

# ASBURY PARK PRESS

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## A sign from a Super Bowl god

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FREEHOLD TOWNSHIP — For New York Giants Super Bowl hero David Tyree, there is life after the “big catch.”

A crowd of about 500 diehard Giants fans who lined up outside the Pro Image store at the Freehold Raceway Mall on Saturday morning for hours to get Tyree’s autograph is testimony that his circus catch to help the Giants win Super Bowl XLII on Feb. 3 has hardly been forgotten.

Although reticent and softspoken, Tyree did crack a smile when a fan on line shouted out that he loved him and that he was a “savior.”

“Knowing the inner quietness and shyness of David, who is never seeking publicity, to see this right now is surreal,” said Peter Grandich, managing member of the sports and entertainment management company Trinity Financial, who has known Tyree since his rookie year.

“But I haven’t seen any change in his makeup yet.”

“Thanks, I’m glad I could do that,” Tyree responded, barely above a whisper.

Tyree also thanked a young fan who shook his hand and told him that his fourth-quarter Super Bowl catch was the most exciting moment he had ever had in 15 years of watching the Giants.

Tyree, whose wife is expecting twins, seemed most comfortable with children, including a 4-year-old girl with whom he exchanged a “high five” as her parents looked on.

Besides waiting in line, Giant fans also were willing to plunk down between \$65 and \$85 to get Tyree’s signature on pieces of Giants memorabilia.

Greg Banara, 50, of Manalapan arrived at 6:30 a.m. to ensure he and his wife, Stefanie, got a prime spot on line to get an authentic Giants helmet signed for their son Gregory, who is away at college.

Others who waited felt they had earned Tyree’s personal autograph.



Lillian Mason, 4, of East Windsor and New York Giants wide receiver David Tyree high-five during an autograph session Saturday at Freehold Raceway Mall in Freehold Township. (STAFF PHOTO: KEITH J. WOODS)

“I’m a long-suffering Giants fan,” said Marie Vegulis, 55, of Freehold Township, referring to the lean years when the Giants were not Super Bowl material.

Jason Sigismondi, 18, of Howell, who arrived at 6:50 a.m., had a more philosophical reason for coming so early.

“You never know when this (a Giants Super Bowl championship) is going to happen again,” Sigismondi said. “It could be a once-in-a-lifetime event.”

Standing patiently at the very end of the line were Mitch Bernardo, 50, of Jackson — along with wife Theresa Bernardo, 47, and their 10-year-old son, Mikie.

“This is a birthday present for me,” Mitch Bernardo said, proudly waving his Giants banner and pointing to the exact white line where he would ask Tyree to sign.

Inside, Tyree, 28, sat at a retractable plastic table, calmly signing each piece of Giants memorabilia assistants passed in front of him. Just to his right, a wall full of New York Yankees jerseys ranging from Babe Ruth to Derek Jeter served as a reminder that Tyree had now joined the ranks of New York sports legends.

Tyree wore a white T-shirt emblazoned with a picture of his mother, Thelma Tyree, who passed away in early December. On the back of his shirt in big letters read, “God Blessed Me With a Mom Like You.”

Standing first in line to get that official Tyree signature were Paul Steinberg, 43, of Howell and his 9-year-old son, Michael.

Michael said he enjoyed getting his Giants poster autographed, but hinted that a Tyree autograph did not exactly impart the same thrill as watching the Giants win the Super Bowl.

“It’s OK,” Michael Steinberg said.

Saturday’s Tyree autographing event was orchestrated by Bernie J. Gernay, 30, president of the Ocean Township-based PSI Marketing Group, which represents professional athletes.

Gernay is scheduled to return to Pro Image in two weeks with a professional sports figure whose notoriety is tied to something quite different than a spectacular catch: former Major League

Baseball player Jose Canseco, author of “Juice,” an expose in which he describes rampant steroid use in baseball.

At one point in Saturday’s signing with Tyree, a barrage of cell phone picture flashes and shouts of “David, I love you — you are my savior” gave the event a surreal Hollywood celebrity quality that stood in stark contrast to Tyree’s calm, unassuming demeanor.

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