

# Matai Bell – from Cougar to Cadet

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Under the tutelage of offensive line coach Bill Leavy, Bell would quickly develop and by his senior year, he would be named to the first team for the following groups: All-Bay Area, West Coast Prep, Chronicle All-Metro and the Bay Area News Group. Bell was also ranked the No. 2 ranked offensive lineman by West Coast Preps. "Bill was hard on us, but he taught us the game by always focusing on the little things. He would know if a play was off immediately. We would hear him yelling at and correcting us from the sidelines."

After Leavy retired, his son Brian replaced him for Bell's senior year. "Brian really focused on getting us in shape over the summer. He really wanted us to pound the ball," Bell said. "Overall, I went through a lot, and I had a truly great experience playing for the Cougars."

It was more than just football for Bell at Campolindo. Bell was part of the group that started the Black Student Union his freshman year and was

a leader of that group as well. Not surprisingly, Kevin Macy was his favorite teacher (math), but the rest of the staff ran a close second. "I loved just about all of the teachers at Campolindo," Bell said. "They took me in, and they knew when I was struggling and when I needed help to get to the next level."

As difficult as things were for everyone with the coronavirus, Bell learned to take things in stride. "After losing the last year and a half, I learned to enjoy the little things. Things were harder for me since I lived so far away so I learned to take everything with a grain of salt and to appreciate how fast things can be taken away from you."

Attending West Point has been a long-held dream for Bell. With grandparents from both sides of his family along with several other relatives having been part of the military, Bell wanted to follow in their footsteps. After taking an unofficial visit to West Point, all doubt was removed from his mind. "Once I saw how beautiful the campus was, hearing all the stories about the history of the Academy, see-

ing the bond between the cadets walking around and saluting each other, I just knew that this was the place I wanted to be. I have always watched the Army-Navy games and to actually have the opportunity to eventually play in that game, it was a no-brainer for me."

The application process was far more extensive than at other schools having to submit a medical form and taking a fitness test twice. Bell will be attending the West Point Prep School so he will not be using up a year of football eligibility but will be playing for the prep team against teams like the Naval Academy Prep Team.

"Attending the West Point Prep School is done to facilitate the academic success of these cadets," said Gene McIntyre, the Senior Associate Athletic Director for Recruiting at West Point. "This one-year program will ensure that Matai and the others will have the foundation to be successful at the academy."

According to Alex Lane, a football trainer at West Point, the players do not receive any special treatment.

"They will go through what the other cadets have to go through – learning how to be a soldier, taking accountability and learning military bearing. Life as a cadet is nothing like their senior year in high school."

Along with the academic demands, there are physical demands that must be met by all the cadets when they show up on July 12. "Primarily, I'm preparing for all these miles I'm going to have to run when I get there," Bell said. "They already know that the big guys are not going to be able to run the times required for all the cadets, but I am still preparing myself to do the best that I can."

Bell, who will be majoring in International Business, understands that going from California to upstate New York will be a new experience. "I'm excited and a little scared since I've only lived in California," Bell said. "It's going to be totally different environment but I'm excited to see new things."

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