

Local products helping Panther playoff push

Written by Scott Unash

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Last Friday afternoon, we welcomed UNI play-by-play announcer Gary Rima to the Gym Class program to talk about the Panthers' upcoming game with Wofford in the FCS football playoffs.

We spent a good deal of the interview kicking around the reasons for yet another successful football campaign for the Panthers this fall. UNI has established itself as one of the top FCS Division I football programs in America thanks to Coach Mark Farley, his staff and their philosophy. That philosophy includes bringing in some of the top in-state talent from Iowa. The Panthers have continually signed players, thought too short or too slow to play FBS football, and turned them into quality FCS players.

Those players include a pair of Metro products who are helping the Panthers in a big way in 2011. Jay Teply is from Xavier and Tyler Sievertsen from Kennedy.

Teply was an all-stater on the Xavier 4A state title team in 2006. He was a rock on the offensive line that helped the Saints running game churn up yardage that magical season. Like many athletes, he found UNI to be a perfect fit for him. It was close to home and a quality program where he could continue his football career.

Teply is a first team Missouri Valley Conference offensive tackle this season and has solidified UNI's big play offense. Rima had great praise in talking about the big left tackle.

"He's hung in there and hung in there and done a great job at the left tackle spot," Rima said. "For him to get first team all conference on that offensive line is a great honor for that lone senior starting up front."

Sievertsen, on the other hand, was not a scholarship player when he began his Panther career. Like most kicking specialists for college teams, he had to earn his way to a scholarship.

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Sievertsen was not highly decorated as a Kennedy Cougar during his career, but was very consistent and constantly showed that he had a big leg. He just need the right opportunity to display his wares and that was as a UNI Panther. Going into the postseason, Sievertsen was the most accurate kicker in all of NCAA Division I -- both FCS and FBS -- having missed only one field goal during the regular season.

Rima called Sieversten a "great story. He answered one of the biggest question marks that UNI had going into the year which was the kicking game, both placekicking and kickoffs."

Perhaps Sievertsen's [biggest kick](#) came in the last regular season game of the year when his 40-yard field against the wind at Illinois State propelled the Panthers into overtime. They eventually won on a 36-yard field goal by Sievertsen.

Two Metro players, two great stories, and two guys who have found success through different roads both looking to help UNI bring home the ultimate goal -- a national championship.

(Scott Unash is the sports and program director at KGYM-AM 1600. He is a six-time winner of the Iowa Broadcast News Association play-by-play Announcer of the Year Award. Scott and Mark Dukes co-host the Gym Class weekdays from 3-4 p.m. on KGYM)