

WM Wade Miller Profile

By Kelly Parker

Downtown Winnipeg is going through a bit of a building boom, and Wade Miller is right in the middle of it, getting his football-scarred hands dirty.

Cross Portage Avenue at Edmonton with the stone and glass of Portage Place at your back, and ahead of you is rejuvenation. On your left is the monstrous exoskeleton of the new hydro building to-be. On your right is an older, inconspicuous façade, behind which hums the offices of Pinnacle Staffing Solutions, Manitoba's largest recruitment firm, handling everything from executive recruitment down to manufacturing. Founded in 2002, Pinnacle's offices are already under renovation.

Behind its Portage Avenue entrance, you walk hardwood floors accented by royal blue walls down an office-lined hallway into the guts of the business and a kind of quiet mayhem. A series of rooms along another narrow hallway emit an unmistakable "things are happening" vibe, and an even narrower staircase leads to the second floor boardroom where Wade Miller, co-founder (with Dale Dreidger, a buddy from his U of M days) of this, one of his several business ventures, apologizes for the "work in progress" state of things.

You get the feeling that things won't slow down anytime soon to free up decorating time, and that pace suits Miller just fine. Here's the thing; Miller's business endeavors didn't begin when he peeled off his #34 Winnipeg Blue Bomber jersey for good just before the '06 season after 11 years in the CFL. He was a throwback; a full-time businessman even during the season, working for national staffing companies and forming business partnerships to start the others. "I would come to the office first," he says, "go to practice, and then come back to the office. I always needed to keep my mind stimulated. That's who I am. I needed to be involved, and doing something else besides just playing football. I looked at football as though every day I was on that practice field was one extra day (in the sport), not as something that would be all I was going to do."

Most didn't think, at five-nine, he'd even do that. "Nobody thought I would play a single game, and I fooled them and played 11 years. That first Bomber training camp was a turning point in my life, because I competed and I won. All the odds were against me, and after 21 days of that...sheer...hell, I said to myself, I can do anything I want in this world."

That heart would make him a respected leader in the clubhouse; a guy who would, according to witnesses, grab then Bomber board member and would-be owner David Asper by the collar and haul him into an equipment room mid-tirade during an infamous 2005 post-game blow-up that made national headlines; who then-coach Jeff Reinbold (who had once told Miller he would be cut) tapped to be playing coach of the special teams after Joe Paopao was fired during the 1997 season; whose alter ego, The Phantom, elevated practical joking to a science in a room with a long history of jokers – a role he hasn't entirely left behind, by the way, if the pair of beanbag chair-sized boxing gloves sitting in the corner of the boardroom is any indication.

Always the leader.

Just don't try to focus that spotlight too brightly on him, because if there is a running theme to any conversation about Miller's successes, it's his deflection of credit to others. "I've had some really good mentors. (Former Bomber/Olympic medalist) Bob Molle took me aside when I wrestled in university and really gave me some good life lessons.

That's really what it comes down to, empowering others to be as successful as they can be."

It's clear that this is really what floats Miller's boat; he truly gets a charge out of achievement and tries to surround himself with achievers. "You have to," he says. "I was at a conference this week, and they went around the room, and one guy had a saying that he attributed to his grandmother; Show me your family and friends, and I'll show you how successful you're going to be."

Working with achievers was part of the pull of football, not to say that Miller misses it. "I miss the competitiveness of game day, but (retiring) wasn't much of a transition because I had these other things going on. A lot of credit goes to my business partners for really growing this company. Dale Driedger (whom Miller credits as his mentor) was here every day at Pinnacle for the first 4 years of the life of the company while I was playing football. He's the most disciplined individual I've ever met in my life. You talk about family and friends; show me your business partners and employees and I'll show you how successful you're going to be."

Driedger, for his part, bounces that admiration right back at his partner. Asked what makes Miller different, Driedger cites Miller's passion for life, and his determination. "He approaches business like he did football; outwork a guy first, then out-think him, too. He's a big man in a smaller man's body, as John Madden would say, who never takes no for an answer. He won't hear it, and he's unique in that way."

Former Bomber teammate Dave VanKoughnett, who recently joined Miller at Pinnacle, echoes those thoughts. "He's a very passionate guy, very focused and results driven, always – every day – trying to be the best he can be, and he really cares about helping people to do their best. That's kind of a unique combination."

Former Bomber QB Khari Jones (Miller's partner in the Booster Juice franchise in St. Vital Centre) makes it unanimous; "He wasn't always the most talented back, but there was nobody I wanted next to me more when blocking assignments were out there because I knew that he was going to give everything he had to make sure that I didn't get touched. Same thing in business; I know he's going to do whatever it takes to make sure that we're successful."

Does that drive come from the same place as his "I fooled all of you and played 11 years" comment to the press when he retired? He acknowledges an edge, but says "it's not so much, 'I'll show them' as much as it is, 'I believe in myself in what I do'. Nobody can take that away from you. There are a lot of people out there who want to say, No, you can't do this. All the naysayers, truthfully, are the problem with our country."

Which prompts the obvious question for a guy with Miller's talents; any thought of a political future? He shakes his head. "The political stuff is all fluff. I will be a part of the change by being a good business person; being an excellent member of the community; by doing (The Wade Miller Play With The Pro's Golf Tournament for amateur football); supporting community events...doing all of those things to help make this city better."

For Wade Miller, it all begins here in these offices. "My focus is Pinnacle every day; making it the firm that everyone calls when they have recruiting needs. That's our business, and just like I was in football, I'm a student of it. I don't stop learning."

With that, he disappears back into the maze of offices to get back to the books.

Sidebar: Wade Miller - The Stats

Family: Married (Dawn) 1 son (Branson), 16 mos. (diapers changed in that time: 3..."I've got an understanding wife, and more importantly, a weak stomach.")

Playing career:

- Drafted by the Bombers out of the University of Manitoba ('95)
- 11 seasons, 159 regular season and 8 playoff games
- 2-time East Division all-star
- Most Outstanding Canadian nominee
- Bombers career leader in special teams tackles (184)

Business career:

- 5 businesses:
 - Pinnacle Staffing Solutions, Inc.
 - Elite High Performance Injury Centres (with Bomber Trainer Jeff Fisher)
 - Performance Healthware (sports medicine rehabilitation bracing)
 - Cheetah Courier (Founded only months ago)
 - Booster Juice franchise
- Named to The Caldwell Partners '06 Top 40 Under 40 list (National), based on achievement in five areas: vision and leadership, innovation and achievement, impact, community involvement and contribution, and growth/development strategy.

Personal Philosophy: "Have passion and a dream, and don't ever let anybody stand in the way of it. Simple."