

## McNabb and Birds: Futures look bleak



Bob Ford

An Eagles season that has wobbled on the thin edge of disaster for more than a month finally fell into the void yesterday when the team lost both a football game and its best player on the same raw afternoon at Lincoln Financial Field.

Quarterback Donovan McNabb, having one of the best statistical seasons of his career despite the team's overall struggles, suffered a season-ending knee injury on a seemingly innocuous sideline play early in the second quarter of what would become a 31-13 loss to

the lightly regarded Tennessee Titans.

The short-term future of the team, which is now 5-5 and almost certain to miss the playoffs for the second straight year, is beyond bleak. Even with McNabb, the Eagles have been awful at times, and yesterday's game against Tennessee was as bad as any, with the home team overlooking minor details like blocking, tackling and catching the football.

The long-term prospects for McNabb, who turns 30 on Saturday, are not much. See **MCNABB** on A10



RON CORTES / Inquirer Staff Photographer

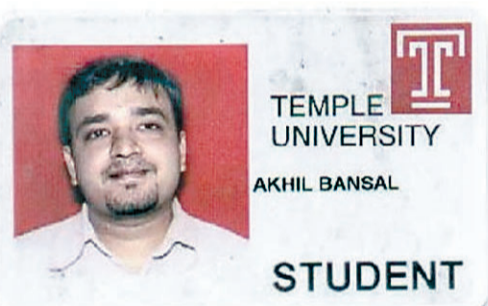
### Eagles Extra

Nine pages on the injury, the 31-13 loss, and other NFL games. **Section F**

**Donovan McNabb** leaves the Titans game with a season-ending injury in the first half. He tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee when he was bumped out of bounds.

## DRUGNET » SPECIAL INQUIRER SERIAL IN PURSUIT OF CYBERSPACE DRUG DEALERS

Suspicious packages at the airport lead a DEA agent to Chester. A son leaves India – but not his family's pill business.



CHAPTER 2

## Origins

**THE STORY SO FAR** Hours before DEA agents are to arrest Internet drug dealers in a worldwide sweep, Temple grad student Akhil Bansal races from his Roxborough apartment to flee home to India. Today's installment takes us back to the day the case began. It is February 2004.

By John Shiffman  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

### PHILA. INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

It all began on a frigid February 2004 morning — back when Akhil Bansal still viewed shipping pills as a chore for his father, back when DEA agents didn't even have Internet access at their desks.

At the airport, a squat Airborne Express supervisor noticed three suspicious packages on the green conveyor belt and, because they lacked manifests, broke them open.

Inside the first, he found 120 tablets of generic Valium. Inside the others, he found more Valium and knockoff Viagra.

Anonymous packaging. No dosage directions. No evidence of a prescription. The supervisor called police.

### NEAR UPPER CHICHESTER

Carlos Aquino, tired from a three-day training session in Quantico, Va., pulled into the driveway of his canary-yellow suburban home. He planned to take the rest of the day off as comp time, maybe tinker with his



MICHAEL BRYANT / Inquirer Staff Photographer

**DEA investigator Carlos Aquino with pills** seized at the airport in February 2004, launching the probe. A former Philly cop, he investigated even though the case looked small-time to him.

fishing boat, an 18-foot Manatee.

The DEA investigator, his once-trim body softened by desk work and agency meetings, hauled his suitcase inside.

He had found the seminar interesting enough — DEA had established a new priority, targeting Internet pharmacies. But Carlos had left the session hoping he never got such a case. It looked complicated, a pain. "Little cases, little headaches," he'd say. "Big cases, big headaches."

Carlos had had enough big cases. He'd spent 24 years as a Philly cop, nine of them

assigned to a DEA task force, busting crackheads, kicking down doors, recovering kilos of dope, nearly getting himself killed working undercover against Jamaican thugs. He could be a hard-ass, but his warm smile revealed an empathetic nature.

Now, at 56, Carlos worked for the DEA division that regulated pharmaceuticals. He carried a clipboard instead of a gun, pursuing a softer kind of criminal, often doctors and pharmacists who violated prescription laws. As bad guys went, they made easy

See **ORIGINS** on A12

## Street: Designate painting 'historic'

Under Philadelphia's historic preservation code, removal of Eakins' work could be halted. There is precedent for its use.

By Stephan Salisbury  
INQUIRER CULTURE WRITER

Mayor Street has nominated Thomas Eakins' masterpiece, *The Gross Clinic*, for protection under the city's historic preservation ordinance, noting the painting's deep historical and cultural resonance throughout Philadelphia, city officials said yesterday.

Designation as a "historic object," a rarely used category of the preservation code, would prevent the painting from being altered or moved without the express approval of the Philadelphia Historical Commission. Its proposed sale by Thomas Jefferson University for \$68 million ignited a burgeoning controversy.

The first such designation blocked the removal of *Dream Garden*, a shimmering mosaic in the old Curtis Publishing building, which its owners sought to sell in 1998.

Stephanie Naidoff, city commerce director, said Street sent a letter to commerce. See **PAINTING** on A5

### Inside

Demonstrators march in front of Alumni Hall to protest sale of painting. **A4.**

Questions reflect worry for their parents in Iraq.

## Children cope with absence amid wartime

By Edward Colimore  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

In their prayers at bedtime, the children ask God to "please let Daddy come home alive" from Iraq and "keep the sand out of the treats we send him."

One 4-year-old boy asked his mother whether they'll have a Christmas tree this year, since Dad won't be around to cut one down for them.

And a 4-year-old girl asked her family minister: "If Daddy dies, would he go to heaven?"

The questions from the children of troops on second and third Iraq deployments have been surprising and sometimes heartbreaking.

The spouses who hear them every day have endured long absences before, but not with sons and daughters old enough to understand that Dad is away at war.

They keep their children away from grim war news on the television — more than 100 Americans were killed last month — and ask teachers to be alert for signs of stress.

And they stay busy with work, family, household duties and places of worship, especially during birthdays, anniversaries. See **FAMILIES** on A10

■ Pentagon's three Iraqi options: "Go Big," "Go Long" and "Go Home." **A3.**

## INSIDE TODAY'S INQUIRER

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High 46, Low 36

Cloudy and cool. Thanksgiving could be windy. Air quality: Good. Full report and NBC10 EarthWatch forecast, **B11.**



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### Phils lose out on Soriano

The slugger agrees to an eight-year, \$136 million deal with the Chicago Cubs. What's next for the Phillies? **F9.**

REGION

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Survey: Penn's Gutmann and Drexel's Papadakis are among top earners. **B1.**

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