

Del Norte alum watches great-grandson play 70 years after his own record-setting days

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There was an unheralded football fan in the stands Friday night watching Del Norte High School's opening-round playoff win against Alhambra.

Seventy years ago, Bill Loftin, 88, was a starter for the Warriors down on that very same field. Only in those days, he played with Mike Whalen ... for whom the field was named.

Friday, he traveled to Crescent City from Medford to watch his great-grandson, RJ, play in his first playoff game. Loftin said he still gets on the internet to follow the team from afar.

He learned that the Warriors had suffered some injuries to starters and had promoted some players from the junior varsity squad - including freshman RJ.

"Once a Warrior, always a Warrior," Loftin said. In 1950, he was a member of Del Norte's championship baseball and basketball squads. He also excelled on the grid iron.

“I played wide receiver. I was a fast little rascal. I caught 12 passes in one game, which was a record I kept for 19 years until my son, Bill, was at quarterback and threw 13 to Donnie Olson and broke my record.”

In truth, he said, his record had a little more significance. “Those days, we played both ways. I also played defensive end. We only had 50 kids in the class. And that’s counting the girls, too.”

The athletic gene runs through the generations of Loftins. His daughter, Karen, he nicknamed Charlie Brown. “She acted more like boy than daughter, so we named her Charlie Brown. She went on to compete in the Junior Olympics in the high hurdles and high jump,” Loftin said.

Grandson Kyle Loftin played professional baseball in Grants Pass. RJ’s dad, Reggie Loftin, got a scholarship to play football at Chico State before he decided to join the U.S. Air Force.

And each of them had a competitive streak. “I had two boys, Bill and Mike, playin’ Little League baseball on opposition teams. God help us with the guy who lost. Oh, my lord.

“They were only a year apart in age. Did kinda tough it out in our back yard. It was good competition. They didn’t like to lose,” he said.

Meantime, he likes what he sees in the 2019 Warriors’ squad. “I think they’re going to win. They’re an awfully good team. I watched them versus Burns.

“It surprised me, the size of kids and how fast they are. I’m telling ya, I’m not sure I would have been tough enough. The only thing I had, I was really fast and could catch the ball,” Loftin said.

Loftin said he heard RJ had been playing on kickoffs and punts and had a 30-yard touchdown against Eureka. “Yeah, he’s really good - 165 pounds, for a freshman. He’s not very tall, but he’s faster than hell,” Loftin said.

Last Friday, RJ was tapped to play outside back on defense. Bill said he could tell RJ wasn’t sure where to be on every play.

Then Bill noticed things went south for RJ in the second half. “He got thumped pretty good after making a tackle,” Bill said. “He came out shaking his head, looking down, and didn’t play again after that.”

That said, “He’s gonna be a good little ballplayer. He’s not afraid to stick his nose in there. I’m not sure if that’s a fault. He takes the hard blows. His dad was that way, too.”