

Father, son make most of last season together

Nehemiah Brunson and his son aim to take the Army and Navy Academy to a title, while Nehemiah Brunson Jr. commits to play for Army



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Nehemiah Brunson Jr. of the Army and Navy Academy in Carlsbad scores a touchdown last season. The senior committed to play football at Army next year and went to ANA to be coached by his father. Courtesy photo

CARLSBAD — Over the past several seasons the Army and Navy Academy has gone from football afterthought to a growing power.

Part of the reason is the father-son duo of Nehemiah Brunson and Nehemiah Brunson Jr. Nehemiah Brunson has coached the Warriors since 2015, while his son is entering his senior season.

Nehemiah Brunson Jr., a two-star recruit, also committed to play football at Army over an offer from Navy. But since his commitment, which is non-binding, others have begun to roll in.

Army and Navy is an all-boys college prep school. The Warriors kick off the season on Aug. 22 at home against Rock Academy.

Solid in his commitment, Nehemiah Brunson Jr. said he is focused on the upcoming season and playing for his dad for the last time. Nehemiah Brunson Jr. said his father was the only coach he wanted play for in high school and now they have just months left on the field.

“My whole plan was to play where he coached,” Nehemiah Brunson Jr. said. “I always knew that I wanted to be coached by him. That’s because I knew how good of a coach he was and what he can do with the players that come out of the school he was coaching at.”

Football has always been in the Brunson family as Nehemiah Brunson Jr. picked up the sport by hanging around his dad, who was an assistant coach at Oceanside High School. He coached under the legendary John Carroll until Carroll's retirement in 2015.

Nehemiah Brunson Jr. began with flag football and then moved into tackle football as a middle schooler. He said the transition was a struggle. However, the happiness and friendships he made on the field is what kept him playing.



Nehemiah Brunson, left, took over the Army and Navy Academy football program in 2015 and has built a small-school power in recent years. Nehemiah Brunson Jr. plays slot receiver and cornerback and is committed to play at Army next season. Courtesy photos

But in 2015, Army and Navy called Nehemiah Brunson with an offer to be the school's assistant athletic director and to take the reins of its struggling football program. The program struggled for several years but since 2021 the Warriors haven't had a losing record and have churned out several top-tier prospects, including Ratumana Bulabalavu, who signed USC last year. (He initially committed to Washington, but coach Kalen DeBoer was hired by Alabama, so Bulabalavu flipped to USC.)

Now, Nehemiah Brunson Jr. is taking up the mantle as one of the Warriors' best players. He's been a starter since his freshman year and plays slot receiver and defensive back.

Last year, the Warrior lost in the CIF Division V-AA championship game after posting an 8-4 record. Nehemiah Brunson Jr. led the team with 55.8 rushing yards per game, 41.6 receiving yards per game, 15 touchdowns and four interceptions on defense.

"We have a lot of people coming back," he added. "We lost three valuable linemen ... but we have a lot of people that have been stepping up in the offseason. We'll be able to fill those spots. (Jonah Tua) is somebody everyone should watch out for."

The bond between father and son is strong, but Nehemiah Brunson said he knows his limits when coaching his son. He said he focuses on not crossing the line between coach and dad and leaves the harder coaching, or discipline on the field for his son, to his assistants.

Watching his son grow the past several years has made the family proud and Nehemiah Brunson Jr.'s decision to enroll at West Point and serve the country is icing on the cake. Nehemiah Brunson said his son's work ethic, attention to detail and study habits have all led to his success. Nehemiah Brunson said his son has earned his position through thousands of hours of laser-sharp focus and determination.

“It’s an honor as an athletic director and a coach to see him work his way to this opportunity,” Nehemiah Brunson said, also noting he loves his son and is proud as a father. “I always promised mom that I would be a father and have a great relationship with my son, so that way when we get in the car to go home, there was no issues. I’ve held to my guns on that.”

Nehemiah Brunson Jr. said Navy was the first school to start recruiting him followed by Army. But since his commitment, he’s received other offers from Penn, Yale, Columbia, Sacramento State, U.C. Davis, Eastern Washington and others.

Regardless, Nehemiah Brunson Jr. said he is confident in his decision. However, West Point, or any other military academy, is a different beast.

Sports are secondary to service, especially as a freshman. However, Nehemiah Brunson Jr. spoke to a friend and former Oceanside High School player Jonah Zimmerman, who plays for Army, about balancing football and Army life.

Nehemiah Brunson Jr. said a typical day at West Point begins around 6 a.m. for formation followed by breakfast at 7 a.m., classes from 7:40-11:30 a.m., lunch, practice and meetings, dinner, study hall, free time and then TAPS at 11:50 p.m.

Along with Zimmerman, Nehemiah Brunson Jr. said the other players and coaches made him feel welcomed and that Army was the place for him.

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