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## Act of kindness speaks volumes about football's spirit

By JAMES WALKER - Thursday quarterback

In an age when arrogance and "Sharpie" pens steal the national spotlight, it is often the smallest, most unnoticed acts of kindness that remind us that football is merely a game.

The story, which is destined to become legendary in Southern Ohio circles, starts in Waverly.

Northwest football coach Dave Frantz and Tigers' coach Derek DeWitt shared a conversation the week leading up to the game.

But the two coaches weren't discussing strategy, instead they were talking about a mentally-handicapped Northwest player by the name of Jake Porter.

Porter, a senior, has a disorder called "Chromosomal Fragile-X," which is the most common cause of inherited mental retardation.

Porter still shows up on time for practice every day and dresses in full gear during games, but he has yet to take an official snap in a football game.

Frantz wanted that streak to end last Friday.

"I told them (Waverly) ahead of time that he can't take a hit or anything," Frantz said. "If the game's not at stake on the last play, I wanted him to come in and take a knee."

Yet a week after their conversation, with Waverly leading 42-0 with five seconds remaining, coach DeWitt offered Frantz one better.

"During the timeout, he met me in the middle of the field and said 'We'll let him score,'" Frantz explained. "(Initially) I said 'Nah.' Then we talked about it with the referees, and they said 'Hey coach, we understand.'"

What soon followed will forever go down in Southern Ohio football lore.

At Waverly's 49-yard line, Porter entered the game at tailback, had his play, "84-iso," called in the huddle, and when the ball was snapped all 21 players parted ways.

Porter was somewhat surprised when he slowly walked through the huge hole. He initially turned back around to the original line of scrimmage, but everyone on the



(over)

field – including defensive players from Waverly – pointed and guided Porter toward the Tigers' end zone.

"When we practiced it, he was supposed to down it, so I think he was a little confused at first," Northwest tailback Zach Smith said. "But once he figured it out, he took off."

The 49-yard trek to glory took about 10-12 seconds in all, and was culminated by players from both sidelines cheering and running step-for-step with Porter to the end zone.

Tears flowed from the bleachers well into the night, and the life of one young man was changed forever.

"At Waverly, we didn't do anything special. We were just happy to be a part of that," a humbled DeWitt said. "That young man was just excited to get the ball. Our guys didn't care about the shutout, those stats went out the window."

"When you're involved in a moment like that, you want to make sure you end the game with class, decency and respect."

Those who play football on the highest levels should take notice.

No pen that Terrell Owens ever pulls out of his sock could write a scene more touching than this.

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