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The drive still alive for Brigade receiver

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JIM BARCUS/The Kansas City Star

Aaron Boone briefly caught on with three different NFL teams.

The day El Niño hit the coastal city of Trujillo, Peru, it hadn't rained for nine months. That's how Aaron Boone remembers it.

It poured for nine straight days after that, and Boone, a Brigade wide receiver, was caught right in the middle of it. Boone's lasting image was that of a cemetery that flooded, bringing the dead and their coffins out of the soaked ground.

"It washed the adobe houses out to sea," Boone said. "It was killing this whole city. I just remember people having absolutely nothing. It was very humbling."

Boone, a Provo, Utah, native, lived in Peru for two years while on a Mormon mission. He slept on dirt floors and ate small meals. A day doesn't go by, he says, when he doesn't think about Peru.

"I'm half-Peruvian now," he said. "It's a part of me."

Boone, who was picked up by the Brigade in a trade with the Philadelphia Soul last week, still dreams in Spanish.

He can't let go of one dream: "*Quiero jugar en la NFL.*" That means, "I want to play in the NFL," and despite having every reason to give up at the age of 28, Boone hasn't.

Boone came back from Peru a shell of himself physically — he had lost 30 pounds — but enlivened spiritually.

"They say, 'Leave it all out there on the field,' " Boone said, "and I definitely left it all down there."

He had four years of eligibility left as a quarterback at Snow Junior College in Utah and switched to wide receiver when he saw he would never start. After his sophomore year, when he led the nation in receiving for Snow, he transferred to Kentucky. And in 2002, his senior year, Boone tied for the SEC lead with 10 touchdown receptions.

Preparing for the 2003 NFL draft, the question about Boone was his 40 time. He pulled a muscle trying to get faster and went undrafted, but the Cowboys gave him a shot in camp. Boone got hurt, was released and then picked up by the Bears.

He went to play for Berlin in NFL Europe and was invited back to Bears camp the following year.

The Bears released Boone, the Panthers picked him up and then sent him back to Berlin. This time, Boone, who is 6 feet 2 and 207 pounds, led NFL Europe in special-teams tackles and was second in receiving yards in 2005. He returned to Panthers camp last year and caught a touchdown pass in a preseason game against Washington. He thought that was going to be his year, but predictably, his body failed him again. A rotator cuff injury in the last preseason game sent him packing.

So, here he is, in Kansas City trying to play for a first-year franchise with a 1-8 record. You won't see him during tonight's game against

Georgia because he's still learning the Brigade playbook.

"My window of opportunity to play at this level is short," Boone said. "I love coming out to practice, I love running routes. I don't look at it like it's work. For me, it's still fun. I love the grind, I love getting sore, I love working. It's the drive I have, I guess."

Maybe it's the work ethic instilled in him at a young age with 10 brothers and sisters that keeps him going.

Or maybe it's the lesson Boone learned in Peru.

"It's about celebrating life no matter what you have," Boone said. "The Peruvians love life, they embrace it. They don't worry about what's going to happen tomorrow. Today, we need to enjoy it."

"When they pray, they say, 'Thank you God for another day of life. Thank you for bread.' The most simple things. Things I overlook. Every morning I wake up, I think about that."

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