

Brookfield grad recalls tradition



Julie Williams

I am not a football fan, and that makes me an anomaly in Brookfield, Mo.

The majority of the people in Brookfield, my hometown, live for Friday night football, and we're kind of a big deal in northern Missouri because our team has won the district and conference championships for six years in a row. However, those aren't the most important statistics.

What you really need to know about Brookfield is it's the home of the bell, and it has been for the last seven years. Friday night's victory over rival Marcelline High gave the Brookfield Bulldogs the most Bell Game wins in the history of the 86-game series. Their seventh year with the bell also marks the longest winning streak of either team.

I was around for five of those wins and witnessed plenty more Bell Games before that. I grew up with the tradition, and just because I'm not passionate about the sport doesn't mean I don't get a spinal rush at the words "Bell Game" and all that they imply.

I've been in the stands, I've rung the famous bell with my own hands (more like the thing rung me), and I've seen how crazy the whole town gets when it's Bell Game time. I tried explaining what it's like to some guys in the Index office last week, and I feel like I just can't do it justice. But I'll try again.

My memories of the Bell Game go back to kindergarten. I remember attending the school-wide pep assembly (which generally fills to standing room only) and watching these monstrous high school boys run into the gym and bounce off each other's chests — their faces painted beyond recognition. I remember attending games when I was in middle school, and being thrilled to stand right behind the "Blue Crew" — a pack of students who dressed in crazy outfits and shouted whatever insults they could get away with at the opposing team.

The Bell Game really started to mean something in high school because I got to experience everything — all the things that make it so much more than a game. For instance, during every break between classes for the entire week, the counseling center secretary leaves her boombox out from behind the counter and turns on "Eye of the Tiger."

The football players — kids that I've known since we were five and suddenly don't seem so much monsters as just normal boys who I sit next to in class and play dodgeball with in P.E. — clog the hallways and think of ways to smash Marcelline (at least that's what I imagine they're thinking).

The best part about the Bell Game is it's not just about the football team, it's for the rest of us, too. I graduated with a guy named Martin Curley, who assumed the critical role of Blue Crew leader our senior year, and who might be one of the most diehard fans of Brookfield football that I know.

Every Friday he walked the halls in a different costume, which always included a bright blue afro wig that added at least six inches to his roughly 6-foot-4-inch frame and a streaming blue cape displaying a giant "B." Coconut bras, hula skirts, blue striped tube socks, professional wrestling belts and wild pajama pants usually were part of the mix as well. For the Bell Game his senior year, however, Martin ditched the majority of these in favor of full body paint (blue, of course) from the waist up.

Despite a steady downpour, Martin showed up to watch the game the night of our senior year with more than 3,000 other fans. Why so many? Because that was the year that the Bell Game almost didn't happen.

The state reclassifies schools every two years based on their enrollment, and increases or decreases could result in schedule changes. In 2004, Marcelline dropped to 1A while Brookfield remained a 2A school. Suddenly our schedule was full with conference and district games, and there was no room for the traditional show-down with Marcelline.

Our two communities — normally such intense rivals — joined forces, wrote letters and attended meetings until we finally convinced the powers that be to give us back our beloved Bell Game. As a result, the whole thing became larger than life that year. If there were an Oscar category for high school assemblies, we would have won hands down.

I am pretty confident that at this point, Brookfield and Marcelline never will allow the game to die, and its fame will continue to grow. When all is said and done, the Bell Game is just one of those little quirks that only small towns have. And even though most of the time I can't tell offense from defense, I can confidently say that most people will never know Friday night football the way I do.



Chris Tharp/Index

Brookfield High School Bulldogs senior Luke Lambert hurdles over several members of the Marcelline High School Tigers during Friday's Bell Game.

RIVALRY CONTINUES

Two high schools battle for historic bell, pride

Tyler Madsen
Staff Reporter

MARCELLINE, Mo. — Marcelline High School senior Kaleb Lake did it all. He ran, caught, threw and punted the football for the Tigers on Friday night.

But following his team's 28-0 loss to archrival Brookfield High School in the annual "Bell Game," Kaleb Lake displayed a different side. He cried.

"This was the last chance for the other seniors and me to win the bell," Kaleb Lake said through tears after the game. "We all wanted it so much, but we just didn't come through."

The entire Tiger offense struggled to break the line of scrimmage all night. Unable to find a seam on offense, they did not record a first down in the lopsided contest. Subsequently, Kaleb Lake put up numbers he'd love to quickly forget.

"He carried the ball eight times for a total loss of one yard, caught two passes for total loss of 14 yards, and failed to complete a pass.

"You've got to give him a lot of credit for the effort he gave out there tonight," Marcelline head coach Deacon Windsor said. "He was being shadowed by a Div. I athlete [Brookfield's Luke Lambert] all night, and [Lambert] just never let him get into any sort of groove."

In the final minutes of the contest it was easy to see the pain on the faces of fans, who spent the afternoon telling stories lauding Kaleb Lake's character. Fans were pained not only by the impending

loss, but for the Marcelline seniors who have never experienced winning the bell.

"[Kaleb] has been playing football since second grade, and I know this is something all the kids around here look forward to," Carrie Lake, Kaleb Lake's mother, said before the contest.

Kaleb Lake played on both sides of the football for every possession of the game except the last, and punted on special teams. His punting was phenomenal all night, registering 46.3 yards per punt for his final six boots.

That mark included an unofficial school record 68-yard punt, which pinned Brookfield deep in their own territory late in the first half.

Marcelline resident Jack White, a member of the school's football team from 1950-54, has followed Kaleb Lake's athletic career for all four years and said he sees a bright future for the young man.

"He's got a great head on his shoulders, and I've never seen him want to come out of the game," White said. "When he gets going, he's really tough to bring down. Overall, he's just a great all-around athlete."

Kaleb Lake is hoping to continue his athletics career in college next year. However, the choice of sport might surprise some people.

"As much as he loves football, he's really developed his golf game," Carrie Lake said. "... He's looking at heading to Maryville or St. Joseph for college, it will depend a lot on how both of those sports this year go for him."

Lambert dominates

Brookfield senior Luke Lambert scores two TDs and rushes for 191 yards

Joe Barker
Assistant Sports Editor

MARCELLINE, Mo. — Luke Lambert looked tired.

The senior running back/middle linebacker for Brookfield High School's football team had just finished playing nearly every down in helping the Bulldogs knock off rival Marcelline High School 28-0 at the 2006 Bell Game.

His face covered in beads of sweat and breathing with a slight effort, Lambert smiled.

"All four years," he said referencing Brookfield's fourth straight win in the annual Bell Game. "Not a lot of people can say that. It's awesome."

Lambert was the catalyst for the Bulldogs all night on both sides of the ball. He starred at the running back position and at middle linebacker in helping his squad capture the bell for the seventh straight season.

"Count his carries, count his yards, count his tackles, count his sacks — that shows you how important he is to this team," Brookfield head coach Shane Cavanah said.

Before the game, three fans sat in the parking lot of Chester Ray Stadium decked out in Brookfield blue and white.

During breaks in their playing a football game on a Playstation 2, the trio spoke about the impending game. They agreed that having Lambert on the field improved their team's chances of winning the coveted bell.

"We are really confident with him playing," Wesley Hinkle said. "We would be confident if he weren't playing, but not as much."

From the very first play from scrimmage, Lambert showed why Hinkle and

his friends were confident.

The 6-foot-2-inch senior used his unique combination of speed and strength, carrying for 19 yards and getting the ball across midfield.

Lambert then found the endzone on the first play on the second quarter. Lambert took the handoff straight up the middle for a 16-yard score, breaking the 0-0 tie.

"That was the big play," he said. "That will be something I will remember for a long time. It felt good to get the early lead."

But Lambert — in his first season as a running back — wasn't done. All told he carried the ball for 191 yards — including a 61-yard touchdown run, that put his team up 14-0.

All of his offensive exploits almost overshadowed his defense. Almost.

As a middle linebacker, Lambert assisted on many tackles, rushed the quarterback and helped shut down the Marcelline offense — an offense that didn't get a first down all game.

"I love playing defense," Lambert said. "The intensity out there is awesome.

And, like they say, defense wins games."

After this season, Lambert's defense will help win games for Div. I University of Missouri-Columbia.

He already has committed to the program for the 2007 and is head coach Gary Pinkel's first recruit for the '07 campaign.

"He basically sold himself to Mizzou by attending prospect camps there for the last three years," Brookfield head coach Shane Cavanah said.

While his on-the-field talents garner most of the attention, Lambert draws off the field praise, too. Lambert is well liked among his teammates, fellow students, coaches and even his principal.

"He's a really great kid," Brookfield principal Bob Brinkley said. "He's a great student in the classroom and a good model for the rest of the school. The worst part about him is that he is a senior."

"That will be something I will remember for a long time."

Luke Lambert
Brookfield High School Senior

Bell Game thrives despite talent gap

Conor Nicholl
Sports Editor

MARCELLINE, Mo. — Shane Cavanah drank in the scene at the middle of Chester Ray Stadium. Wearing a huge smile, Brookfield High School's head football coach watched his team celebrate after winning the Bell Game Friday night.

As Cavanah answered questions about the team's victory, Brookfield players took turns ringing the gold bell that goes to the winner of the annual rivalry between the Brookfield Bulldogs and Marcelline Tigers. Citizens and players rang the bell over and over, creating a sound that echoed throughout the stadium and nearby homes.

Cavanah — his voice barely audible over the players' cheering and the bell's clanging — also expressed excitement. Winning the historic game never gets old.

"I lived here, I coached here, and I played here," he said. "All of those things make it sweet for me. Our kids worked hard to get here, and I am glad to see them get it."

Brookfield, breaking a 41-41-2 overall tie, won the game with relative ease. The 28-0 victory was the biggest blowout in the rivalry since 1997 and marked the first time a team has won the Bell Game seven straight seasons.

Helped by prolific line play, the Bulldogs didn't allow Marcelline to register a first down the entire game. Overall, the Tigers gained just two yards of total offense. It appears that Brookfield — about twice the size of Marcelline, a town of 2,235 people — has taken a stronghold on the series.

Still, the talent gap hasn't dampened the fans', players', coaches' or administration's enthusiasm.

"These kids who have never won a Bell Game still feel they have a chance to win," Marcelline fan Stephanie Chrisman said. "If they never thought they had a chance, they should have forgotten about the rivalry long ago."

No one has come remotely close to forgetting the game.

"It just means so much. It means more than anything," Brad Gardner said. "This rivalry has definitely went up since I was little."

Davey Darr, Marcelline's equipment manager, said the towns have embraced the rivalry after it nearly ended when Brookfield moved to Class 2 and Marcelline to

Class 1. The game almost wasn't played, but both teams petitioned the state and the rivalry continued.

"In [past] years, you will see half the people that you see now," Darr said. "Now, it has grown. The state wanted to take the game away from us, but two towns came together ... so it plays a big role in everybody's heart."

And the towns delivered in full force. "Everyone looks forward to the game," Marcelline sixth-grade teacher Lisa Hilsabeck said. "It's a big event every year. My sixth-graders look up to the players."

Homes and establishments were decorated in both towns, reading "Blue Pride" for Brookfield, and "Bring Our Bell Home" for Marcelline. On the nine-mile drive between the two towns, each of the players', coaches' and team managers' number or name were written on a miniature paper bell and stuck in the ground.

Brookfield's players' lockers were covered with motivational decorations, including lines reading: "Football is an incredible game. Sometimes it's so incredible, it's unbelievable. Sometimes it's so unbelievable that we call it the Bell Game."

Even with changes to the two towns, the rivalry still remains strong.

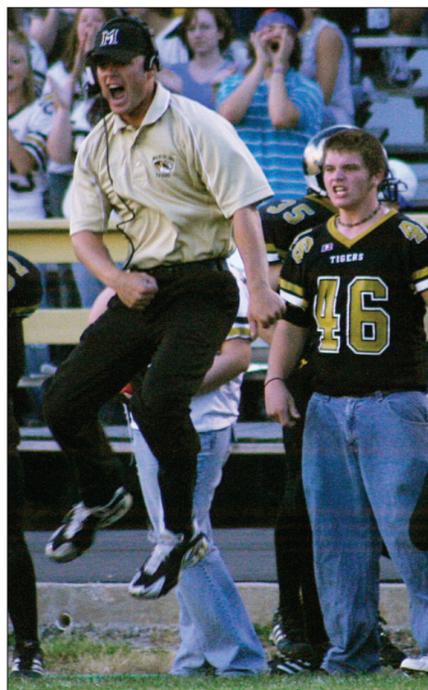
"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," former player Matt Lutkin said at Brookfield pep rally. "You will never get another chance."

Only one team, though, took advantage of the opportunity. Brookfield — benefiting from 17 players who weigh more than 200 pounds and an experienced offensive line — went up 7-0 at the half. Marcelline, with only seven players over 200, had little offense. The Bulldogs, led by Mizzou signee Luke Lambert, went up 14-0 in the third quarter and cruised the rest of the way.

"We probably had more talent than they did, but they came out scrapping," Cavanah said. "We got the best they had to offer early. It was anybody's game until we got up 14-0."

Afterward, several of Marcelline's players, including the highly touted Kaleb Lake, were in tears after losing another shot at ringing the bell. Marcelline head coach Deacon Windsor knows of the talent gap, but is aware of the game's importance to his players.

"It's obviously a great rival game, and they kicked our butt tonight, there is no doubt about that. ... We'll take the bell back one of these years," he said.



Chris Tharp/Index

A Marcelline coach shows his excitement during the 85th Bell Game on Friday night at Marcelline High.

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