

PURDUE FOOTBALL

Boilers' new receivers still catching up

Offense is still looking for newcomers to emerge

MIKE CARMIN
JOURNAL & COURIER

WEST LAFAYETTE - Tracking Purdue's offense after seven games and heading into Saturday night's matchup against Nebraska at Ross-Ade Stadium:

ONE TAKEAWAY

Newcomers at the receiver position were supposed to provide a boost to the passing game. Stretch the field. More big plays. Give quarterbacks David Blough and Elijah Sindelar more weapons on the

perimeter.

After seven games, Terry Wright, Isaac Zico and Corey Holmes haven't made a big impact. Wright and Zico are junior college transfers, arriving in the summer, and Holmes is a graduate transfer from Notre Dame. He came to Purdue right before the start of training camp.

First-year coach Jeff Brohm said Wright, Zico and Holmes are behind in learning the playbook and applying that knowledge to practice and on game day. The assumption was the trio would start training camp with the first-team offense but that never materialized for a variety

SATURDAY'S GAME

Nebraska (3-4, 2-2) at Purdue (3-4, 1-3)

TV: BTN, 7:30 p.m.

Radio: WAZY (96.5)

Note: The Nov. 4 home matchup against Illinois starts at noon

of reasons, including injuries.

"College football, you've got to work at it, you've got to study it, you've got to know it and there can't be a whole lot of margin for error," Brohm said. "Those guys were behind. I do think both Isaac and Terry are getting better."

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Purdue's Terry Wright is among the young Boilermakers receivers who are behind in learning the playbook, according to the coach Jeff Brohm. DENNIS SCHNEIDLER/USA TODAY SPORTS

LAFAYETTE JEFF FOOTBALL

'DREAM JOB'

Pat Shanley left state champion Ben Davis to join a 1-9 football team. Three years later, he's the head coach of the 9-0 Bronchos.

"I never could have envisioned this and I thank God every day that he helped me fulfill my dream and I get to be here at Jeff," head coach Pat Shanley said. JOHN TERHUNE/JOURNAL & COURIER

SAM KING
JOURNAL & COURIER

Pat Shanley sat in Chris Meeks' classroom, putting pen to paper as his mind wandered.

Some might consider it doodling and Shanley wouldn't be the first high school student guilty of doing that to pass the time.

This though wasn't so much doodling as it was innovating. "He would be drawing plays and making play

suggestions. He always had that football mind," Meeks recalled of his former linebacker and running back. "Early on in high school, he said he wanted to be a coach. He always had that mentality."

Meeks, the longtime Rensselaer Bombers football coach, was a mentor to Shanley as a teacher and his football and wrestling coach.

For all the wins Meeks has produced, it's a 42-14 loss in 1999 that Shanley remembers so vividly as the day he found his passion.

A high school freshman, Shanley watched coach Scott Muncy's state championship Central

Catholic team come and dismantle Rensselaer. He noted the mastermind at work, seeing Meeks come up with any plan he could to try and slow down what was an unstoppable machine of a football team.

It sticks with Shanley 18 years later.

"He probably doesn't even understand what he means to me," Shanley said of Meeks. "I got to see coach Meeks in action and see how he got us to play for our community and the amount of pride he took in his job. All that seemed really

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Students in Obama, Trump masks attempt Monon Bell heist

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GREENCASTLE - Three Wabash students in white jump suits — one in a Donald Trump mask and two in Barack Obama masks — just etched their names in Monon Bell lore.

They spent six hours hiding under bleachers at the Lilly Center in Greencastle, according to Putnam County Prosecutor Tim Bookwalter, before sneaking out and unfastening the 300-pound bell. Which, of course, was set up with a pressure sensor that alerted police as soon as

they lifted it from its stand.

The massive trophy has been handed back and forth to the winner of DePauw and Wabash's annual football game since 1932. Sometimes, though, the exchange isn't so peaceful.

In 1965, a Wabash student posed as a Mexican dignitary and was given a tour of the DePauw campus. He returned after learning of the bell's location with a group of students and stole it.

The next year, DePauw students stole it (from their own school!) and buried it in the north end zone of Blackstock Stadium for safe keeping. This is a tradition full of

scandalous stories of thievery, with the last successful heist coming in 1998.

This latest chapter will ultimately result in a Class A misdemeanor criminal trespass charge handed out to four students. The three that snuck in the building: Aaron Scott, Mason Owen Simmons and Wabash placekicker Schuyler Nehrig; plus their getaway driver, Brendan McCoy.

Nehrig's part in the brazen thievery attempt actually drew some praise from Bookwalter.

"They always talk about football players looking down their nose at the place-

kicker," he cracked. "(Nehrig) had a set of guts on him, for a placekicker."

That charge is about as light as Bookwalter could have offered. He spoke with DePauw officials, local police and the Montgomery County Prosecutor because — even though this is tradition — he had to make some example of them.

"We're cognizant that this is a college prank or whatever," he said, "but when you go into a building and hide out for six hours, we've got to do something."

They were confronted by police as soon

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NASCAR

Truex's team heads on through adversity in playoffs

DAVE SKRETTA
ASSOCIATED PRESS

KANSAS CITY, Kan. - There have been soaring highs at the track for Martin Truex Jr. and his Furniture Row Racing team this season, a series-leading seven victories and a spot in the round of eight of NASCAR's playoffs.

The crushing lows have come away from it.

There was the news this summer that Truex's longtime girlfriend, Sherry Pollex, would need a second round of chemotherapy after doctors discovered a recurrence of cancer. She had her spleen taken out and was recovering in the hospital when Truex won the Cup Series race at Kentucky.

There was the news that Truex's crew chief, Cole Pearn, lost his childhood friend to a bacterial infection. Jacob Darnen's unexpected death came just days before Truex won on the road course at Watkins Glen, and just before the man's family was to attend the race at Michigan.

There was the hard decision Pearn had to make in the days after Truex's victory at Charlotte, which assured his spot in the round of eight, to put his dog down. The pup had become an indispensable part of the family over the past 13 years, a constant companion on his rise through the ranks.

Then there was the news Saturday night that Jim Watson, one of the fabricators on the No. 78 car, had died of a heart attack. The 55-year-old crew member had accompanied the team to Kansas Speedway for the elimination race, helping usher the car through inspection just hours earlier.

True to form, the team rallied through adversity to reach Victory Lane again.

"It's just like, man, I don't know if reg-



Martin Truex Jr. has been NASCAR's most dominant driver this season. But his Furniture Row Racing team has also dealt with plenty of heartache. ED ZURGA/AP

ular life is supposed to be like this," Pearn said Sunday night. "And it just keeps going on for some reason. It would be a lot nicer to have all the highs and not all the lows. That's just how life is and we're getting the full circle of it."

No amount of on-track success can make up for the loss of a life. Or the recurrence of cancer. Or the loss of a pet. To call the Furniture Row Racing team's stunning performance this season a silver lining would be nothing more than a trite cliché.

Yet the track has nevertheless provided an escape from many of those hardships, a place where Truex and his team

can focus on the task at hand rather than much more substantial problems.

"The nice thing is they're a tight race team. Everyone rallies together," explained Furniture Row Racing president Joe Garone. "We just try to keep focus on what we need to do."

So far, they've managed to do that week after week.

Their second victory of the year at Kansas Speedway came despite on-track obstacles, too, beginning with a restart violation that resulted in a pass-through penalty. Teams had been told during the prerace meeting that diving below the white line on a restart was against the

rules. Truex made the move, but it was Pearn who accepted blame.

"We were talking about what happened (to Watson)," he said, "and I flat wasn't paying attention."

Then, Truex was making his way quickly through the field again when a vibration turned into a more concerning shaking. Worried that a wheel was loose, Truex headed to the pits under green and was again shuffled to the back of the lead lap.

"Just couldn't believe some of the things that were happening," he said. "Then we got back mid-pack and had a couple really good restarts to get some track position, and then really fought the car through that part of the race and had to make some big adjustments. I felt like at the end we got dialed in pretty good. I'm pretty happy with that."

Truex was chased across the finish line by Kurt Busch and a host of playoff contenders, then did a customary burn-out on the front stretch. As he hopped from the car to fulfill a television interview, his team members huddled in the pits and shared in an emotional moment.

There were hugs. There were tears. There was joy and pain and sorrow.

"It's just a combination of everything," Furniture Row Racing owner Barney Visser said. "We say it every time we get in front of the microphone, Martin is just on fire right now. Every call he makes seems to be the exact call, what he needs in the car. And the guys are able to give him it."

Regardless of whatever life deals them away from the track.

"A lot of it was this team and the fight in us, in all of us," Truex said. "It's crazy how these things work out, but you just got to give your best effort all the time and never give up."

Shanley

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cool to me.

"I am a head football coach today and I wanted to pursue it because of Chris Meeks. He inspired me, there's no doubt about that."

Shanley wanted to be just like him, a man who not only coached, but taught his players how to be good citizens, lessons that extend far beyond four seasons on a playing field.

To this day, Shanley still speaks with glee about the behind-the-scenes good deeds of his former coach. The same could be said for Ben Davis head coach Mike Kirschner, who Shanley worked under.

"The thing with Pat, and all successful young coaches are similar in this way, is he had very strong mentors," Lafayette Jeff Principal Mark Preston said. "Pat has his own style, but he's learned something from each of his mentors. He's got that real drive to not only be successful, but to build strong young men in the process."

On Jan. 11, 2016, Lafayette Jeff afforded Shanley an opportunity, promoting its offensive coordinator to head coach after just one season with the program. Shanley was 30 years old with no head coaching experience.

Some considered it a risk.

Athletic director Peyton Stovall didn't.

"When Pat came in and he was an assistant that first year (2015), I noticed he was very assertive," Stovall said. "The kids took to him and not just as a mentor, but they looked at him as a leader and somebody they could reach out to if they ever needed something."

"As I was going through the application and hiring process, in the back of my head, that kept coming back to me. Even though he doesn't have head coaching experience, he's going to work as hard, if not harder, to make sure the guy that hired him looks like a genius. He makes sure he does everything to hold up his end."

Dream job

Chaos surrounded Pat Shanley under the Scheumann Stadium lights on Sept. 1.

The audio recorder is off after a post-game interview and the cameras are gone. Shanley stares off into the celebration after the Bronchos defeated McCutcheon 28-10 in a de facto North Central Conference title game in the

league opener. It's their third victory in a row in what will become a 9-0 regular season.

We're just talking, and tears start to mount.

"I'm going to get emotional, man," Shanley said as he put his thumb and index finger into his eyes to hopefully block drops from running down his face.

Former NFL first round draft pick Dustin Keller, at one time one of the most dangerous tight ends in pro football, came back to his high school from his Texas home. He spoke to the team and led the Bronchos onto the field.

"To see what this place means to so many people, it's special," Shanley continued. "I don't know. I can't describe it. I'm lucky."

Shanley was in a good spot before arriving in Lafayette.

Working with football powerhouse Ben Davis, Shanley earned a Class 6A state championship ring in 2014 — the same day his younger brother Jared, now a member of Jeff's coaching staff, helped Rensselaer win the Class 2A title as a player.

It was Shanley's third and final season with the Giants.

Lafayette Jeff made a head coaching change. Justin Myers, a friend of Shanley's, was on departing coach Andy Kennedy's staff. He reached out to Shanley to gauge his interest in the Bronchos.

Shanley did his research and gathered feedback when he considered a job change. Some told him not to go to Lafayette Jeff. You can't win there, they said.

That may have done more to persuade the competitive Shanley to go there than if they'd said it was a good career move. He wanted to prove you can win at Lafayette Jeff.

Jeff hired Brian Moore, a former state champion coach at Seeger, to run its football program. Moore wanted Shanley as his offensive coordinator.

Shanley left the state champions for a 1-9 team that hadn't had a winning season since 2008.

"The fact that Justin Myers is a friend of mine and that Brian Moore is a great human being and nobody in the coaching world had a negative thing to say about him, and the leadership above (from Jeff administration), we felt we had a great opportunity to get things going in the right direction," Shanley said.

They quickly did.

Moore resigned after one season to return to his alma mater Fountain Central as athletic director.

Shanley's move to Lafayette Jeff was about to pay off far better than he could have imagined.

Right place, right time. Head coach of the Jefferson Bronchos.

"I never could have envisioned this and I thank God every day that he helped me fulfill my dream and I get to be here at Jeff," Shanley said. "I tell the kids all the time I have the best job on the planet. Being here with them and a great coaching staff, it's not too often you get to fulfill your dream job, especially this early in your career."

Difference maker

After celebratory photos with friends and family following victories, many of the Broncho players make sure to run up to their head coach before heading off the field. Every one has a smile on his face.

There's an underlying appreciation.

"He's made a huge difference. We all buy into the culture," senior running back Latrell Brown said. "He tells us to come out and get better every day. Improve the little things. We do everything for him."

If it was just football, that'd be enough for some.

If Shanley's coaching crew, most of them teachers at either Jeff or neighboring Tecumseh Junior High, are only molding football players, then Shanley believes they are failing regardless of the win-loss record.

There's a leadership academy where the coaches prioritize developing the student-athletes as young men. Goal No. 1, every kid is told, is to learn how to be a great father, husband and human being. "He really brings that leadership quality we all need," senior receiver Jay Segal said of Shanley. "He's there when he needs to be hard on us or when he needs to love you."

Part of the off-field character molding includes hearing it from other voices.

Each Thursday, Shanley brings in someone with football ties to the community to speak to his team. Purdue legend Leroy Keyes, Boilermaker quarterback David Blough, hall of fame sportswriter Jeff Washburn, former Central Catholic and Purdue standout Danny Anthrop and former Mr. Football Clayton Richard, a McCutcheon graduate now pitching for the San Diego Padres, are among the them.

Coaches can mentor, but role models of this prestige can really hammer a point home. And many times, the speakers left as impressed with Jeff's football program as the players were with the guy delivering a message.

"What coach Shanley is building over there, I was like, 'Wow, this is a fun cul-

ture to be a part of,'" Blough said. "I went to their game (against Harrison). They gave me a Jeff shirt and I was rooting those guys on as they ran off the field."

Building a winner

Shanley's one season as offensive coordinator resulted in Lafayette Jeff going 8-3 and racking up four games scoring 40 or more points. Jeff hadn't scored more than 40 points in a game more than once in a season since 2006.

Jeff advanced to the sectional championship in 2015, losing to Westfield 45-27. Now on the high of Jeff's first 9-0 regular season since 2003, it is again the Westfield Shamrocks in the way. They'll visit Scheumann Stadium Friday night trying to knock Jeff out of the postseason for a third straight year.

Jeff enters as a possible underdog despite its ranking and record.

Right now, though, the Lafayette Jeff Bronchos believe they can beat anyone because the man in charge believes his team can beat anyone.

"He holds us together and keeps everybody pushing," lineman Kelon Williams said. "He keeps raising the bar to get better every week. He gave us a real good work ethic."

Lafayette Jeff is set up for long term success.

New locker room and weight room facilities are on the way.

In regards to football, Jeff's system is implemented from top to bottom and it's been proven to work. The fifth- and sixth-grade, seventh grade, eighth grade, freshman, junior varsity and varsity teams have a combined four losses this season. The varsity, junior varsity and Sunnyside (fifth and sixth) teams are undefeated.

"I always just say that Pat gets it," Preston said. "He understands it's all the little things you do on a daily basis to allow you to accomplish your long-term goals."

You can win at Lafayette Jeff.

Right now, everyone is on board, including the leader.

"Our kids work hard and our seniors have done a great job," Shanley said. "There are kids like (senior defensive back) Avarey Walker who has a younger brother who is an eighth grader. They really take it to heart of leaving this place better."

"When you have seniors who are really taking everything personal about where our program is at and where the want it to be in the future, it's a lot of fun."

Contributing: Mike Carmin and Ken Thompson