

## Hearing-impaired football player elevates team

BREWER, Maine - The sounds of a football game are vivid - quarterbacks barking out signals, pads hitting pads, the referee's whistle and the roar of the crowd. But for Brewer High School senior Billy Bissell, they are largely the sounds of silence.

Bissell was born with a hearing impairment, and initially it was thought that even hearing aids wouldn't help. That proved not to be the case, and Bissell has successfully made his way through school with assistance of sign language, interpreters, speech therapy, auditory trainers and hearing aids. Sports also have been a major part of his life, as the son of Bill and Lynn Bissell he has emerged as one of Eastern Maine's better all-around athletes.

He's a strong-armed outfielder who has competed in the Senior League World Series and last spring helped Brewer win the Eastern Maine Class A championship. He also is a quick-jumping forward on the Witches basketball team. But football has proved more challenging.

Bissell had played the sports since his elementary school years, and while hearing aids helped, excessive sweat from wearing them beneath his football helmet or damage from the contact inherent in the sport jeopardized their effectiveness from game to game and practice to practice. As a sophomore at Brewer, that concern became too troublesome. His hearing aids routinely stopped working during games, and Bissell would try to blow the moisture out of them, but to no avail.

Without them, he sometimes was lost amid a game he knew well. It became so frustrating, that he chose not to play football last fall. Bissell continued to play basketball and baseball. Hearing aids would withstand the demands of those sports. Bissell wasn't sure if he would play football again, but after meeting with head coach Don Farnham and assistant coach Dana Corey this summer, he decided to return to the team and deal with the issue by eliminating hearing aids from the equation.

One adjustment that has helped Bissell cope with the silence is that he wears two special armbands when he is playing - one with numbered offensive plays on it, the other bearing numbered defensive plays. Classmate Coby Hutchins, the Witches' quarterback, relays Bissell each play by hand, and if Bissell is required to go in motion before the play starts, Hutchins gestures while awaiting the center snap to let Bissell know when to begin moving down the line of scrimmage.

"My teammates have been great," said Bissell. "If I miss something, they'll try to give me a sign and I'll finally get it, or I'll try to read their lips." And that's one area where Bissell's fellow Witches have been especially helpful, making sure he can read their lips through the bars on their helmets.

"I've found that having him on the team has made us better coaches," said Farnham, "because we have to make sure we communicate well and think out everything we can do to make sure that when Billy's on the field he's going to get the message either by armbands or hand signals." Vision has served Bissell well so far this season. Not only does he rank among the Pine Tree Conference Class A rushing leaders, he's perhaps proudest of the fact that he has yet to draw an offside penalty.

By Ernie Clark, Bangor Daily News, October 10, 2008

## Running into trouble

Twelve-year-old Jenny Campbell loves to run. From the moment she started running cross-country in Grade 4, she loved its inherent freedom and excelled at it to such an extent that she was ranked one of the top - if not the top - runner her age in Simcoe County. In the fall 2007, she decided to specialize in running. Unfortunately, following a mid-season race, she felt a twinge in her right knee. What was learned was that Jenny suffers from patellofemoral syndrome (PFS), a condition that is becoming increasingly common in young athletes. "There's a higher incident of injuries in those (younger) athletes," said Justine Beattie, the general manager of Mind to Muscle who has 12 years of athletic therapy experience. "Athletes are playing more sports and doing so much more." PFS occurs more commonly in girls, due to wider hips and narrower knees, and is a result of mal-tracking of the kneecap. For athletes in the 10-14 age group, it is nearly always a result of overuse. According to a clinical report by Joel S. Brenner and the Council of Sports Medicine and Fitness in the Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, up to 50 percent of all injuries seen in pediatric sports medicine are related to overuse, the risks of which are more serious in the pediatric/adolescent athletes since growing bones cannot handle as much stress as the mature bones of adults. What young athletes like Campbell are beginning to learn is that despite their desire to compete and train at intense levels, the body needs time to develop. Sporting activities should be limited to one activity to a maximum of five days a week, with at least one day off from any organized physical activity. As well, Brenner recommends athletes have at least two to three months off per year from their particular sport during which they can let injuries heal and refresh the mind. - *Barrie Advance.com, October 3, 2008*

## Schools require completion of sportsmanship initiative

In conjunction with the Alabama High School Athletic Association (AHSAA), Madison City Schools have added the STAR Sportsmanship Initiative to student-athlete requirements. Students in grades 7-12 must complete the online interactive program to be eligible to participate in athletics. The program is designed to promote higher awareness of the importance of sportsmanship and aims to significantly reduce the number of ejections at sporting events. "Sportsmanship has gotten worse in the 23 years I've been coaching," said Kent Chambers, longtime coach and current athletic director at Bob Jones High School. "Bad sportsmanship hasn't gotten out of hand, but it is more prevalent now." All students participating in athletics, including cheerleading, must complete the course once during their high school careers. "This is a very important step in the right direction," said Steve Savarese, executive director of the AHSAA. Madison schools have implemented the STAR Sportsmanship Initiative as a requirement for their coaches this school year although the AHSAA is not requiring the initiative to be completed by coaches until the 2009-2010 school year. Chambers said he's proud of Madison for requiring coaches to be leaders, not just on the playing fields, but in the community. "Each head coach has been encouraged to ask the parents of their athletes to take the online program as well," Chambers said. "I personally, would like to see the program be an annual requirement." The STAR Sportsmanship Initiative also has a specially designed coach and parent component. - *By Bob Labbe, The Huntsville Times, October 8, 2008*

## Report: Urban girls shortchanged in sports

NEW YORK (AP) - Girls who live in urban areas start sports at a later age and have lower rates of participation than urban boys and suburban girls, according to a report released by the Women's Sports Foundation. The report "Go Out and Play: Youth Sports in America" by professor Don Sabo at D'Youville College in Buffalo, N.Y., also looked at sports participation among disabled and immigrant youth. Girls in urban areas with a family income of \$35,000 or less enter sports on average at 10.2 years old compared to 7.6 for boys, according to a 2007 Harris Interactive survey of 2,185 youth in the third grades and 863 parents. Physical activity among urban girls lags well behind their male counterparts. In urban areas, 59 percent of third to fifth grade girls were involved in at least one sport, compared to 80 percent of urban boys. That compared to 81 percent participation for suburban girls and 89 percent for suburban boys. "A level playing field exists for suburban boys and girls," Sabo said. "However, urban communities are often faced with a lack of space and resources. When funds for sports are found, boys seem to come first." Girls' athletic participation has increased since Title IX was passed in 1972, but a gender gap remains in many communities. The report indicates much of the disparity is rooted in economic inequalities, which affect the ability of families, schools and communities to provide equal opportunity. Some 7.3 million youth participated in high school sports in 2006-2007, according to the National Federation of State High School Associations. The number of girls exceeded 3 million for the first time. Many suburban girls' interest in sports and opportunities to play were on par with boys. The greater parity in suburban communities shows that the gap can be closed, Sabo said. "There's a surge in urban girls participation during middle school years," Sabo said. "By middle school, it's more school-based, and they're interested in trying new things and making friends." But the steepest sports dropout rate for urban girls is also during middle school. Policy recommendations included getting girls involved earlier in sports activities, advocating physical education as mandatory, enforcing Title IX regulations and reaching beyond traditional sports offerings for girls. - *By Melissa Murphy, The Associated Press, October 9, 2008*

## Kids + Sports = Better Health

Kids who play sports and do other physical activities report all kinds of health benefits, feeling better about themselves mentally and physically, a comprehensive new study shows. The Women's Sports Foundation partnered with Harris Interactive to survey 2,185 children in grades 3 through 12 and 863 parents about the kids' participation in organized sports and other activities such as playing frisbee and going camping and hiking. More kids who are active in sports regarded their own health as excellent than non-playing kids did and had greater "body esteem" than the kids who didn't take part. Moreover, kids who played sports were less likely to be overweight than those who didn't. Interestingly, the survey didn't turn up meaningful distinctions between active kids and others when it came to television viewing and fast food consumption. *By Jennifer Huget, Washington Post, October 13, 2008*

## Sportsmanship at its best

On the field, there is little love lost between the Kaufman Lions and the Wills Point Tigers. When a 13-year-old Wills Point football player collapsed during a September practice session, Kaufman junior high students proved that rivalries halt when the whistle blows, but compassion is always in the heart of a champion. Jason Neil Pool, 13, a Wills Point eighth-grader, was involved in a drill when he collapsed during a Sept. 15 practice session. Upon hearing of the teen's condition, Norman Junior High School students began raising funds to aid his family. "Coach [Todd] Gent saw an article on Jason Pool and the junior high coaches decided we would suggest to the parents and student body we would try to do something to help out the family," said Charlie White, a Norman Junior High teacher and Kaufman High School boy's basketball coach. "We started bouncing around ideas and others got involved and soon everyone embraced the cause." White said many Norman Junior High organizations were involved including the cheerleaders and their sponsors Charlotte Rhodes and Warren Morrow, the Kaufman Athletic Booster Club, Norman Junior High administrators, faculty and students as well as the football players and their parents. "Buckets were passed around at pep rallies, during games and in the classrooms, White said. "All together, we raised just over \$1,062." According to White, the Norman Junior High players related to Pool so much they wanted to honor him by wearing the No. 54 on their helmets through the remainder of the season. "It was an honor to wear No. 54 and hopefully in some way, Jason will gain strength by it in his recovery," said Norman Junior High player Estevan Esquivel. - *By Michael Gresham, The Kaufman Herald, October 15, 2008*

## The ugly side of youth football

The Fort Worth Falcons Youth Sports Organization was kicked out of an area youth sports league Monday because of three incidents of parents fighting at games. A few days later, a Haltom City youth football coach and two other people were banned for the season when a brawl erupted after an Oct. 11 game. These are not isolated cases, experts say. A nationwide survey this year of parents and youth sports indicated that almost 80 percent of them had witnessed coaches arguing with another coach, officials and parents. The focus on all-star teams, championships, standings and other trappings of sports are at least partly to blame, said Fred Engh, president of the National Alliance for Youth Sports and author of *Why Johnny Hates Sports*. The fallout in Haltom City and Fort Worth is far from over. Haltom City police have turned over their investigation to the municipal court for any criminal charges. Police were called to the Oct. 11 game after an 8-year-old boy was kicked in the groin by an opposing player during a game. The injured boy tried to kick the opposing player, was flagged for his actions and ejected from the game. He took a few steps and collapsed. Maria Hernandez, the injured boy's mother, said she heard an opposing coach, Randall Thompson say, "He got what he deserved." Maria Hernandez confronted Thompson. Each says the other threw the first blow. A melee erupted among several coaches and parents. Board members banned Thompson and Hernandez for the season. Falcons president Reggie Weatherd said that he may start his own youth football league based on what has happened to teams in his association. The four Fort Worth teams, whose players range in age from 4 to 12, were kicked out of the league because of fights involving parents Aug. 23 and 30 and Oct. 11. "I feel sad for what's happened," Weatherd said. "We don't condone fighting." - *By Domingo Ramirez Jr., Star Telegram, October 18, 2008*

## *Sports Done Right* Endorsement

The MCSC will be launching the *Sports Done Right* Endorsement Process next month. Receiving a *Sports Done Right* Endorsement from the MCSC Board of Directors is an acknowledgement of a school's efforts toward creating a healthy and positive sports experience for the student-athletes using the core principles and practices of *Sports Done Right*. The Endorsement recognition is less intensive when compared to the Accreditation process, and reflects the first level of implementation.

## Controversial fees

At dozens of metro Atlanta high schools, football programs are asking athletes to pay in order to play. The cost, ranging from \$20 to \$500 per player, may cover anything from coaching salary supplements to uniforms. It's a controversial, complicated - and potentially lucrative - issue for many schools. Mandating that students pay to play sports is not allowed in any school district in metro Atlanta. So football programs walk a fine line, saying the "registration fees" and "player dues" are really donations. In some cases, the money is collected through booster clubs. An Atlanta Journal-Constitution survey of 68 metro Atlanta high schools found that 38 schools ask their players for money. Stephenson, M.L. King and Lithonia ask the most, \$500 per player. Many schools do not initially tell parents that paying the fee is optional, and information on some team web sites and in documents parents are required to fill out seems to indicate the fees are mandatory. "You feel bad asking kids to pay, but we really don't have any other way," said Mount Zion-Jonesboro coach Jarrett Laws, who asks for \$150 per player. "If you want your kids to stand on an equal power with some of the programs we play, this is almost a requirement." Georgia High School Association executive director Ralph Swearngin worries that "subtle" forms of pay-to-play will discourage players whose families can't afford it. But he also acknowledges the increasing costs of funding school sports. Tax money can't be used to fund high school sports, so programs must rely on fund-raising and gate receipts. A Georgia Department of Education guideline states that school systems may charge fees for extracurricular activities, but not as a condition of participation. Although a DOE spokesman said it is unclear whether the guideline would apply to sports, Swearngin of the GHSA said he is not aware of any school system in Georgia that mandates a pay-to-play policy. - *By Todd Holcomb, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, October 26, 2008*

## 6 NM teens charged in school football camp hazing

LAS VEGAS, N.M. - Six youths were charged with conspiracy and other crimes stemming from a hazing case at a high school football camp. District Attorney Henry Valdez announced the Children's Court charges Wednesday and said he would decide within 10 days whether to seek adult sanctions against the youths. The charges stem from allegations of sexual assault on younger players by older players at the Robertson High School camp Aug. 11-14. One football player was expelled and five others were suspended from school for the rest of the year. Those six were never publicly identified and it was not clear if they were the same six youth charged Wednesday. Head football coach Ray Woods and six assistants resigned in September amid allegations that coaches had failed to adequately supervise the players or follow up on initial hazing allegations. The school district, in its own investigation of the hazing, criticized coaches for calling all the players together and questioning them in front of their peers once the staff became aware of the alleged cases. - *By The Associated Press, International Herald Tribune, October 30, 2008*

For more information about the *Sports Done Right* initiative visit  
[www.sportsdoneright.org](http://www.sportsdoneright.org) or call 1-866-767-8540

