keep giving 110 percent and that's really coach's call," Colasanti said. "If I sharpen up on my mistakes and start playing a little better maybe chances get a little better, but it's really their call."

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