

Pinoys in the NFL

by JOSEPH PIMENTEL / AJPress

THE National Football League kicked off the opening of its season last month and Pinoy fans should be aware that this year, there are several players with Filipino blood to look out for every Sunday. Chris Gocong of the Philadelphia Eagles, Jordan Dizon of the Detroit Lions, Steve Slaton of the Houston Texans, Aaron Francisco of the Indianapolis Colts and Eugene Amano of the Tennessee Titans all carry some Filipino heritage.

"Besides Manny Pacquiao, there haven't been many Filipinos who have played in the professional major leagues or mainstream sports," said Bo Navarro, Amano's manager. "This just shows that Filipino youth are embracing the sport."

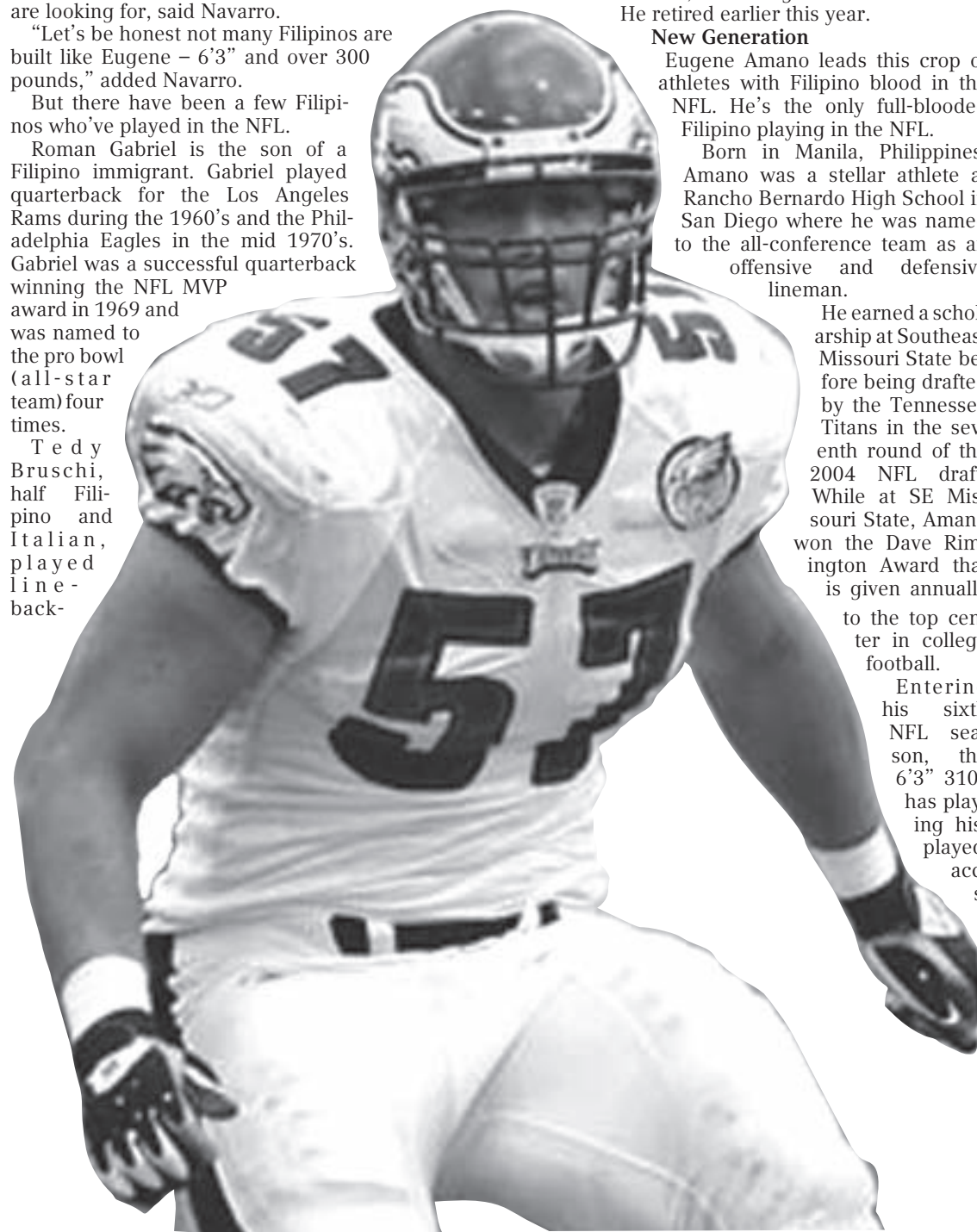
Filipinos are not known to be football players. Most Filipinos don't have the physical size that many NFL personnel are looking for, said Navarro.

"Let's be honest not many Filipinos are built like Eugene - 6'3" and over 300 pounds," added Navarro.

But there have been a few Filipinos who've played in the NFL.

Roman Gabriel is the son of a Filipino immigrant. Gabriel played quarterback for the Los Angeles Rams during the 1960's and the Philadelphia Eagles in the mid 1970's. Gabriel was a successful quarterback winning the NFL MVP award in 1969 and was named to the pro bowl (all-star team) four times.

Tedy Bruschi, half Filipino and Italian, played linebacker.



Chris Gocong

er for the New England Patriots. In Bruschi's 13-year Patriots career, he has been a part of nine playoff seasons, eight division championships, five conference titles and three Super Bowl crowns, according to the Patriots.com. He retired earlier this year.

New Generation

Eugene Amano leads this crop of athletes with Filipino blood in the NFL. He's the only full-blooded Filipino playing in the NFL.

Born in Manila, Philippines, Amano was a stellar athlete at Rancho Bernardo High School in San Diego where he was named to the all-conference team as an offensive and defensive lineman.

He earned a scholarship at Southeast Missouri State before being drafted by the Tennessee Titans in the seventh round of the 2004 NFL draft. While at SE Missouri State, Amano won the Dave Rimmington Award that is given annually to the top center in college football.

Entering his sixth NFL season, the 6'3" 310 pound 27-year-old Amano has played in all but one game during his career (79 career games played) with a total of 24 starts, according to the Titan's website.

Last year, he started all 16 games at left guard and was a part of an offensive front that allowed an NFL-low 12 sacks.

"Playing offensive line is perfect for me," Amano said to ABS-CBN. "I like to be behind the scenes. I'm not the limelight type of guy. I just want to get the job done and make other people look good."

"One thing that makes Eugene so great is that he



Steve Slaton



Eugene Amano



Jordan Dizon



Aaron Francisco



Galing Pinoy showcases the triumph of the Filipino spirit - the Filipino's innate perseverance to rise above. A double entendre, Galing Pinoy literally translates to both coming from (or brought to you by) the Filipino and Filipino ingenuity.



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embraces the Filipino culture. He shops at Seafood City, he gives back to the young Filipinos by hosting football camps, and he goes to all the Filipino festivals," added Navarro, speaking on behalf of Amano. Amano was not available for comment because he was in team meetings to prepare for this weekend's game against the Colts. "When the young Filipino kids find out about Eugene, they embrace him. It's like he's their role model."

Steve Slaton

Another NFL player who embraces his Pinoy culture is Steve Slaton, the running back for the Houston Texans.

Before the NFL season, the Associated Press featured Slaton's heritage. His maternal grandmother is from Manila, Philippines. His grandfather met her when he was based in the Philippines during World War II.

Although he may not look Filipino, Slaton has a tattoo of the Filipino flag on the left side of his chest.

"It's just something that I'm very proud of and something that is a great heritage," Slaton told The Associated Press. "It's a little unknown, but I appreciate it 100 percent."

Slaton was a stand out running back at West Virginia. The Texans drafted Slaton in the third round of the 2008 draft.

Standing 5'9" and 210 pounds, Slaton is a small but quick running back. Last year, he racked up 1,200 yards rushing, had 50 receptions and scored 10 touchdowns.

NFL and Philippines

Navarro said Amano has approached the NFL about introducing the game of football to the Filipino people in the Philippines.

Amano hopes to bring some of his teammates on the Tennessee Titans or an NFL team to the Philippines on a goodwill tour, said Navarro. ■

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