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## Brady Aiello: From Acalanes to Oregon ... to the NFL

By Jon Kingdon



Brady Aiello

Transitioning to college from high school is hard enough. It becomes that much more onerous when you opt to play on a football team as well. It becomes exponentially more difficult when you are competing at a Division I school. Brady Aiello, an Acalanes graduate, took on the academic and athletic challenges head on by attending and graduating from the University of Oregon. Though not drafted in the NFL, Brady Aiello has already been through two team's training camps and is currently trying out with various NFL teams.

Aiello grew up in Lafayette swimming, playing football, basketball and baseball. His first exposure to football was playing in the MOL flag football league. As a freshman at Acalanes, he moved to his ultimate position of offensive tackle, though he took a hiatus from football his sophomore year: "I wanted to focus more on swimming at the time so football took a back seat until I was convinced by Coach Mike Ivankovich to come back out for football."

High school football prospects are rated from one to five stars. After sitting out his sophomore season, Aiello was starting from scratch, Ivankovich said: "He did not have any stars in the beginning so he was behind in the recruiting game, but the tools were there. A legitimate prospect needs three elements: height/weight/speed, playing ability and the academics. Brady had the profile and the academics along with the intangibles. He is a great athlete, articulate, intelligent, super loyal to his teammates and was very humble."

Ivankovich, who is currently teaching and coaching at Las Lomas High School, saw potential in Aiello that he did not see in himself: "I sat down with Brady and his parents before his junior year. I told them that he could become a Division I football player. I don't think that he had really considered that, though he really had the size, athleticism, intelligence, and intensity to play at that level. I told him that if he were willing to go all in on trying to do it then I would go all in on with him. He worked really hard for me and my defensive coordinator Michael Ross-Nathans and we worked on things that I knew that recruiters would want to see."

At the conclusion of his senior year, Aiello had developed into a four-star prospect having earned MaxPreps Division III first-team all-state honors as well as All-West Region recognition by PrepStar. It was not the recognition that Aiello found most satisfying about playing at Acalanes: "Even though we did not win any championships at Acalanes, the overall experience was the best takeaway. It was like Friday night lights, playing with my friends and it was always fun competing against Campolindo."

The recruiting process was a family experience for Aiello: "My father (Brian) would drive me to all of the camps and other football events and my mom (Jennifer) played a huge factor in the whole recruiting scheme. She would send mail to all the coaches and direct message them on social media. Without Coach Ivankovich convincing me that I could play Division I football, none of this would have ever happened."

Aiello always had the height - maxing out at 6'7" - but putting on the weight was another story. From his junior year in high school, he went from 235 to 265 to 285 to 295 and finally to 315 pounds his senior year at Oregon. He did everything the right way, Ivankovich said: "He was a healthy eater and did it the right way. He didn't just eat lots of food or force down supplements. Brady ate healthy and trained intelligently. He also ran 4.8 in the 40-yard dash his senior year at Acalanes."

Yet, it took time for Aiello's name to come to the attention of the Division I schools: "After my junior year, there were a number of camps that I went to, like the NIKE NFTC camp, the Rivals Yahoo camp and a Washington State satellite camp in the East Bay. A couple of weeks later, I was offered a football scholarship by Washington State and once the word got out that they had offered me a scholarship, the word spread and it seemed like every single day another coach would come by to visit with me at school."

It became Ivankovich's job to keep things under control for Aiello: "As a senior, it was just a flood with the recruiters for Brady. Every day there would be two or three guys lined up to meet with him. When he made a recruiting visit to Oregon, they made the whole production to make him feel welcome, offered him a

scholarship and he soon made the commitment to attend Oregon. After committing to Oregon, he shut it down, not taking trips or engaging with other schools. He was very true to Oregon."

There were three things about Oregon that most appealed to Aiello: geography, facilities and academics. "Oregon had just come off a national championship and that was a strong factor," he said. "I liked being able to get out of California and check out a whole new state and not be so far away where I could not see my family a lot. It was just a seven-hour drive from Lafayette and my parents were able came up to every single home game that I played."

It was hard to look past the athletic facilities at the University of Oregon, much of which has been funded by Phil Knight and Nike: "When I went up to their summer camp, I was able to check out the campus and the facilities and it definitely blew me away," Aiello said. "Oregon has set the bar for every school regarding facilities. For example, the weight room has hard wood floors, using wood that has only a 4% acceptance rate. It was all first class."

Aiello was redshirted (sitting out the season but maintaining his athletic eligibility) as a freshman which helped in the adjustment to college: "At first it was a challenge to have to do everything on your own and then balancing it with football. It was all new to me, but I soon got into the swing of things. The whole transition of doing everything on your own and the schedule is a lot more complex when you get to college and play football, which is a complete job in and of itself. Not playing in the games did decrease the stress level my first year in college. Oregon had great academics and a beautiful campus, and I had a great time studying business."

Aiello graduated in four years with a degree in General Business. Aiello showed up well prepared for the academic rigors of college: "Acalanes really prepared me; it's a great school academically and I never felt behind the eight ball in college. It was a big adjustment to play for Oregon, but Coach Ivankovich really prepared me to play at that level. Technique wise, I was definitely ready."

In his four years at Oregon, Aiello played in three bowl games: the Las Vegas Bowl, the Redbox Bowl and as a senior, the Rose Bowl, defeating Wisconsin 28-27. Aiello would start at four different positions for the Ducks: left and right tackle, right guard, and even tight end (catching a touchdown pass). Another highlight for Aiello was having the Ducks come in second for the Joe Moore Award which goes to the best offensive line unit in the country. Winning the Rose Bowl and defeating the 11th ranked University of Utah in Salt Lake were also memorable moments for Aiello.

The National Football League is Aiello's next challenge. Having originally signed with the Minnesota Vikings, Aiello has spent time with the Cleveland Browns and has had tryouts with the Washington Redskins and the New Orleans Saints. As with everything else, the NFL pays more than lip service to the coronavirus. Teams used to fly players into their city, work them out and either sign them or send them home, but it's a far more extended process these days, according to Aiello: "I'm now in New Orleans for a tryout. They have put me up in a hotel and I'm not allowed to go anywhere for three days, getting a COVID test each day before I am allowed to show up at their facility."

At some point, Aiello is anticipating a career in medical sales having made connections through Oregon that he anticipates will help him throughout his career.

From Acalanes through Oregon, it's been years of growth for Aiello: "I'm a much more mature person. I did not have to work that hard for things prior to college, but going through college and college football, it taught me the meaning of hard work and dedication and having discipline and not straying away from anything. I learned the values of hard work and discipline. You are the only one that is responsible for the rest of your life."



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[back](#)

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