

Legacy: A Conversation with Tom Martinez
by Hollie Mendillo

As Super Bowl XLVI approaches, there has been a lot of talk about legacies. What is Tom Brady's legacy? What is Eli Manning's? How will a win or a loss this Sunday affect their legacies?

On Thursday, I had the honor of speaking with Tom Martinez, legendary quarterback coach, and Tom Brady's mentor. As you can probably imagine, we talked a great deal about the Super Bowl.

It's a hard game to predict, according to Martinez, because there are so many factors. "It's a game within a game," he said. There are a million little games within one game; who wins the most little games usually wins the big game.

The factors you cannot predict—turnovers, injuries, penalties, mistakes—are often what decide the outcome of games. It can all come down to one person's mistake, like Billy Cundiff's missed field goal or Kyle Williams' muffed punts. As Tom said, "You can be a hero forever or a goat forever," and he thinks those are unfair extremes.

At the end of the day it's just a game, right?

But it's a game we love. That's what makes fans so passionate, and it's what drives us, sometimes, to do and say crazy things—from booing our favorite players to sending them threatening tweets.

Threatening someone's life over a football game—any game—is utterly unacceptable. Yet, it is common practice to judge players on their latest achievements or failures without considering the past. As fans our long-term memory can be spotty. We live in the now. For instance, when the Patriots lost Super Bowl XLII, no one said, "It was a tough loss, but what a great season."

This is why Tom Martinez feels sorry for both teams, because someone has to lose. They each deserve to win. There is no loser, but someone has to lose the game.

It may be difficult to predict which team will come out on top, because of all the factors—all the little games within the game—but what we do know for sure is that this Super Bowl will feature two highly capable quarterbacks, one of whom, Martinez knows very well.

Tom Brady was a teenager when Tom Martinez became his coach and began teaching him the importance of proper mechanics. What makes a great quarterback, in Martinez's opinion, is "consistency, accuracy, velocity, judgment and studying."

Work ethic is also important. The problem with many players coming out of college these days, according to the coach, is their lack of discipline: "They have million-dollar arms and fifty-cent work ethics." This is not the case with Tom Brady, nor is it the case with Tim Tebow.

Legacy: A Conversation with Tom Martinez
by Hollie Mendillo

I had heard through the grapevine that Martinez once said he could “fix” Tim Tebow in two weeks, so I had to ask him about the Broncos quarterback.

First, he corrected me and said he was misunderstood—it could take three weeks—but with better mechanics and the work ethic Tim already possesses, Martinez is confident he could turn Tebow into the more consistent pocket passer that he needs to be, in order to have long-term success in the NFL. Martinez sees potential in Tebow and called him the “ultimate leader.”

So what does Tom think of Eli? “I really like him and always have,” he said. Mechanically, Eli does what Tom teaches—most of the time. Occasionally, he still throws when he’s off balance, and Coach Martinez would like to see Eli do less of that—wouldn’t we all Tom, wouldn’t we all.

He also admires how Eli doesn’t look for attention—he doesn’t seek it, he doesn’t need it—and he believes the younger Manning is undervalued. Without big brother Peyton, Martinez thinks Eli would get more of the credit he deserves. Perhaps another Super Bowl championship will change this?

Of course, Super Bowl XLVI will affect how history perceives both Manning and Brady, but we need to remember that these two great quarterbacks won’t be defined by one game. It is, after all, only one part of their respective legacies. To borrow from Tom, it’s one of the million little pieces that make up the man.

On a more serious note, Tom Martinez and I may be cheering for different quarterbacks and different teams this Sunday, but there is one thing we are both rooting for and that is for Tom to find a kidney.

Tom Martinez is in need of a kidney transplant. Recently, he was accepted as a patient at Johns Hopkins, which is good news. It means he is stable enough to undergo the transplant surgery. Now, all he needs is a donor.

To aid in the search, Tom Brady posted a link on his Facebook page to Martinez’s profile on MatchingDonors.com, the organization helping Tom find a living donor. It’s estimated that around 400 potential donors have since come forward. Of those people, about 75 have gone through to start the process of being tested.

A match for Tom has not been found yet, but he and his family are still waiting for some of the results. Plus, three people were a match for other patients on the site, which is amazing in and of itself.

The wait for Tom has certainly been difficult and frustrating. There have been several times where he’s been close, but sometimes the blood type matches and the tissue doesn’t, so he’s trying to maintain an even keel—trying not to get too emotional.

Legacy: A Conversation with Tom Martinez

by Hollie Mendillo

Tom admits he would love to find a kidney. He wants to live longer; he has a lot more to give, but, at the very least, he hopes to raise awareness about living donors.

He has visited several donation centers across the country and every chair is full, but not everyone knows what services like MatchingDonors.com can do to help them or that living donor transplants are even possible. If Tom can help to change this, he'll be happy, even if a kidney isn't found for him in time. He'll rest better knowing that his story has increased awareness and more people will now be able to find donors who will save their lives. That can be his legacy.

In life, as in sports, it's not if you win or lose, it is how you play the game.