

A boost from Belford

Lacey WR happy to be back after 2 years away

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Lacey's Branson Boos (6) celebrates with Bill Belford (3) after Belford scored a touchdown against Toms River North on Saturday. / DOUG HOOD/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Written by
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LACEY — The last two scholastic football seasons were not fun for Bill Belford.

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Belford, a senior wide receiver at Lacey, said he missed the 2010 season with a spleen injury. He said he could not play in 2011 because he was academically ineligible.

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“Watching the team from the stands was frustrating as anything because I wanted to be out there,” Belford said.

Belford is out on the field playing, and his presence and big play-making ability has been a major boost for a Lacey team that went 4-6 last season and struggled on offense.

He now has five touchdowns in the Lions first two games, including three on Saturday in Lacey’s 37-20 win over Toms River North in a Shore Conference Class A South game.

“It’s basically the best feeling in the world to come out and play again,” Belford said.

Belford scored on a 99-yard kickoff return, a 62-yard pass from junior wide receiver Christian Tutela on a reverse pass and on a 7-yard pass from junior quarterback Tom Kelly that gave Lacey (2-0, 1-0) the lead for good at 21-14 with 1:24 left in the first half.

“Finally, he has the opportunity to play and prove himself as a football player,” said Lacey coach Lou Vircillo, who collected career win No. 250 during his 37-season head coaching career. “He decided to make a commitment and he got himself squared away. I feel very good for him.”

Belford’s kickoff return came 18 seconds after Toms River North (1-1, 0-1), had grabbed a 7-0 lead on 2-yard TD run by sophomore quarterback Carmen Sclafani.

Belford appeared close to being in the end zone when he fielded Chris Gulla’s kickoff and then sprinted away from all pursuers.

“Everybody set up their blocks perfectly,” Belford said. “It was a left return. I faked it to the right. All their momentum was shifted to the right. I cut it back to the left and there was an open hole.”

“He is truly an exceptional athlete,” Vircillo said. “We just faced very exceptional athletes, I thought. When I watched North against Howell, I thought how are we going to beat this team? Then, I watched Belford run against them, and I thought, ‘Holy Mackerel. He’s better than they are.’ ”

The second TD came after the second of Sclafani’s three TDs — a 37-yard run on a fourth-and-2 had given Toms River North a 14-7 lead.

Tutela took a handoff, started on the “Jet Sweep” action, then stopped and lofted pass down the right sideline to a wide-open Belford.

Belford’s third TD capped an 83-yard, nine-play drive that was keyed by a 50-yard run by senior running back Kyle Spatz.

The Lions then capitalized on Toms River North mistakes in the second half. A fumble led to a 28-yard field goal by Liem Dolly with 5:39 left in the third quarter.

Less than two minutes later, Chris Jensen intercepted an attempted desperation pitchout by Sclafani and raced 30 yards for a TD. Spatz returned an interception 97 yards for the final TD with 15.4 seconds left.

Toms River North’s offensive line suffered a major blow in the first quarter when starting center Nicholas Silva suffered a broken leg while playing on special teams.

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