

C David Andrews

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Patriots' David Andrews has unique mentor in Dan Reeves

By Jim McBride GLOBE STAFF SEPTEMBER 25, 2015

FOXBOROUGH — They can be found on refrigerators, albums, and desks across the country.

Replica trading cards featuring young athletes wearing their favorite uniforms and playing their favorite sports. Keepsakes for proud moms, dads, grandmas, grandpas, and assorted other extended family members.

Dan Reeves has one. And the retired NFL coach is pretty proud of it. It's of a young football player near and dear to Reeves's heart — and it's even autographed: "Hold on Uncle Dan, I'm coming."

The signer? Patriots rookie David Andrews, who watched Reeves's Atlanta Falcons teams as a kid growing up in Johns Creek, Ga.

"That's a memory that really sticks out," said Reeves, whose brother-in-law was Andrews's grandfather. "When I was coaching the Falcons [from 1997-2003] he gave me that bubble gum card. It had his picture on it and he was in his pads, no helmet, but he had his pads on, holding the ball, snapping it."

It's a memory Andrews recalls fondly, too.

"Yeah, I do remember that. You know, he never got to watch me play growing up because [the Falcons] were always either on the road or they had practices when we had games," said Andrews. "So my Little League team had trading cards made up and I signed one. I know he still has that. Pretty funny story. He always says, 'You said you were coming but I didn't hold on.' He always jokes about it. But he did enough in his career."

Andrews has come a long way from those Little League days. These days he's in the big leagues, playing center for the Patriots. He may have seemed like a long shot to have an impact on the reigning Super Bowl champions when he arrived in New England as an undrafted free agent in May. But Reeves saw it coming.

"Well, I'm not surprised because it's something he's dreamed about all of his life," said Reeves, who arrived in Dallas as an undrafted free agent in 1965 and amassed more than 3,600 total yards over an eight-year career at running back. "When he got that opportunity, he immediately moved [to New England] and wanted to be there every day and wanted to do everything he could to prepare. He's worked extremely hard. That's the way he's gotten to where he was at Georgia and that's the way he's gotten to where he is in New England. He's a very dedicated young man."

It was at Georgia where Andrews was able to refine his skills as a center and where Reeves was able to make up for all those missed Little League games. Andrews started every game over his final three seasons with the Bulldogs, and it was during that stretch when Reeves started to realize the 6-foot-3-inch, 294-pounder had a chance to play on Sundays.

"I watched the quarterback at Georgia from the sideline and the end zone and I'd watch David. And in the three years I watched him there he never made a bad snap," said Reeves. "That's incredible — when you figure you go from under the center to shotgun. And they do the same thing in New England. He's very comfortable in that system. He's been doing it a long time."

David Andrews (60) started in the Patriots' season opener vs. the Steelers.

Andrews smiled at Reeves's recollection of his performances, saying, "I think I might have had a few [bad snaps]." But added, "I've played center since the seventh grade, so I had a lot of practice and I try to be consistent with it."

Consistency has been the key for Andrews, who has stepped in and played every snap through the first two weeks of the season for the Patriots. With starter Bryan Stork and top backup Ryan Wendell on the shelf, it looks like Andrews will be entrenched in the middle of the offense for the foreseeable future.

Reeves said another component to Andrews's success is his intelligence — an important trait for a center.

"[Centers are] like the quarterback for the five offensive linemen," said Reeves. "They make all the calls. He and the quarterback have to be on the same page. I know they do a lot of communication at the line of scrimmage in New England."

Andrews ended up in New England after working out for Bill Belichick before the draft. It was a workout that obviously left an impression.

"It was an awesome experience," said Andrews. "I just went there and tried to show that I deserved a chance and it all worked out."

Reeves said no guarantees were given to Andrews.

"Coach Belichick was very honest with David," said Reeves. "He told him he wouldn't draft him but if he was a free agent they would be interested in signing him. So I wrote Bill and told him how much I appreciated his honesty and for giving David a chance. I told him he wouldn't be disappointed because he's such a great young man."

You'd be hard-pressed to find anyone in the organization disappointed in Andrews's play.

"I think that David has done everything we've asked him to do since he came here," said offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels. "He's been accountable to his job, dependable each day . . . And he's played very tough, and he's a smart player."

Andrews lacks prototypical size for an offensive lineman but is deceptively quick and athletic — he can get to the second level. He is very appreciative of the tips he picked up from his favorite former NFL coach.

"He gave me a lot of advice," said Andrews. "Especially as I started getting older and started to understand how the game was supposed to be played. Definitely a very unique contact to have. He's a great mentor. A great mentor for football but also a great man. So it's kind of a two-dimensional thing."

As exciting as the journey has been for Andrews and Reeves, there were some anxious moments along the way — specifically roster cut days.

"The fact that he was getting to play an awful lot, I felt good about that. You know the way it is, it's hard to find offensive linemen," said Reeves. "It's unusual for a rookie, a kid, to come in and play that much in the preseason . . . To think about where he is now. Coach Belichick does a tremendous job. He knows exactly what kind of players he wants, offense, defense. To see that David was someone he was interested in as a free agent, to give him that opportunity is pretty special."

Andrews said the bond between the two is still strong and he still seeks Reeves's advice.

"Not many people in my family know what it's like to play in the NFL," he said. "So he's kind of the only one I can bounce things off or someone who might understand what it's like, so it's definitely cool."

Reeves hopes Andrews will be bouncing things off him for years to come. For now, he's just enjoying the ride. "This has been a dream of his since he was little, so it's been great to see," said Reeves. "You hear stories like these but to be involved with one personally . . . It's just great."
