

Jake Carried the Ball

When 17-year-old Jake Porter ran onto the football field, both teams cheered.

It was odd that they would. In three years on the Northwest High School squad in McDermott, Ohio, he had barely dirtied a game jersey.



The Northwest High fans had never seen Jake carry the ball or make a tackle. Nor had they seen him read a book or write much more than a sentence.

You see, kids with chromosomal fragile X syndrome, a common cause of mental retardation, seldom do.

But Jake loved sports. Each day after his special education classes, he dashed off to some practice: track, baseball, basketball. Never missed. Never played, either.

Until the Waverly game.

Dave Frantz, Jake's coach, made his decision before the kickoff. If a lopsided score rendered the final seconds superfluous, Jake would come in.

The lopsided part proved true. With five ticks remaining on the clock, his team was down 42-0. So the coach called a timeout.

He motioned to speak with the opposing coach, Derek Dewitt. As the Waverly coach heard the plan, he began shaking his head and waving his hands. He disagreed with something. A referee intervened, and play resumed.



The quarterback took the ball and handed it to Jake. Jake knew what to do: take a knee and let the clock expire. They'd practiced this play all week.

But, to his surprise, the players wouldn't let him. His teammates told him to run. So he did – in the wrong direction. The back judge stopped him and turned him around.

That's when the Waverly defense did its part. The visiting coach, as it turns out, wasn't objecting to the play. He was happy for Jake to carry the ball, but not for him just to run out the clock. He wanted Jake to score.

The Waverly players parted like the Red Sea for Moses, and shouted for Jake to run.

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And run he did. Grinning and dancing and jumping all the way to the end zone.

Both sidelines celebrated. Moms cried, cheerleaders whooped, and Jake smiled as if he'd won the lottery without buying a ticket.

We live in a sports-crazy world. Games are to be played, so it is heralded, to demonstrate sportsmanship, which is defined as “an aspiration that a sport or activity will be enjoyed for its own sake, with proper consideration for fairness, ethics, respect, and a sense of fellowship with one’s competitors.”

More and more, it seems, sportsmanship suffers in the high-dollar world of professional sports and the win-at-all-cost theme that echoes through other organized activities.

But for Jake Porter, this was a day of eternal remembrance – and not just for Jake but for everyone in attendance. It was sportsmanship at its finest.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16 NKJV).

– Beecher Hunter