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## Walk-on to intern on Capitol Hill, go through officers training camp

### Neal making most of education

*Sarah Fryer*



Sherman Neal is spending the

summer preparing for life after **Sherman Neal** to be a Division I collegiate defensive back. Middle Tennessee. ()

It may also seem unexpected for the timid senior to take his education and potential career to such heights where he might be found in the political limelight some day. However, Neal is taking the necessary steps to completely utilize his time at Middle Tennessee in effort to reach his ultimate goals.

Born July 27, 1988 to Sherman Sr. and Michelle, Neal realized he wanted to take part in athletics at an early age. As soon as he was old enough to participate, Sherman joined a pee-wee football team in his hometown of Naperville, Ill., and hasn't taken a year off since. Simultaneously, Neal began to notice and take interest in the occupations of his parents. Michelle is an attorney and Sherman Sr. has been in the U.S. Navy for 21 years.

Putting possible career choices on the back burner because of his young age, Neal began to completely focus on football. When he entered high school, Neal joined the Neuqua Valley High School football team and the track team.

"I joined the track team to help my football game which actually made me better in track, but I didn't want to run in circles my whole life," says Neal.

Football always remained his first priority, making first team all-conference and being voted best defensive back. He was also an all-state hurdler in track.

Reaching the end of his high school career in the Spring of 2006, Neal knew he wanted to try and take his game to the Division I level. Because of his small size, he did not have many colleges and universities reach out to him, so he took it upon himself to write to as many universities as possible.

Neal knew almost immediately he wanted to go somewhere in the South.

"Naperville is about 20 minutes outside of Chicago and it is very cold and very windy," he adds. "I basically drew a line right above Tennessee and told myself I would go nowhere above it." Neal received several letters. Some peaked his interest while others he had never heard of before. Middle Tennessee was on the unfamiliar list. Assuming MTSU would be nothing of his interest, Neal considered the letter junk mail. It was his mother, Michelle, who let him know Middle Tennessee was not another community college.

"To be honest, I knew nothing about Middle Tennessee and the next thing I know I'm on the plane to meet the coach and that day I decided this was where I wanted to be," Neal said.

As a walk on, Neal took a redshirt year in 2007. In 2008, he participated in 10 games and had a total of 47 snaps. He debuted as a member of the punt block team against Kentucky and had a career best 10 snaps against North Texas.

When it comes to being a Blue Raider, Sherman says there is not another group of guys he would rather have as his teammates. In addition, he wouldn't trade his coaches either. Neal appreciates Head Coach Rick Stockstill because he takes a different approach.

"Coach is very laid back and stays like that most of the time, but he definitely knows when to put his foot down," says Neal.

Off the field, Neal takes his studies very seriously. He recently changed his major to political science and pre-law. He would like to be a lawyer, following in the footsteps of his mother, and then potentially a politician. Going to school in the South has opened his eyes to the regional opinions of people. He considers himself a mellow liberal and going to school with a majority of conservatives has helped him decide on his political science major.

Upon his career choice, Neal was given an opportunity of a lifetime. He has been offered a summer internship with Congressman Bart Gordon at the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. When asked about the details of his trip, Sherman stated, "I'm not really sure what I will be doing up there, but I've had to purchase some suits and ties so I know it will be an experience."

Instead of interning all summer, Neal has decided to work in Washington for 2 weeks then travel to Virginia for a 10-week officers training camp for the U.S. Marine Corp. Neal plans to return the day before football practice convenes August 9.

"Sherman is a good person, a good student, and has really helped us on the football team," said Stockstill. "I tell guys on the team all the time to get as much as they can out of the four or five years they are here. I tell them to use Middle Tennessee and not to let Middle Tennessee use them."

"Get to know professors, get to know people who can help you once you graduate, and get involved in summer internships. Last year I helped him get into Florida State's Summer Law program and he is [going to Washington] this summer. He is a very focused young man, a very goal-oriented young man and I think he is going to be very successful because he is not waiting until after he graduates to take action."

Neal has set his personal and professional goals and does not plan on falling short of them. In the next 5-to-10 years, though he dreams of making a professional career of football, he rather sees himself being an attorney to professional athletes. He also hopes to be an active Marine.

This comes as no surprise since the majority of his family including his father and many uncles and cousins are active in the military. Neal's ultimate goal is to be a politician and he considers President Barack Obama his biggest inspiration since they both hail from the same state of Illinois.

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