

Manhattan Mercury Article: Q&A With Wildcat Legend Dan Manucci



Dan with original letter jacket and Bills jersey.

Dan Manucci was a Phoenix area high school star triple-sport athlete who went on to play football and baseball at Mesa Community College before playing football at Kansas State his junior and senior years in 1977-78.

Following his time as a Wildcat, he had a brief stint playing professionally.

JC: Dan, how did you end up in Manhattan?

MANUCCI: I went on a recruiting trip to K-State after recruiting coordinator Don Bocchi saw me play at Mesa CC... It was a fun visit. I went to a K-State basketball game. I just loved the fan enthusiasm and spirit. It was like nothing I had ever seen.

JC : So you made one trip and signed?

MANUCCI: I did. I was so impressed by the number of known players that had gone to play professionally. There were pictures of them on the wall in the Big Eight Room where we met — Steve Grogan, Lynn Dickey, Mack Herron, Larry Brown...

JC : Even though K-State wasn't known to be that great, you were still enthused?

MANUCCI: A chance to play against Nebraska, Oklahoma, in the Big Eight was very attractive. I had been recruited by New Mexico State and some other small schools, but getting to play for K-State was big time, yes.

I have to tell you though, it was January 15, 1977, and it was a sunny warm day here in Phoenix. We landed in Manhattan and it was about 15 degrees. Took the business puddle jumper and landed in snow. "Oh my gosh, what am I doing here?" I asked myself. It was so windy we had to land the plane sideways.

JC: What was it like playing for Ellis Rainsberger?

MANUCCI: He was a good coach. He was very firm. A real rah-rah guy. I wasn't used to coaches going off on me, but he was pretty fair. He also had the players' backs. Once I threw an interception against Oklahoma State and the assistants were yelling at me pretty bad. He yelled at them, "Don't you ever jump on my QB!"

JC: The starter in 1976 was Wendell Hendrickson, how did you end up playing?

MANUCCI: I came in as (fifth) on the depth chart, so I had a big hill to climb. Wendell separated his shoulder early on, and by then I was (second) and was able to step in and start.

But I didn't keep the job. I was even the Big Eight Player of the Week against BYU and thought I had secured the spot. But the next week, I was benched and Wendell was back out there. That inconsistency may have been part of our problems.

JC: You won two games your first year, if you count Mississippi State, did you know that was forfeited?

MANUCCI: (Laughs) Yes, I did know that. Pretty sad that we have to count that forfeit, but we'll take it.

JC: Ellis Rainsberger is always pictured wearing purple and white plaid pants during his era, was that his only uniform, or was it coincidental in the photos?

MANUCCI: (Laughs) and White shoes. Yes, it was his standard uniform...fashion of the day.

JC: Tell me about your single win in 1977 — it was on the road in Wichita.

MANUCCI: Yes, at Cessna Stadium. We had to win that game. We could not lose to Wichita State. As bad as we were, it would have been devastating, (laughs) and it took a last second play to win.

JC: What was the atmosphere like at Cessna Stadium for a football game?

MANUCCI: You're not going to believe this story, but it's true. We arrived at the stadium and, as I mentioned Coach Rainsburger was always trying to rile us up with something crazy, but this may be the craziest thing to ever happen in all of my years in sports.

As we head to the locker room, there was a crate by the door that read "Live Chickens" and one of the assistant coaches starts screaming at us, "Did you see that? A box of baby chicks! They think you are a bunch of baby chickens, Are you a bunch of chicks?"

We were all screaming, "No and go Wildcats!"

And then someone kicked over the crate of baby chicks, and while we are trying to get all fire up to head out on the field, baby chickens are running all over the locker room, tweeting and scrambling for their lives!

Most of us were not really even sure what to think. But I will tell you now, it was hilarious, and none of the chicks were harmed, I might add. Watching these big

tough lineman try to scoop up baby chicks wasn't exactly the best way to fire up the team for a win. (Laughing), can you even imagine that?

JC: You were in one of those transition periods between coaching staffs, what was that like and specifically playing for Jim Dickey?

MANUCCI: The Dickey staff was a breath of fresh air. New look, new everything and a whole different approach to the game. Dickey was much more knowledgeable about different offensive and defensive schemes. We had to do whatever we could do to score!

JC: Looking back this was a pretty good coaching staff.

MANUCCI: Carl Selmer, Jim Donnan, Dennis Franchione — great coaches. They made football fun, speedy offensive plays, throwing the ball more, defensive blitz packages.

We had to use smoke and mirrors, because we didn't have the best athletes. I would have loved to be able to play one more year under Dickey. He was definitely more cerebral, similar to Bill Snyder, I suppose.

JC: No baby chicks in the locker room I suppose?

MANUCCI: (Laughs) no, Jeff, but we were not without crazy stories under Dickey.

That first spring with all new staff and trying to learn the offense was a mess. We were practicing on our own, and working out and lifting as everyone does, as a group, but on our own time before the official practice days started. It's pretty normal.

The coaches might pass by or observe but were not actually coaching or anything, but the K-State athletic faculty representative at the time — professor David Laurie — called the Big Eight offices and turned Coach Dickey in for practicing outside of the rules.

He sent pictures of us players up in Ahearn Fieldhouse throwing routes and practicing while the new staff would come and say hi and watch us... with no coaching at all going on.

JC: Wow!

MANUCCI: Yeah, wow is right, our own guy turns us in, and we weren't officially practicing. The funny thing though, this happened on April 1. We all thought it was an April fools' joke. We had to stop practicing...

We only had one official week of team practice with our new coaching staff...We had a big scrimmage that April 1st day, then had to sit and forgo our last three weeks of spring practice, while everyone else in the conference practiced.

It was a major setback and was really a crazy situation. It was so bad, I considered transferring back to Arizona State to play, football or even baseball, but for some reason I stuck it out...

Still unbelievable to this day. And, I had Professor Laurie for class that semester. Just nuts.

JC: Well you managed to be named Big Eight Honorable Mention that season anyway.

MANUCCI: Yes, thank you. I was the total offensive leader, second in passing. We beat Colorado, KU for the first time in like four years, and I had a great game against Air force and was named AP Player of the Week.

Against Auburn I had 343 yards passing that day, and at kickoff it was 130 degrees on the field. We had a great comeback that game, but couldn't score enough points to win. They beat us 45-32.

JC: I never got to see you play live Dan, but do remember listening to some games on the radio. Against Nebraska and Oklahoma in particular, do you remember the names Cumby or Hunt?

MANUCCI: (Laughs) yeah, they were in my grill all day. Both great defenders at OU, they would rush three and drop eight. No one was open and we had no blockers, so it was a bad combo for a throwing offense.

At Nebraska though, I actually had a good game. Threw for over 250 yards. But I was also sacked five times and our defense just could not stop them, they were too good.

JC: Did you keep in touch with Jim Dickey or Ellis Rainsberger after K-State?

MANUCCI: I wish I had stayed in contact with Coach Dickey... I really loved his enthusiasm. I do see and talk to Buddy Rainsberger, Coach Rainsberger's son at least twice a year...He keeps me up to speed on Coach.

JC: You were drafted in the fifth round by the Buffalo Bills?

MANUCCI: I honestly didn't think I would get drafted, but hoped, as all college players do. My friends and teammates were teasing me all day. Ribbing me.

I even got prank phone calls. Guys would call me and say they were Mr. Rooney with the Steelers or Packers or whatever, and then as I was just about to head to dinner at the athletic dorms, the phone rang and it was Bill Munson, the assistant GM of the Bills.

JC: Did you think it was another prank call?

MANUCCI: I did actually. I figured the guys were busting my chops again, at first anyway, and then I realized it was the real guy. They signed me to back up Joe Ferguson.

JC: What was the deal with the Green Bay Packers? Weren't you supposed to back-up Lynn Dickey?

MANUCCI: Yet another crazy story. I was called and signed a contract with Green Bay and even had a personal letter from Bart Starr guaranteeing my contract.

I was cut with one game to go in preseason. Bart Starr had told me that Lynn could get hurt and that I would probably be back soon. That was the strike year in 1982. I got paid the first two games of the season, and then the players went on strike for seven weeks.

I did not get paid, so I had to file a grievance with the league to get the remainder of my checks since I was not a member of the bargaining unit... It took me three years to finally get the money I was owed by the Packers. It involved arbitration and lawyers and was unfortunate.

JC: So, you had a stint in the CFL?

MANUCCI: It was more like a few weeks of more crazy. The Toronto Argonauts were a losing team in complete disarray. It was like playing JUCO ball with a bunch of guys that didn't seem to even care anymore. I didn't know the Canadian rules

and like the rest of the players, I didn't really want to be there. But I took it as an experience, played in a couple of games and was glad to get back to Arizona.

JC: That when you played in the USFL? I am just going to guess, this story will also be crazy.

MANUCCI: Yes, you got it. Crazy. I signed with the Arizona Wranglers, based here at home, so I played that spring in 1983. Then for the 1984 Season, the Chicago Blitz came here to Phoenix, and our team, the Wranglers went to Chicago — yes, the two cities swapped teams.

The league was such a mess. I finally get a hold of the coaching staff in Chicago to find out what was happening and they said, "Oh, you were traded to Memphis to play for Pepper Rogers."

So, I of course call Pepper Rogers and he says, well, you were released yesterday. It was a screwball deal and very unprofessional.

Nobody knew where they were playing. The downfall of the league was trying to compete with the NFL and play in the fall.

JC: You played with the Bills again though right?

MANUCCI: I did. I went back for the replacement games during the 1987 strike year. I was asked to return to the pros one last time to back up Gary Hogaboom for the Phoenix Cardinals in 1989, but they called me the night before practice was to start. I had not thrown a ball in over a year and was focused on my commercial real estate career, so I turned down the offer and that was the end of my playing career.

JC: Tell me about your tutoring business.

MANUCCI: It all started when some high school kid called me up for some help. It went well and I enjoyed it and now 10-12 years later it is a very successful program, and I love teaching.

JC: Who are some of the quarterbacks you have worked with?

MANUCCI: Darell Garretson (Utah State), Brandon Bialkowski (Lehigh, now in CFL), Tyler Palko (Pitt, Kansas City Chiefs), Bryce Perkins (Arizona State), Austin Appodaca (New Mexico), Tyler Rogers (New Mexico State), Brad Shaenker (Fort Hays State), and several top area high school QBs.

JC: Do you contact your alma mater with any of your protégé's names?

MANUCCI: I do and the coaching staff is always very nice to respond. They haven't signed any of my guys yet.

JC: When was the last time you went to a K-State game in Manhattan?

MANUCCI: 1981. I was back once, for one game right after leaving the CFL, and that was the last time. I have seen the Wildcats play every time they have been in Arizona for a bowl game though. The only other time I have been back to Manhattan was in 2000, when I was recruiting engineers for Motorola.

JC: So you follow the Cats?

MANUCCI: I am still an avid fan and proud alum. Purple Pride man! I watch them closely, try to see every game on TV that I can and I still have my letterman jacket. And yes, it still fits!!

JC: Tell me your thoughts about Bill Snyder and today's program comparatively.

MANUCCI: I want to say that I interview Coach Snyder a lot on my radio show. We also get John Currie and Kirk Schulz too. I put a lot of K-State love on my show here in the valley.

Look, Bill Snyder, K-State football today is a modern miracle... When he got the job, for the first-time ever, we were reached out to... We felt as alumni that we were a part of Bill Snyder's plan... We had never had a comprehensive plan before. He had a winning formula from the beginning. It wasn't smoke and mirrors or crates full of baby chicks.. He knew how to get you to buy in and you could just tell it was going to be successful.

JC: Weren't you approached about coaching at K-State once?

MANUCCI: It was in 1988 by Stan Parrish. To be the QB coach. It was an honor, but I was advised, smartly, to turn it down as he was on thin ice and it wasn't long after that his staff was fired. I don't imagine Coach Snyder would have retained me after that.

JC: Were you ever embarrassed about your days at K-State?

MANUCCI: No, not at all. I did take a lot of heat. A lot of bad jokes and ribbing from people about how awful we were as a program. I mean, Jeff, it was brutal. But my pride never wore off and then Snyder comes along and like the Rise of the Phoenix every K-State football player got their pride renewed or restored.

- See more at: <http://themercury.com/articles/qa-with-former-wildcat-quarterback-dan-manucci#sthash.UPl5KaYi.dpuf>



#10 Manucci scrambling for his life!

Update Dan was inducted into his high school hall of fame in March of 2025.

https://www.tempenews.com/news/ex-mcclintock-high-school-qb-dan-manucci-inducted-into-hall-of-fame/article_4076728d-313b-41a2-9c6b-3909af02f07a.html