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"Res Ipsa Loquitur"
Philadelphia's Family Newspaper

09/06/2007

Marple's Massaro Hopes To Put Past Behind Him

By: Brendan F. Quinn , The Bulletin

Pete Massaro sat on the plush outfield grass of Blair County Ballpark in Altoona. His knees were at his chest and his arms draped over his legs like a blanket off the side of a bed. Pandemonium filled the air around him.

Bruce Springsteen's "Glory Days" pumped through the stadium's speakers and the Punxsutawney High School baseball team partied away at home plate.

Massaro, Marple Newtown's right fielder, remained in a daze. Moments before, a pop fly was ticketed for him but tipped off the lip of his glove. An out would have sent the PIAA class AAA championship game to extra innings - instead, the ball landed behind Massaro and the Tigers could only watch as Punxsutawney ripped the state title from their grips.

"It was really tough afterwards," Massaro said Wednesday. "I didn't really talk to anyone for a good two hours after the game. Then I thought, 'What good was mopping around and whining about it going to do?' I can't change anything or bring anything back." That was a little over two and a half months ago. Through the summer, the 17-year-old had bigger and better things to occupy his mind.

Mainly, which major Division I football program would receive his services following his senior season.

Massaro, who is the anchor of the Marple Newtown football team as a 6-foot-4, 245-pound defensive end, delivered a verbal agreement to Joe Paterno and Penn State on Aug. 19, just weeks before the beginning of his senior year.

Now that he is over two major hurdles - recovering from the excruciating error and choosing a college destination - Massaro is ready to focus on the season ahead.

"I'm not looking for redemption," the Newtown Square native said. "I made a mistake, there is nothing I can do about it."

According to head football coach Ray Gionta, Massaro is the unquestioned leader of the Tigers. Not only is he the top pass rusher in the Philadelphia area, but he's also a vocal player who's a member of the National Honor Society.

Last season, which saw Massaro register 52 tackles and four sacks, set off a fury of activity. Such colleges as PSU, Georgia Tech, Boston College and Pittsburgh came flocking to Delaware County to get their hands on him.

"I thought (a major college scholarship) was possible after his sophomore year," said Gionta, who has watched Massaro since junior high days when he was a quarterback. "I talked to him about working year-round, but the message didn't sink in. He thought he was going to be a baseball player until last season."

Gionta says he's 100 percent confident in handing the keys to his team to Massaro, who also lines up as a starter at offensive tackle. Many of his teammates were on the field with him on that fateful day in Altoona. They stood by him, never turning their backs.

"My friends...my teammates, they all comforted me," Massaro said. "They made me feel like it was a forgivable mistake, even though I don't feel like that."

After the Tigers' second-place finish (8-3, 7-2) in the Central League last season, Massaro & Co. are ready to take a run at the title.

The second-team class AAA All-State selection is joined by key returning senior starters John Rutecki (FB/OLB), John Gallagher (RB), Steve Giordano (QB/DB), and Jay Trio (OT/DE).

While he is surrounded by talent, all eyes will be on set squarely on No. 59 at defensive end.

When asked what he was hoping to do this year, Masaro paused a moment, and it was clear that he doesn't care about stats.

He doesn't care about what colleges are watching.

He doesn't care about a dropped fly ball.

He cares about one thing and one thing only.

"I don't set personal goals," he said. "It's all about the team. I want to make it back to the playoffs first and take a shot at the Central League and the District 1 championship. That's all that matters."

If those goals are accomplished, Pete Massaro will head off to Happy Valley with a smile on his face.

Behind him, he'll leave an outstanding high school career to begin a promising future that lies ahead.

But then again, to the southwest of State College, sits Altoona.

And Massaro doesn't care.

"I always think about it from time to time," Massaro said, "but I don't really let it bother me anymore. It's in the past."

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