



TOUCHDOWN: Santa Margarita's Carlo Audagnotti scores against St. Bonaventure.
ROSE PALMISANO, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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ALL-STAR GAME

Brea Lions Orange County North-South Prep All-Star Football Game

When: Friday, 7:15 p.m. Gates open at 6 p.m.

Where: Orange Coast College

Tickets: \$10 at the game, \$9 when purchased at North practices at El Modena High or South practices at Trabuco Hills High.

Information: 714-524-3335

Wednesday, July 9, 2008

Football not life and death to all-star with a cause

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Santa Margarita's Boise State-bound Audagnotti and his family help orphaned children in South Africa.

By JONATHAN KAY

OCVarsity.com

MISSION VIEJO- Ryan Audagnotti draws an easy connection between his third son's summers and autumns.

There are the abandoned South African children, most of them infected with HIV. And then there's football.

"Not all of us have got a gift," Ryan said. "He's got a gift to play football, and I always remind him of that. ... What I know about the way that it works is, 'If you get a gift, don't waste it.'

"I think the reason for our gifts is to help those that are less fortunate. I said to Carlo, 'It's not about you being some big shot one day. It's about using your gift to help those that are less fortunate than you.'"

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Carlo Audagnotti, the former Santa Margarita running back and last year's Trinity League Co-Offensive MVP, has been home this summer, preparing for Friday's Brea Lions Orange County North-South Prep All-Star Football game. He will play for the South team, after rushing for 1,419 yards and 11 touchdowns in his only season as the Eagles' starter.

It's not a typical destination for someone born in a land where cricket, rugby and soccer dominate. But after his family moved from Johannesburg, South Africa, to San Juan Capistrano, Audagnotti gravitated to football, which once caught his eye on South African television.

Today, he's an undersized speedster, standing 5-foot-9, 185 pounds. At age 10, he played offensive line and progressed down the beef spectrum to tight end, before settling into the backfield.

Sounding like a former wrestler, Audagnotti can recall fasting the night before recreation league games. Some days, he would shed extra pounds by spitting into a cup, to slide under the weight limit.

Now, Audagnotti sculpts his body by running thousands of stairs a week and substituting sand bags for free weights.

"It's like a doctor," his personal coach, Glenn Campbell, said. "A doctor is a doctor for a reason. He went through the courses and sharpened his way to become a plastic surgeon."

Audagnotti sat behind Chris Spangenburg for most of his junior year, and thus missed out on the season when colleges do most of their recruiting. But 333 rushing yards over two playoff games provided a springboard into a stellar senior season, which caught the eyes of Boise State, Oregon State and Army. He is headed to Boise State, as a preferred walk-on, and expects to redshirt before playing both running back and slot receiver.

And then, if every dream is fulfilled, Audagnotti said, "The money I make in the NFL is going to go toward those children."

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Ryan Audagnotti and his wife, Gerda, founded Acres of Love in 1998, the year before they moved from Johannesburg to California.

"We could actually see people walking in the street dying of AIDS," Ryan said. "More and more kids started being abandoned, because their parents were dying."

According to avert.org, an AIDS prevention group, South Africa had 1.2 million children in 2005 who had lost both parents to AIDS. Ryan said that number has risen to 1.5 million.

"You go through a phase where you blame the government for not doing anything about it; and you blame the religious institutions and churches," Ryan said. "And then one day we just said, 'Well, what are we doing about it?'"

"We felt that we should make some small contribution."

They started with a vacant property that Ryan, a financial adviser who works in real estate, owned, and they brought in 10 children from a local hospital. Now, the organization has 20 houses, stocked with pediatric doctors, social workers and a volunteer staff. About 80 percent of the kids are infected with HIV, Ryan said.

"They come in with nothing, and then they get so much love and care," said Carlo, who spent past summers playing with the children and assisting the staff. "You can just see how they transform."

As the organization strives to raise "leaders of the future," Ryan said, each child receives a private school education, in preparation for college. Many have been adopted by Western European families, others by South Africans and Americans.

Gerda serves as CEO, Ryan as chairman, and the couple's oldest child, Darren, 25, is heavily involved, as well.

Carlo started an Acres of Love club at Santa Margarita, and he raised money selling African Christmas ornaments.

"I'm going to take over for my parents one day," he said. "It's where my heart is."

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With college tuition bills on the way, the Audagnottis encouraged Carlo to shoulder some of the financial responsibility. He got a job at Abercrombie and Fitch, and his parents helped him open a bank account.

When Carlo received his first paycheck, for \$200, he opened his own checkbook for the first time. Afterward, Gerda found a \$150 donation to Acres of Love waiting on her keyboard. "That blessed me. I was actually in tears," Ryan said. "It just came out of his heart."

• [See Audagnotti's stats](#)

- [Q&A with Carlo Audagnotti](#)
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Contact the writer: You can learn more about Acres of Love at www.acresoflove.org
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