

Clairton's "unsung hero" propelled Bears to WPIAL title

**By Joshua Funk
For PA Football News**

How much pressure does a 17 or 18-year-old have when playing a football game on Heinz Field's turf for the WPIAL championship? Probably a lot.

How much pressure does that same 17 or 18-year-old feel when he has to step in at quarterback and replace a starter who totaled over 2,400 yards of offense and had a hand in 36 touchdowns?

That was the situation that Clairton back-up quarterback Troy Webb found himself in Saturday's WPIAL "A" title game versus Monaca.

Starting quarterback Andrew Currington took only two snaps, both designed running plays, and gained zero yards on a dislocated big toe. He sat out the rest of the game.

Enter Webb, who played quarterback for the Bears in his 10th and 11th grade years. When Webb was a sophomore, Clairton won the WPIAL title against bitter playoff rival Rochester, 16-13. Last year, Clairton was eliminated in the semifinals by Springdale, 21-20.

It wasn't like Webb went into the game cold. He knew the facets of Clairton's spread offense.

But he hadn't been handed the controls in a while.

"He hadn't taken a snap at quarterback all year long," head coach Tom Nola said. "He was our starting quarterback in 10th and 11th grade.

"As the week progressed, it became (evident) that (Currington) wasn't going to start, so we gave (Webb) the snaps in practice."

All Webb did was complete 4-of-9 passes for 111 yards and two touchdowns and add 103 rushing yards on 20 carries. Clairton needed every bit of Webb's 214 yards of offense – it was locked in its closest game of the year, and actually trailed just two minutes into the game, 6-0.

"We didn't think it would be this close," Webb said. "We thought we would have a field day."

As did everyone else in the orange and black. But, given a wake-up call, Clairton responded the only way it knew how – get down the field quickly and steal back the momentum.

The Bears did exactly that – Webb’s first touchdown pass, a 23-yard toss to Malcolm Ford knotted things up at six apiece. But it was Webb’s second scoring pass that was a thing of beauty.

Webb had run toward the Clairton sideline, stopped, then threw a spiral across his body to a wide-open Deontae Howard. The play spanned 71 yards, gave Clairton a 12-6 lead, and stole all the momentum back to the orange and black.

“I mean, he hasn’t played quarterback all year, and he just comes right in and runs the offense well and leads the team to victory,” Nola said, somewhat in admiration of #2.

It’s been said that sometimes, to win a championship, you just need a little luck. So if luck is defined as the back-up quarterback single-handedly winning your school’s sixth overall WPIAL title and third since 1989, then so be it.

But Webb said he’s not satisfied with a gold medal at Heinz.

“I was happy with the win, and it’s nice I had that kind of performance,” Webb said, “but it really doesn’t matter.

“I really want that state title.”