

# How Demarco Cox became an Indianapolis Colt

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By [Ken Sugiura](#) - The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

In a high-school corridor in Yazoo City, Miss., Nick Saban looked Demarco Cox up and down.

The Alabama coach was paying a visit to Yazoo City High to recruit Cox's cousin. Tony Woolfolk, the Yazoo City football coach who had been trying to convince the basketball-minded Cox to give football a try since he was in middle school, was showing Saban around the school when they happened upon the tall, thick, long-limbed Cox, then a junior. Woolfolk explained to Saban that Cox was a basketball player. Saban thought otherwise.



[+](#) [Chuck Burton](#)

Georgia Tech's Demarco Cox tries to steal the ball from Wake Forest's Devin Thomas in their game at Wake Forest last [... read more](#)

As Saban and Woolfolk walked away from the encounter, Woolfolk said, "He just mumbled. He said, 'Man, kid, you're losing money.'"

Some seven years later, Cox is embarking on a most unlikely attempt to fulfill the destiny that Saban foresaw. After playing three seasons of basketball at Ole Miss and one at Georgia Tech as a graduate transfer, Cox is scheduled to begin offseason workouts with the Indianapolis Colts on Monday as their newest offensive tackle.

Cox signed with the Colts on March 19 as an undrafted free agent, just two days after team scout Jon Shaw received an email from general manager Ryan Grigson with Cox's name and a suggestion to check him out. Tech's star-crossed season had just ended. When Shaw reached him, Cox was still on campus, enjoying spring break and preparing for a shot at professional basketball.



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“If you have an opportunity like this, there’s no way you’re going to turn it down,” Cox said.

In recent history, Tech's athletic fields have birthed the single-season hits record holder in Japanese baseball (Matt Murton) and one of the world's pre-eminent professional wrestlers (former defensive lineman Joe Anoa'i, AKA Roman Reigns). With one season of organized football to his credit — as a high school senior, having been sufficiently intrigued by Saban's offhand remark — Cox is beginning what could turn out to be the most unlikely professional sports career in Tech's long athletic history.

Said Cox, "They think I have a chance to play on that team."

There's little denying that Cox has the tools. He stands 6-foot-8 and played the season at 275 pounds with 15 percent body fat. Tech's basketball strength-and-conditioning director, Mike Bewley, said Cox could add 25 pounds of good weight with little trouble. The Colts measured his wingspan at 83 inches.

"I always say that he doesn't have hands, he has paws," Bewley said. "He has the biggest hands I've ever seen on a human."

Playing center for the Jackets, Cox showed considerable deftness on his feet, sliding to the basket on pick and rolls, taking on guards on switches and running the floor in transition. He averaged 8.8 points and 6.1 rebounds while shooting 50.7 percent from the field. Cox impressed Bewley in the weight room, where, despite his newcomer status, he was the most energetic player in the room, talking trash and backing up his standing as the strongest player on the team.

Cox "just created an awesome environment in the weight room," Bewley said. "He'd just challenge guys and step up. He was great."

It presumably was for those reasons that Cox's information showed up in the email inbox of Grigson, who leads a scouting department whose mantra is "no stone left unturned." Since Grigson's hire in January 2012, the Colts have signed a Kenyan-born rugby player and two other former college basketball players, as well as players out of the CFL and Arena Football League.

Shaw, whose title is pro scout/special projects, said that "our pro (scouting) guys, we're always on the look." When college scouts make campus visits, Shaw said, "they'll pop down to different departments and kind of just inquire if there's another athlete that may fit the football mold."

Grigson forwarded him the email and asked him to take a look. After looking at YouTube clips and speaking with Bewley, Shaw was intrigued.

"The hardest part was getting in touch with Demarco," he said.

Once he made contact, he inquired about Cox's interest in the NFL. The same day, Cox was on a flight to Indianapolis.

In the meantime, the team had checked with the NFL about Cox's signing status. The league's rules state that non-football athletes are eligible for the NFL draft after four seasons have elapsed since their enrollment. Cox started at Ole Miss in 2010, which made him eligible for the 2014 draft and, hence, a free agent after it ended.

He worked out before Colts coaches and scouts the next day. He answered questions with his agility, flexibility and confidence.

"And he's a great kid," Shaw said. "He's a big personality. We thought he'd fit in great with the culture here."

After the workout, Cox met with Colts coaches and then went up to Grigson's office. In time, Grigson had a question.

"Do you want to be a Colt?"

Cox's eyes lit up, and he was signing a contract soon after.

"I was blindsided," Cox said. "I didn't have a clue they were going to sign me."

Word reached Woolfolk, his high school coach, now coaching in Lexington, Miss. Woolfolk had a three-word reaction: "I told you."

Cox's challenge now is the work of becoming a football player — learning techniques, terminology and how to play a violent, complex game at high speed. If it helps, he's got the bloodlines. Cox's cousin — the one whom Saban came to Yazoo City to court — is Fletcher Cox, whom the Philadelphia Eagles drafted out of Mississippi State in 2012 with the 12th overall pick.

"Just the game is the biggest hurdle," Shaw said. "Obviously, we'll take it slow with him and go from there."

If it doesn't work out, Cox would consider returning to basketball. He has no plans to do so, though.

"I have that mindset, I know I can (play)," Cox said.

Coaches Woolfolk and Saban would offer their assent.

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