

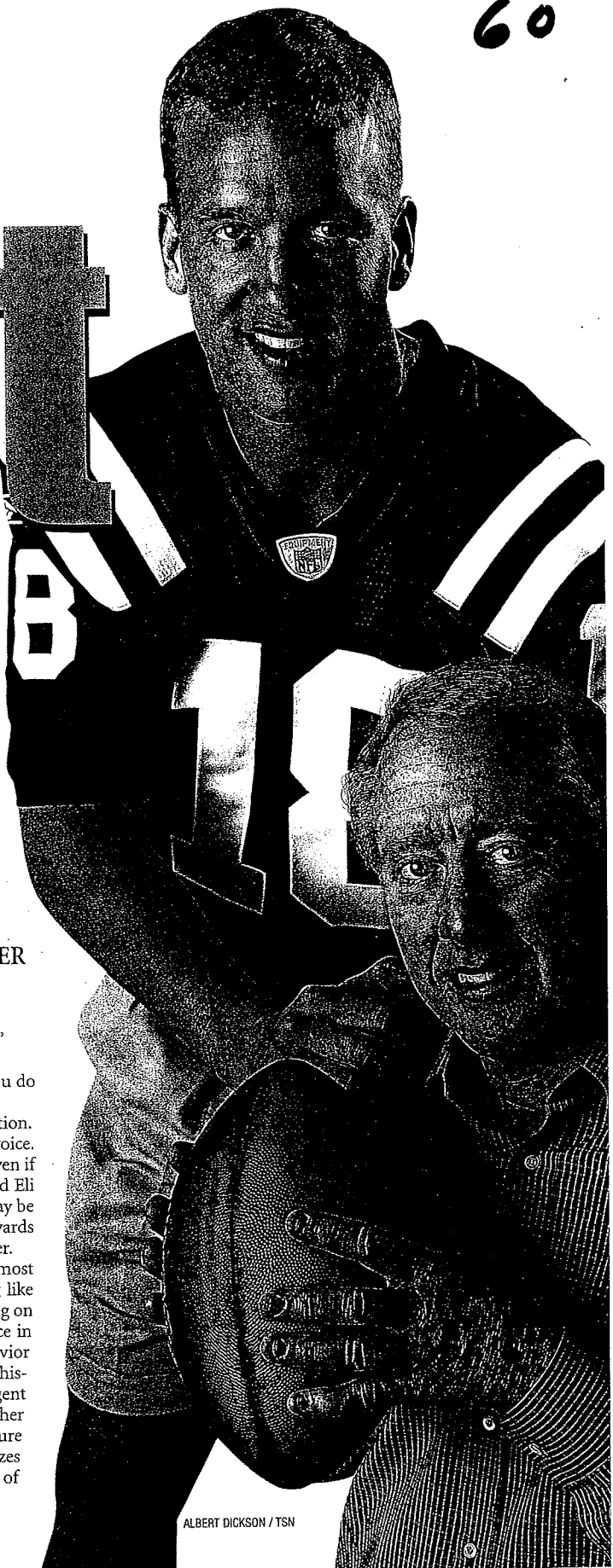
■ NFL

The First Family

Archie, Peyton and Eli are incredibly famous, immensely skilled and intensely driven. But as Eli prepares to be—like his brother—a first overall draft pick, what stands out most about the Mannings is how refreshingly grounded they are.

BY PAUL ATTNER

Let's do it," says Peyton Manning to his brother Eli. Eli nods. They approach each other grimly. "OK," says Peyton. "Turn around." Eli obeys. They stand back to back. "So who's taller?" Peyton asks. Eli stands on his toes. "Now, don't you do that," says Peyton. Eli stops. They settle down. It's 6-5 Peyton by half an inch. No question. "See, I knew I still have you," says the older brother, triumph in his voice. Some things in the pecking order of brothers never change, even if you are Peyton Manning, maybe the best player in the NFL, and Eli Manning, who should be the No. 1 choice in April's draft. Eli may be the better basketball player and may be able to fling a Nerf Vortex football 15 yards farther. ("I destroyed him," says Eli proudly.) But he's still younger and smaller. Eli also is the last of the fabulous Manning boys, the final star in the most remarkable family in the history of pro football. We've never seen anything like this: father Archie, second pick in the 1971 draft by the Saints before embarking on a highly lauded and heroic 15-year career; middle son Peyton, the first choice in the 1998 draft and the reigning league co-MVP; and youngest son Eli, the savior of the Ole Miss football program and second-most popular player in school history behind—who else?—his dad. Every one a quarterback—all gifted, intelligent and, dare we say in this era of hard edges and bad-boy personas, *nice*. Their father could be the best-liked person to ever play the game, and his sons are a mixture of politeness and respect that masks a marked determination that characterizes seemingly everything a Manning undertakes. They get it in a way so many of



ALBERT DICKSON / TSN



their peers don't.

Think about it. Name another son of a former NFL star who has been as successful as Peyton—and consider this family could boast two players selected first in the draft. These Mannings are a refreshingly grand and classy bunch, close and loving and happy, devoid of psychological scars and blood feuds, strong enough to remain grounded amid ungodly fame and, yes, fortune. “They are the DiMaggios of the NFL,” says Ole Miss chancellor Robert Khayat, once a kicker with the Redskins.

“It’s mind-boggling, almost unfathomable,” says former Packers general manager and current Browns consultant Ron Wolf, who scouted Archie at Ole Miss and Peyton at Tennessee. “Just consider how hard it is to play quarterback in this league, and you have two brothers this talented. And Archie—he was a really terrific player who got stuck on some really bad teams.”

Now you have the Chargers sitting with the first pick in the draft, struggling to figure out what to do. For a franchise that erred on Ryan Leaf and passed on Michael Vick, it should be a no-brainer. Eli Manning is available. Take him. You don’t pass up a Manning. Otherwise, you’ve learned nothing from history—and from the impact one family can have on this game.

It is Eli’s private pro day. NFL personnel men and head coaches gather within the Saints’ indoor facility. In many ways, Eli is a clone of Peyton—nearly the same height, at 222 just eight or so pounds lighter, with strikingly similar mechanics and mannerisms. On this day, his passes are crisp and tight, accurate and consistent. But it is an unnecessary exercise; teams like the Chargers, Raiders and Giants, all possessing top-five picks, will learn much more in private meetings with Eli and by watching tapes of his development at Ole Miss, particularly last season, when the Rebels, with less-than-elite talent, won 10 games—and a New Year’s Day bowl game for the first time in 34 years—and Manning became Peyton-like in his effective use of check-offs and audibles.

“He’s more athletic than Peyton,” says John Dorsey, the Packers’ director of college scouting who watches the workout with coach Mike Sherman. “He has better feet, but he is not as cerebral coming to the line as Peyton. But Eli can make all the throws; his arm is alive; he is smart, and he is a Manning.”

And something else, too. “The family is undefeated,” says Giants general manager Ernie Accorsi. “He comes from a wonderful family of achievers. Everything they do is excellent. Look what they already have done for college and pro football; they represent everything good about our sport. And their humility in this era is so refreshing.”

Peyton attends the workout. He’s in town for older brother Cooper’s 30th birthday party. The quick-witted Cooper, now a very successful institutional broker in New Orleans, was an Ole Miss receiver with pro potential before a congenial back condition forced him to give up football. The injury hit the family hard, particularly Peyton, who is almost two years younger than his brother and still idolizes him. He was in high school when Cooper stopped playing; Peyton immediately began wearing his brother’s old number, 18, which also was his dad’s at Ole Miss. Eli, five years younger than Peyton, also wore the uniform number in high school. All three brothers, who are strikingly similar Huck Finns with varying shades of red hair, attended Newman, a private high school in New Orleans, and all three played quarterback there (Cooper only briefly); the school is retiring No. 18 this spring as part of a 100th anniversary celebration.

Eli is not Peyton. It’s an inevitable comparison, one they understand but don’t particularly enjoy. Nor is it fair. If teams are looking for another Peyton, they’ll be sorely disappointed, and not because Eli is incapable of becoming an NFL star. But Peyton has one of the most intriguing personalities in sports. He is consumed with football to the point of obsession and always has been. When he was being recruited in high school, he would study media guides and talk to college coaches about their staffs and returning players. He always is on, deadly serious, analytical and detailed, so gregarious and focused.

That’s not Eli. One family friend, Bo Ball, says it was years before Eli “finished a sentence.” Once painfully shy and introverted, Eli dryly blames his brothers. “I could never get a word in,” he claims. During his time at Ole Miss, he has emerged and blossomed to a point where he could give a recent speech before a sports gathering in Memphis and, when asked about his college recruiting, reply: “I had a great visit to Colorado.” When the laughter stopped, he quickly added: “Just kidding.” But he still keeps his own counsel. He is observant, smart, loose, unassuming, but he doesn’t readily share his thoughts—even with his parents—and is unwilling to take himself too seriously.

David Cutcliffe,



Eli’s passes were crisp and consistent on his pro day.

who was Peyton's offensive coordinator at Tennessee and Eli's head coach at Ole Miss, knows the brothers better than anyone outside the immediate family. "Here's the difference," he says. "I would walk into a stadium on a Friday with Peyton, and he would tell me all the great players who had played there. If I tried to talk to Eli about the same thing, he would look at me as if I was crazy." When Eli was young, the only reason he knew the schools in the SEC was because Peyton would hold him down and pound him on the chest until he could name them all.

But Cutcliffe cautions NFL teams not to misread Eli. "He is every bit Peyton when it comes to game preparation," he says. "They both work as hard. They have great minds and a fast-twitch thinking ability that allows them to absorb things very quickly." Eli is passionate, just in a more quiet way. "I love everything about football," he says. "The games, the practices, the preparation, the smells, everything." Anyway, Eli always has developed more slowly than Peyton.

Unfortunately, neither son inherited Archie's rare mobility. "Archie had absolutely great feet," says Wolf. Archie's sons are elusive in the pocket but not particularly quick. Instead, they are classic drop-back passers at a moment when Vick-like movement is favored. That's one reason the buzz around Eli has not equaled the clamor that surrounded Peyton. Any criticism would nag Peyton. But Eli? "I can't change who I am," he says.

Imagine how difficult it could have been, growing up in New Orleans with Archie Manning as your father. He last played with the Saints in 1981, yet he remains by far the city's most revered sports figure. He still lives in the same classic manor home along splendid St. Charles Avenue. Still works in the city, too, in his own marketing and public relations business. He immersed himself in community affairs and befriended seemingly the entire population. He's instantly charming and warm; no one can remember anyone saying one bad thing about him. But when his sons leaped into football and then gravitated immediately to quarterback, it seemed like a formula for eventual rebellion—or for offspring so full of themselves to be obnoxious.

Maybe because Archie and Olivia, who now have been married 33 years and a couple for 37, feared those possibilities is why none of that occurred. "They gave their children a proper Mississippi upbringing," says Billy Van Devender, who roomed with Archie at Ole Miss, was his best man and now is a prosperous businessman in that state. "They were taught to respect adults and have the right manners. All Archie and Olivia wanted was for their kids to be normal. You don't see them flaunting their success. The whole family is warm and generous, a joy to be around."

Some of this seems almost too Hollywood to be true. Archie, the All-American quarterback from tiny Drew, Miss., marries a former Ole Miss homecoming queen. They raise three intelligent, energetic, athletic sons, all of whom also excel academically (Peyton,

Essential reading

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who graduated *cum laude* in three years, and Eli, who finished in December, both won NCAA scholarship/academic awards, including an \$18,000 post-graduate scholarship by Eli).

Archie was fearful of being a Todd Marinovich father, so he never pressured them to play sports or most certainly quarterback. He instructs them only if they ask. But they are smart enough to do just that; he teaches them proper mechanics, his love of sports. It shows. Cooper would proudly have 3-year-old Peyton demonstrate to friends his five-step drop; Eli would sleep with Nerf baseballs and footballs in his bed, not stuffed animals.

But Archie refrained from coaching their youth teams. It has been troubling enough when his sons have been singled out by rival parents who encouraged their kids "to stop that Manning." He vowed to stay in the background, supportive but quiet. To this day, he still is, even skipping Eli's pro workout.

In the most simplistic terms, Peyton is Archie, Eli is Olivia, Cooper is everyone. Cooper is the family star, really; it's optimist, its energy, its funny bone. "I'm just as proud of what Cooper has done in business as I am of anything Peyton and Eli has accomplished," says Archie. Cooper also has produced the first grandchild, with another due in April. The family is impressively protective of Cooper's feelings and his role. Eli understands. When Cooper was at Ole Miss, Eli remembers fondly the time spent in his apartment. So when Eli went there, he was determined to rent the same place. He eventually did.

Archie is detailed, determined, organized, living off lists, making only well-researched and analytical decisions. Peyton always has had lists, too; Eli just got himself his first organizer. His sons love to mess

with Archie's habits. At Ole Miss, Archie straighten up Eli's apartment. When he is in room, Eli would create some clutter, just to dad clean that up, too. When Peyton was in one of his first roommates was messy. Peyton only tidied up the room, he made his friend. He thinks it makes perfect sense to map out after his dad's.

Cooper and Peyton were inseparable; even no one laughs harder at Cooper's jokes than I. But Eli was too young to pal around with the young to attend his dad's workouts as they'd young to remember his dad playing in the pro would try to play catch with Peyton, but he'd too many balls, so Peyton took pillows off the and taped them to Eli's arms. He looked like marshmallow, but at least he could smother passes.

When Eli was 13, Peyton left for college. was traveling a lot, and Eli and Olivia became friends. "He's his mama's boy," says Ball, the friend. Olivia is soft, gentle, quiet, same as Eli has the nickname "Easy." Archie calls her "my equalizer." Their friends credit her with creating family's solid foundation. "My mom knows how do everything," says Eli. "My dad is clueless. I think he knows how to wash clothes. When I go first place as a pro, I will have her come out and congratulate and organize it."

Olivia rarely gets upset over anything, even she had to watch her sons play 17 basketball games in one weekend. One day, she let her men eat dinner so they could watch a game. When they left plates, she erupted. "I think the least you could show me some respect by taking your plates to the kitchen," she told them. She walked away, but back seconds later. "And another thing, I am tired washing jock straps."

Eli and Peyton have become closer as they grown older. Last fall, they would talk briefly weekend about their respective games; on Thursday, they would have lengthy discussions.

All in the family

With Eli Manning soon to join his brother Peyton (1st pick, 1998) and father Archie (2nd pick, 1971) as a high first round draft choice, the Mannings will become the first family to produce three first-round picks. Of the 15 families (father-son or brothers) with more than one first-round choice, the Mannings are the only one in which a son was drafted higher than his father. —Dave Sloan

Year	1st draftee, position, team (overall pick)	Relationship	Year	2nd draftee, position, team (overall pick)
1971	Archie Manning, QB, Saints (2)	Father-son	1998	Peyton Manning, QB, Colts (1)
1946	Dub Jones, RB, Cardinals (2)	Father-son	1973	Bert Jones, QB, Colts (2)
1962	Merlin Olsen*, DT, Rams (3)	Brothers	1970	Phil Olsen, DT, Patriots (4)
1944	Steve Van Buren*, RB, Eagles (5)	Brothers	1951	Ebert Van Buren, RB, Eagles (7)
1963	Ed Budde, OT, Eagles (4)†	Father-son	1980	Brad Budde, G, Chiefs (11)
1969	Jim Seymour, WR, Rams (10)	Brothers	1973	Paul Seymour, TE, Bills (7)
1978	Clay Matthews, LB, Browns (12)	Brothers	1983	Bruce Matthews, G, Oilers (9)
1976	Pete Brock, C, Patriots (12)	Brothers	1980	Stan Brock, OT, Saints (12)
1984	Don Rogers, S, Browns (18)	Brothers	1987	Reggie Rogers, DE, Lions (7)
1960	Billy Cannon, RB/TE, Rams (1)†	Father-son	1984	Billy Cannon Jr., LB, Cowboys (25)
1967	Bubba Smith, DT, Colts (1)	Brothers	1971	Tody Smith, DE, Cowboys (25)
1978	Ross Browner, DE, Bengals (8)	Brothers	1983	Joey Browner, S, Vikings (19)
1965	Steve DeLong, DE, Bears (6)†	Father-son	1989	Keith DeLong, LB, 49ers (28)
2000	Stockar McDougle, OT, Lions (20)	Brothers	2003	Jerome McDougle, DE, Eagles (15)
1967	Gene Upshaw*, G, Raiders (17)	Brothers	1968	Marvin Upshaw, DE, Browns (21)

*Member of Pro Football Hall of Fame.

†Signed with an AFL team.



Archie's sons inherited his throwing ability but not his special running skills. Peyton and Eli are classic dropback passers.

sometimes about their next opponents. Earlier this month, just after Peyton signed his record \$98 million contract with the Colts, he was in Bradenton, Fla., at the training facility run by IMG agency, which represents both brothers. Eli has been training there for his workouts; Peyton spent four days living in Eli's room.

"I don't want to be his coach or mentor," says Peyton, sitting next to the facility's swimming pool. "I just want to be his brother." They watch Peyton's pro workout tape together. It was not very impressive; lots of passes hit the ground. "I'm not as nervous now," says Eli, "seeing how badly he did." Peyton laughs. "It was pretty ugly."

Archie and Olivia understand how special it is that all their boys call them virtually every day, tell them they love them before they hang up and seek their advice. "My wife thinks I talk to my dad too much, but it's hard; he has such an influence on me," says Peyton. Archie has told them the one thing they could do to really hurt their parents "is to not get along. We see families fussing all the time; we don't want to be like that."

There's something else, too. When Archie was at Ole Miss, his father took his own life. In the middle of an interview, Peyton brings up his grandfather and father. "Dad and I haven't talked much about him losing his father," he volunteers. "He was a lot older than my dad, and they never had this super close relationship. I just sensed he was going to be super close to us and hug us."

But the kids aren't perfect, thank God. Cooper strove to have a good time in high school and not always have his parents know it. Peyton was so intense in high school—once quitting the basketball team after disagreeing with the coach over playing time—that his parents had to sternly remind him it is more important to be a great person than a great player. Later, an assistant trainer at Tennessee accused him of mooning her in the training room. Eli was arrested for being drunk in public his freshman year at Ole Miss. "It was the best thing that

happened to him," says his dad. "It taught him he couldn't do stuff like that and not have it reported. It embarrassed him." He had forgotten what his parents had preached for years. Because of Archie and his fame, the public always would be watching. They had to be careful how they behaved.

"It really hasn't been that hard," says Peyton. "We didn't resent being a Manning. We haven't known anything else, but we've never said, 'This isn't fair.' We wouldn't have wanted it any other way." Well, almost. "We just wondered why we didn't get our dad's speed," says Eli.

But quarterback? "I couldn't play anywhere else," says Eli. "I was tall, skinny and slow. Same with Peyton." So much of what you see is natural, of course. When Peyton was in second grade, Archie attended a school function in the cafeteria while the kids played outside. A pass soared past the window and disappeared; it was his son, throwing. "Did you see that?" asked another dad excitedly. Archie just nodded. But he cringes when folks attribute his sons' success to genes. His point is correct; they haven't wasted their gifts. Instead, their admirable work ethic developed their talents into what we see today. It is another Manning commandment: Once you commit to something, you put everything into the obligation. No halfhearted efforts accepted, thank you.

When Peyton was choosing a university, everyone expected him to go to Ole Miss, where his folk-hero dad, now in the College Football Hall of Fame, was so good that someone wrote a song about him that sold 50,000 copies. But the boys always have been encouraged to think independently, and Peyton instead picked Tennessee, angering many Rebels fans. Anyway, it's probably better Eli went to his father's school; he never worried about being the next Archie or, most important, the next Peyton. Nor did he care the school speed limit is 18 mph (his dad's number) or that he had press conferences in

the Archie Manning Room, filled with his dad's college memorabilia. That's just not Eli.

"I was nervous and scared when I went to school because I didn't know if I could complete a pass in college," he says. "Forget about trying to be like Peyton." He redshirted his freshman year, barely played the next but started the last three, winding up tying or setting 47 school records and winning the Maxwell Trophy as the nation's best player (he was third in the Heisman voting, same as his dad in 1970; Peyton finished second his senior season). Peyton and Eli could have jumped to the NFL early, but they chose to complete their eligibility—that Manning commitment again—and the decision to play a final year particularly benefited Eli, whose accuracy and maturity improved noticeably last fall.

His impact on Ole Miss is almost incomprehensible, extending far beyond football. "More people know about Ole Miss than ever before because of him," says Khayat. "He changed a program that had been inconsistent for 29 years." Dead, in fact, since his dad left. During Eli's tenure, season-ticket sales and merchandise revenue soared, the stadium was expanded and the school now has the SEC's best indoor practice facility. "More than anything, he's given everyone here hope for the future," says athletic director Pete Boone, who was Archie's center in college. This, too, is eerily Hollywood in its feel—the last of the Mannings, this once-shy, still-unassuming kid, returns to his father's and mother's roots and revitalizes an entire university. Pressure? What's that?

By now, Eli is so accustomed to questions about family legacies and expectations that his answers have become robotic. But he's right. He can only control himself, not how early he'll be taken in the draft or what city he will reside in or how well Peyton plays. For him, being Eli—being a Manning—is good enough. And he's right. **TSN**

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THE FIRST FAMILY

1. WHO IS TALLER ELI OR PEYTON?
2. HOW MANY YEARS DID ARCHIE PLAY IN THE NFL?
3. WHAT COLLEGE DID ELI ATTEND?
4. WHAT TEAM DOES PEYTON PLAY FOR?
5. WHAT HIGH SCHOOL DID PEYTON AND ELI ATTEND?
6. WHAT TEAM DID ARCHIE PLAY FOR?
7. PEYTON'S NEW CONTRACT IS FOR HOW MANY MILLION DOLLARS?
8. WHAT COLLEGE DID PEYTON ATTEND?
9. WHAT IS PEYTON'S OLDER BROTHERS NAME?
10. WHY DID COOPER STOP PLAYING FOOTBALL?