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QB quandary

By Dan Friedell / Special to The Citizen

Every coach knows that injuries are a part of football. They're just a part of the game that coaches don't like to think about, especially when the injury involves a high school offense's most important player, the quarterback.

Three local schools - Auburn, Moravia and Weedsport #- have had to deal with injured starting quarterbacks this season, and the injuries have affected each program differently.

Moravia's playoff hopes were snuffed out when Greg Langtry went down for the season, Weedsport saw a 15-game winning streak end when Mike Coolbaugh sat out his first game in three seasons and Auburn was forced to move its best wide receiver behind center when Darnell Murphy suffered a high ankle sprain.

Two weeks ago, Moravia was 4-0 and hoping for both a league title and a playoff appearance.

Today, the Blue Devils are 4-2 after Langtry tore his ACL in a 12-9 loss to Newfield, which was followed by a 20-14 loss to Candor.

"We're out of it in the division, officially eliminated," Moravia coach John Crossgrove said. "So now we're just playing for pride."

Langtry's injury turned out to be one from which the Blue Devils - who lost two other starters during the early part of the season - couldn't recover, while Weedsport managed to tread water while Coolbaugh recovered from his week two knee injury.

Coolbaugh missed all of one game, a 20-0 loss to Watertown IHC, and parts of two others, and the Warriors went 2-1 in that stretch. After big wins against Alexandria Bay and Beaver River in the last two weeks, the 5-1 Warriors have a good chance of making the playoffs

"Any time you take him out, the team might have a little lull," Weedsport coach Jason Trousdale said. "But I've noticed that as soon as he came back, the team got its swagger back."

While Auburn may not have been a legitimate playoff contender this year, the Maroons were certainly hoping to have more than two wins at this point of the season.

Murphy, a junior in his first varsity season, hurt his ankle in week three against Baldwinsville and missed the next two games. Interestingly, the Maroons won both games that Murphy missed before losing to CBA last Friday.

That's because Auburn had Dan Zambito, a four-year varsity player, ready to fill in at quarterback.

"Our situation was very unique in having Danny there, because he did extremely well stepping in," Auburn coach Dave Moskov said. "And that's very rare for most high schools to do that at the quarterback position."

All three coaches agreed that even if there is a solid backup available to take over, there's still going to be a problem somewhere else on the field.

"It's a trickle-down-effect," Moskov said. "We also lost probably one of our best defensive players, because Dan's the starting safety and you want to get him off the field. You plug one hole, but you may get two or three other holes that are created."

One positive to come from Murphy's injury was that Moskov promoted defensive back Mike Fandrich from the junior varsity squad to fill

in for both Zambito and Murphy on defense. Fandrich then proved that he could play on the varsity level as a 10th grader.

"He's the starting quarterback on the J.V. team, so the trickle down continues and we stretch the J.V. team thin," Moskov said. "Fortunately we found out that Mike's an outstanding ballplayer now instead of next year."

Trousdale said experiencing eight quarters without his top quarterback has turned Coolbaugh, also a starting safety, into a one-way player.

"Once he got hurt, I've been kind of tentative about playing him on defense," Trousdale said. "He's very valuable on defense, but he's more valuable to us on offense."

In Moravia, Crossgrove said that with the Blue Devils previous injuries, the holes became unpluggable.

"We've had so many injuries this year that in some ways it was like starting all over again, because what worked for us doesn't work now," he said.

While each team has been impacted differently by this season's injuries, the phenomenon of losing quarterbacks reinforces one point that all coaches must remember.

"Frankly, it's the responsibility of coaches to try to get as many kids ready to play the game, because you're gonna have to call on them at some point" Moskov said.

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