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NFL Player of the Day: Brad Smith

November 26, 2008

His team just became the first and only one to beat the Tennessee Titans this season, and one of his impressive NCAA records was broken this past Saturday. Brad Smith, a former Missouri Tigers star and now a member of the New York Jets, has been in the limelight plenty, but he always enjoys getting a chance to meet the fans who adore him.

To officially kick off the 2008 NFL Player of the Day program, Smith did a one-hour appearance at Steve's Sports Cards in Rutherford, N.J. on Sept. 16. Approximately 100 NFL fans came to the hobby shop, where Smith gladly signed autographs, posed for photos and interacted with customers. His visit there was one of two free autograph-signing sessions to launch the promotion, now in its ninth year.

"It was really good," said Smith, a dynamic wide receiver for the Jets who is averaging 7.3 yards per catch in 2008. "It kind of had that hometown feel, real small. A lot of people from the neighborhood came and it was pretty nice. It was on one of the streets downtown. Well, I don't know if that was 'downtown,' but there were all the little restaurants around, people—the waitresses and the waiters coming in—and all the police officers coming in while they were on duty.

"They brought food and they had a bunch of the kids coming around setting stuff up. You could just tell it wasn't real commercial. It had that 'Uncle Sam'-type feel to it. I had fun being a part of that."

In a post-appearance interview, Smith said he had made only one other visit to a hobby shop during his NFL career. He said this one was a good experience because of its "hometown feel," a welcomed change of pace from New York's bright lights and big stage when he experiences playing for the Jets. Store customers—the ones who regularly stop by Steve's Sports Cards, as well as first-time visitors—were visibly excited to be up close and personal with a well-known NFL player. Smith said he fed off of that energy.



"They were just excited to have an athlete there," said Smith, whose NCAA mark for career rushing yards by a quarterback (4,289) was bettered last week by West Virginia's Pat White. "You could just kind of tell the excitement. It didn't matter who the athlete was; they just wanted to support the owner of the shop, and to be able to get the autograph and stuff like that, that was just extra."

While signing everything from photos and trading cards to footballs and helmets for the fans in attendance, Smith also mingled with store owner Steve Bistany.

Smith said, "He (Bistany) [told me] he had been publicizing it to his friends, and his friends were coming in. And then to have an athlete there, as well, he seemed very excited and appreciative to the NFLPA for choosing his store. I thought it was a great turnout and it seemed like the owner had a lot of fun with it."

Beyond just having fun interacting with Smith, Bistany was grateful for the added exposure his store received, and said his customers had nothing but positive reactions to the event.

"We really enjoyed the opportunity to host Brad Smith in our store to kick off our NFL Player of the Day program," Bistany said. "Our customers love the NFL Player of the Day program so it was really special to start this year's program off with a big event like this. It really gets people excited for collecting NFL player trading cards. We hope our luck continues and we get to host the grand-prize event later this year."

Rob Lefko, President of Athlete Marketing for Priority Sports & Entertainment, said his company was happy to assist in coordinating Smith's appearance.

"Since NFL players are always preparing for their next opponent, they have very little free time during the week," Lefko said. "However, many players look for opportunities to personally connect with the fans who support them throughout the season. Hobby shop appearances provide a venue for players to show their appreciation to the fans and reward their loyalty.

"At Priority Sports & Entertainment, we always look for ways to support the off-field efforts of the players we represent. The NFLPA did a great job of working around the player's practice and meeting schedules."

As in years past, each of the more than 700 shops participating in the Player of the Day program received a free merchandise kit with prizes and promotional materials needed to run the three-month promotion, which lasts through November. Inside the kits were posters, T-shirts and 100 prizes from licensees such as: Donruss, Topps, Upper Deck, The Licensed Products Company, McFarlane, Riddell, WinCraft, Reebok, Fathead, Pro Specialties Group and Team Beans/Forever Collectibles.

Each participating hobby shop receives an autographed card to award to its grand-prize store winner. Among the NFL stars contributing autographed cards for this year's promotion are T.J. Houshmandzadeh, Lee Evans and LaMarr Woodley. In addition to the prizes contributed by the licensees, every store gets four NFL Player of the Day exclusive card packs featuring a special card from each licensee. This year, the featured players include Tom Brady (Upper Deck), Adrian Peterson (Topps) and Darren McFadden (Donruss). Individually-numbered versions of the cards are randomly inserted into trading card packs.

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-- Brad Smith, N.Y. Jets

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Smith, a third-year NFL receiver and special teams standout who played quarterback in college, said he saw quite a few Jets jerseys at the shop—but no other Brad Smith No. 16 jerseys.

Still, he held in-depth conversations with fans whose passion for their team is as intense as it gets.

“There were a couple of die-hard Jets fans in there that knew everything about me and about the team,” he said through laughter. “They were asking about certain plays and they were saying how they were at certain games when [you made] a play or called a play somebody else made. So, it was interesting to see how much these people know about football and about the game you play,” added Smith, who was drafted in the fourth round by the Jets in 2006 after becoming the first player in NCAA history to pass for 8,000 yards and rush for 4,000 yards in a career.

Due to Steve’s Sports Cards’ location in East Rutherford, N.J.—close to Giants Stadium, which the Giants and Jets share as their home venue—Smith said there were quite a few Giants fans because of the shop’s proximity to the facility. Asked if he saw a lot of green and white No. 4 jerseys amongst the crowd, Smith said he didn’t notice many avid Brett Favre supporters on that day.

“Actually, there was a Chad Pennington jersey sitting in there,” Smith answered. “You didn’t really see too many people with jerseys on, but definitely the Jets T-shirts. I autographed footballs and helmets, but not too many jerseys at all.”

Lefko shared his thoughts on how a player’s marketability comes into play. “The New York Jets ... have a very dedicated fan base and Brad Smith has worked hard to earn the respect of the fans both on and off the field,” he said. “We look forward to setting up similar appearances for Brad and our other NFL clients in the future.”

Smith, the recipient of the 2007 Kyle Clifton Good Guy Award as selected by members of the Jets organization, said being a “good guy” in the community is a goal of his, and giving fans a sneak peek into what he’s like underneath the helmet through appearances such as the one he did for the Player of the Day promotion is important to him.



“It was a great honor to have the organization and my teammates recognize things you try to do that are positive, trying to be a positive influence in the locker room and in the community,” he said. “So it was good for people to see that and be inspired, or maybe be more aware of how they’re coming off to people and the image that they’re putting out there.”

Would Smith be interested in doing similar hobby shop appearances in the future?

“Absolutely,” he responded. “Anything with the NFL and the NFLPA is going to be good quality. It’s not going to be something that is just thrown together. So anything with them, I’d love to do.”

For more information on the NFL Player of the Day program, visit www.nflpod.com.

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