

## USC's Thompson gets chance to work with Mannings

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Dylan Thompson knows there are high expectations on him going into the season as the starting quarterback at South Carolina.

The redshirt senior and former Boiling Springs standout fully understands those expectations after the departure of close friend Connor Shaw, who holds the school record for wins as a starting quarterback with 27.

Beginning today, Thompson will have an opportunity to pick the brains of some of the greats to ever play the game. He is one of 30-plus college quarterbacks who have been invited to the Manning Passing Academy in Thibodaux, La. The camp is run by former NFL standout Archie Manning and sons Peyton and Eli. Peyton is the quarterback for the Denver Broncos, while Eli shares the same position for the New York Giants.

Thompson will join Florida State quarterback and Heisman Trophy winner Jameis Winston, Oregon's Marcus Mariota, Baylor's Bryce Petty, UCLA's Brett Hundley, Stanford's Kevin Hogan and Southern Cal's Cody Kessler, to name a few. The camp will host approximately 1,200 high school aged children to help them learn a better understanding of football. It will continue through Sunday.

Thompson said getting to participate in the camp is an honor.

"Archie Manning called (Gamecocks) Coach (Steve) Spurrier, and then Coach told me that (Manning) would be calling me," he said via phone conversation from Columbia on Wednesday. "The cool thing is we get to work out a few times with Peyton and Eli in our down time. We'll all just mostly be counselors and split into teams and work with our teams. It's just a really good opportunity."

The camp's mission statement on its website says that it is held "to create an environment of greater understanding of the proficiency with, the fundamentals, techniques, skills, motivation and sportsmanship necessary for success at the individual offensive skill positions in the sport of football, while expanding the overall knowledge and strategy of offensive play and defensive coverage."

Thompson said he's excited about being able to lend his services.

"They do it the right way," he said. "Plus you get to work with Peyton, who has won the Super Bowl, and someone I grew up watching. Eli has won two Super Bowls, and it's just great to be able to learn from them."



AP FILE

Boiling Springs product Dylan Thompson is expected to be South Carolina's starting quarterback this season after the departure of Connor Shaw, who is in camp with the NFL's Cleveland Browns.

Thompson is not a stranger to such camps. He's participated with children of all ages at home and abroad, and it's something he enjoys.

"They want us to be good role models for the up-and-coming guys," Thompson said. "I just want to use this to build relationships with the other college quarterbacks that I know and show these kids that we are people, too."

The Manning Passing Academy comes on the heels of a football camp that Thompson and Gamecocks offensive lineman A.J. Cann took to Israel last week. Thompson said the overseas trip will always be memorable.

"We went over there to teach the kids American football," he said. "It was awesome. It was the most unbelievable trip of my life. The crazy part is, as excited as I am about it, I didn't think about the Manning camp once while I was over there."

Thompson does not hide the fact that he's religious. He said getting to walk in the Holy Land was eye opening.

"It was a cool opportunity to get to see everything," Thompson said. "We got to see as much as we could in a week. We walked where Jesus walked and got to see where he was crucified. You can't describe the feeling you get. It's as real as any feeling you'll ever have."

Once Thompson returns from the Manning camp, he said it will be full speed ahead for getting ready for the Gamecocks' season opener against Texas A&M on Aug. 28 in Columbia.

Thompson is 3-0 as a starter and completed 55 percent of his passes, tallying 1,827 yards and 14 touchdowns.

He's also rushed for five touchdowns and thrown for more than 300 yards twice.

Thompson said going into the season as the starting quarterback is a dream come true.

"As a kid, you grow up wanting to be a starting quarterback anywhere," he said. "Getting to be in the national spotlight against A&M, a great team, is everything you want. You go back to when you were a kid and drawing up plays in the sand. I'm very ready for this opportunity."

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