Written by Mark Darnell
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This week three MCHS Seniors signed a letter of intent to attend school and play football with Cumberland University. Jacob Salyer, Tyler Manning, and Chris Escamilla gathered in the MCHS auditorium to make it official.

Cumberland is a four year liberal arts school which was founded in 1843 by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. In 1852 t he Cumberland School of Law was the very first school of its kind west of the Application Mountains. Unfortunately, the football program holds a share of the dubious record for the most lopsided football score in college football history, a 222-0 defeat in 1919 at the hands of John Heisman's Georgia Tech squad.

Cumberland competes in the Mid-South Conference in the Western Division. They play in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) which is made up of smaller colleges and universities across the United States. They were co-champions of the conference in 2008.

Offensive Line Coach Ryan Locke welcomed the three to the Cumberland family. “We are pleased to have these young men become part of our program.” Coach Locke initially saw Tyler Manning at the 2011 East-West All-Star game. When he called the coaches at MCHS, Coach Pemberton suggested that he take a look at a few other Tigers. After watching game film, Cumberland knew they wanted all three players.

The Cumberland Football team plays its games on Saturday. This season they will be moving to Nokes-Lasater Field, just behind Ryan’s Steakhouse in Lebanon. The 5,000-seat facility has been the home of Lebanon High School football for the past 46 years. It offers expanded restrooms and concessions areas for the fans as well as an indoor practice facility and two 80-yard practice fields for the football program.

Jacob Salyer is the son of Hap Salyer and Suzanne Salyer. Jacob dreamed big dreams about playing football. His mother remembered his enthusiasm for the sport when “he came home the first night after his first junior high practice and slept in his helmet.” Unfortunately Hap couldn’t be present for this event, as he had to be out of town working. But Jacob knew he was there.

“My parents have been the best parents anyone could ask for. They trusted me to make my own mistakes and allowed me to learn from them.” Jacob says he dreamed that this day would happen and his one word to describe it, “Awesome.” He plans to study pre-dentistry.

Chris Escamilla, however, never ever thought that football would bring him to where he is today. The son of Ricky and Kathleen Escamilla, Chris had a visit to Hanover College, but choose Cumberland. He plans to major in pre-pharmacy and says he will miss the Friday nights with his teammates, but the memories he has, he will never forget. His advice to younger Tigers, “Never give up and stay with your dreams. Small accomplishments lead to the biggest achievements.”

Kathleen Escamilla says her fondest memory of Chris is when he broke a growth plate during his Babe Ruth Baseball season. “Even though he couldn’t play he was there for every single game. When he commits to something, he follows it through.” Ricky helped reinforce this after Chris’ first pee-wee football practice. “He came home and wanted to quit, but I told him that he had said he would do it and that is what he needed to do.”

Tyler Manning wasn’t sure football would lead him here either. He has been raised by his uncle, Jerry Fulton, all his life and he calls him Dad. Sometimes it is the little things in life and Jerry commented about a junior high football game in Livingston where Tyler caught a 20 yard pass. He remembered shaking his head, “He caught the ball but slid through the rain and mud for 20 yards after the catch.” Raising Tyler, Jerry wanted to encourage Tyler to be a part of something that he enjoyed and encouraged him to work hard at it. He commented wistfully, “I am so glad he is finally reaping what he has sown.”

Tyler is undecided about his major. He was contacted by a number of schools before signing with Cumberland. Tyler credits his Dad as the most influential person in his life. “He always guided me and told me to work hard and have no regrets.”

It was good to see the turnout for this event. Other than family, there were a number of teachers, friends, and teammates who ventured by to offer congratulations to these three college bound student-athletes. More importantly members of the current and former coaching staff were on hand to share in this proud moment.

So we say good-bye to three young men who will suit up for the Cumberland Bulldogs. We wish them well and hope they enjoy their collegiate careers.