

Taking life in stride

Valentine Manada's drive to succeed began in one of the most unlikely places at one of the most unlikely times: South Central Los Angeles when Manada was just 15 years old.

Horrified by the violence that dictated his life and the lives of those around him, the NMU senior and Wildcat football player left his single-parent home—with his mother's blessing—and sought a calmer, safer existence eight hours north of Los Angeles in Turlock, California. It was here that Manada began a new life with some family friends.

"I knew that life had to be more than straight violence all the time," Manada said. "I knew that my only chance for survival was to leave. Who knows what I'd be doing if I had stayed in L.A. I'd probably be dead by now."

That is not to say that Manada's life was instantly better in Turlock than it was in Los Angeles. Although the family friends he lived with saw that he always had food and shelter, he was basically on his own. And for Manada, being on his own meant that he was without his mother.

"At first, leaving my mother and my home to move so far away wasn't a big deal to me," he said. "I was just trying to do my own thing, trying to survive. But I missed my mother, and our relationship suffered because we aren't the way that moms and sons should be with each other. I was making my own choices and learning from my own mistakes and successes. I learned at the age of 15 what some people may not learn in their lifetime: the real world comes quick."

Manada turned to sports when

he was a sophomore in high school to take his mind off of the real world that was waiting for him when he stepped off school grounds. He began wrestling and playing football and eventually found himself at another crossroads.

"I was going to go into the service so that I could get money for college," Manada said. "But then I decided I would try football and see if I could get a scholarship, and here I am today at NMU."

Before coming to Northern, Manada attended junior college in Modesto, California, fine-tuning his football skills and study habits to get the grades he needed to play and succeed. In addition to balancing the time requirements of being both a student and an athlete, Manada also had to worry about paying the bills, so he took a job as a part-time manager at a Blockbuster video store. After two years in junior college, Manada was offered a scholarship to attend Northern. Once again, he picked up and moved to realize another dream.

"A football scholarship," Manada said, "is like a piece of meat thrown into a pen of hungry animals. All these hungry animals are fighting and brawling for the prize, but only the strongest, the fastest, and the best wins. I was hungry for that scholarship because I knew that it would take me where I wanted to go."

Wildcat football coach Doug Sams is, to say the least, pleased with Manada's decision to attend Northern—both for the play he has gotten from the defensive back and for the potential that he

sees in the young man.

"Valentine is a student athlete a coach can really take pride in seeing succeed on and off the field during his collegiate experience because he's overcome some bumps along the way and he's worked hard to be what and where he is today," Sams said.

Today football has become more than just a release from day-to-day stresses for Manada, it has become a teaching tool and a model against which to measure life.

"My football players are my family," he said. "I reach out to



them and talk to them and they come to me, especially the younger players, when they have something they need help working out. They look to me for advice, and I try to teach them.”

Manada said that teaching is the perfect profession for someone who learned the hard knocks of life on his own, and something he is eager to do once he earns his secondary education degree.

“I have to be a teacher so that I can give back to the kids,” Manada said. “So that I can help try and push them toward the right roads because I know what the wrong roads are. I had to learn all of that on my own, but there is no reason that any other kid has to. At least not a kid who is a student of mine.”

“Kids need teachers who really care about changing someone else’s life and who take the initiative to help kids who are on the edge, like I was. They need somebody to tell them the truth from the start; they need a role model.”

Manada found his own role models while he was out on his own. It is something he credits to his success more than his own inner will and outer strength.

“My [high school] wrestling coach was always there for me, and the couple I lived with was also really cool,” Manada said. “These people looked out for me and were always there. Sure, I still had bad experiences. I’ve been through situations much worse than anything I will experience for the rest of my life. But I’m glad I got these experiences at an early age. Things could be worse than they are right now; I just take whatever comes in stride.”

—Ryan Sjöholm ’99 BS

Life lessons

Casey Young’s dad would be proud. The 2002 football season was a good one for his son, a defensive back who was second among the Wildcats in solo tackles (46), third in overall hits (82), second in interceptions (3 for 42 yards), and a team leader who was instrumental in helping Northern to a 6-5 record under new coach Doug Sams.

Young dedicated the season to his father, **Bob Young ’74 BS**, who died of a heart attack just as training camp was set to begin last August. Immediately following his father’s death, Young considered not playing his senior year.

“I didn’t know what to do at first,” said Young. “All I wanted to do was to be there to help my mom and my younger brother.”

But Young’s family and Gladstone, Mich., community members went on the offensive to convince him that his dad would have wanted him to play.

“Ironically, Dad had to make the same decision when his father died,” said Young. “He had a scholarship and was playing football at Ashland, but he moved back to the U.P. to take care of his mother.”

After talking to family members and his father’s closest friends, and with the encouragement of his mother, Young agreed that playing and dedicating the season might honor his father and be a good way to get through the grieving process.

“Nobody loved football more than my dad,” Young said.

After moving back to the U.P., the elder Young came to Northern to finish his degree, playing football and studying to be a schoolteacher—as his son does today. Following a brief career in teaching, Young’s father went to work at Mead Paper where he stayed for the remainder of his career. He became a longtime youth football coach, and recently had a Gladstone sports field named in his honor.

Many Gladstone community members continued to honor Young by attending his son’s games.

“My parents went to almost every game throughout my entire athletic career. I missed looking up and seeing my dad in the stands, but he would have been thrilled to see my fan section—there were about 40 people who came up every game to cheer me on.”

Young described his football style as “old school,” saying, “I just like to hit people. I try to be the toughest person on the field.”

When asked if he’s ever played on the offensive side, Young smiles. “Yeah, but I still hit people and that wasn’t always the best thing.”

Sams agreed that hitting is Young’s forte. “He has a relentless physical style with a knack for getting in the right spot to forcefully take players down.”

Young said he’s learned some tough life lessons this year. “Now, whenever I face hard decisions, I think, ‘What would my dad do?’ That keeps me connected to him. I’m using his life as my example.”



—Cindy Paavola ’84 BS