

Football – Milestone Marker: Lacey 37, TR North 20

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LACEY - To reach a milestone like Lacey head coach Lou Vircillo attained on Saturday afternoon, a coach not only needs success and longevity, but also the ability to adapt.

Vircillo joined Brick legend Warren Wolf and late Manasquan luminary Vic Kubu as the only coaches in Shore Conference history to reach 250 career victories when the Lions, ranked No. 5 in the All Shore Media Top 10, beat No. 10 Toms River North 37-20 in a Class A South game. While Lacey's defense scored two touchdowns, the Lions (2-0, 1-0) also showcased a much more productive offense than the unit that averaged 14.4 points per game in a 4-6 season in 2011. A big reason for the leap forward is the new faces in the lineup and on the sideline, who helped bring Vircillo's career record to 250-112-3 and put him in a select group on Saturday.

"I'm going to be very honest about you, I forgot all about it," Vircillo said about the milestone. "I didn't even know until the kids said it to me at the end of the game. I don't really think about those numbers. It's just nice to be a part of the tradition of hard-working guys that loved the game and endured."



Senior Bill Belford continued his sensational start in his one and only varsity season with three touchdowns in Lacey's 37-20 win over Toms River North. (Photo credit: Bill Normile).

like, how do you blend it?"

The straw stirring that blend has been speedy senior wideout Bill Belford, who has scored a combined five touchdowns in his first two varsity games after finding the end zone three times in the first half on Saturday. Belford missed his sophomore season because of a torn spleen suffered in practice, and missed last year because of academic ineligibility, so he is making up for lost time.

"It's been the greatest experience of my life," Belford said.

The first fireworks from Belford came after Toms River North took the opening kickoff and drove 55 yards in five plays to score on a 3-yard run by sophomore quarterback Carmen Sclafani, who ran for 138 yards and three touchdowns in the loss. Belford returned the ensuing kickoff 99 yards for a touchdown to tie the game at 7-7 with 9:18 left in the first quarter. He also had luck on his side as his back foot touched the end zone, which should've been a touchback, but the official missed it and the touchdown stood.

"I cut to the right just to fake them out and as soon as I cut to the left, it was completely open," Belford said. "I just took it right to the house full speed."

"Billy Belford obviously is a little bit of a secret weapon," Vircillo said. "We said in preseason that he was a legitimate guy."

Toms River North was then dealt a blow when starting center Nick Silva went down with a season-ending broken left leg and had to be removed by EMT workers. The Mariners initially shook it off to take the lead back when Sclafani ripped off a 37-yard touchdown run off an option fake on fourth-and-2 for a 14-7 advantage with 3:09 left in the first quarter. Lacey answered when junior wideout Christian Tutela took a handoff on a jet sweep and threw a pass to a wide-open Belford for a 62-yard touchdown that knotted the game at 14 with 7:49 left in the second quarter.

"We've been working on that in practice especially for this week," Belford said. "We ran a lot of jets at Pinelands (in the season opener), and we never did a pass off that, so we worked hard on getting that down. We knew it would fake them out the first time because they had never seen us do that, and I was completely wide open."

After the defense came up with a stop, the Lions mounted a nine-play



Lacey coach Lou Vircillo became just the third coach in Shore Conference history to reach 250 wins with the Lions' victory over Toms River North. (Photo credit: Bill Normile).

headed for the end zone," Jensen said.

The Mariners would not go away as Sclafani scored on a 5-yard run in the final seconds of the third quarter that cut the lead to 30-20 after a two-point conversion attempt failed. After forcing a punt, Toms River North drove to Lacey's 40-yard line, but Lions' defensive back Justin Longo intercepted a pass and returned it 50 yards to the Mariners' 20-yard line.

Toms River North came up with a stop on downs and had one last chance to make it interesting. The Mariners drove down to the Lacey 11-yard line in the final seconds, but Spatz stepped in front of a pass and took it 95 yards the other way for the icing on the cake with 15.4 seconds left in the game.

The victory not only added another line to Vircillo's impressive resume, it also stamped Lacey as a prime contender to Southern's supremacy in Class A South.

"Honestly, this was a playoff win right here," Jensen said.

For Vircillo, it was a chance to quickly savor a special moment in a career in which his teams have won four NJSIAA sectional titles and 12 division titles during his tenure at Lacey.

"If you don't have the fortune to have good kids and be surrounded by good coaches, you don't coach very long," Vircillo said. "If you're fortunate enough to be successful and crazy enough to stay in the game this long, you can reach things like this. God bless Warren Wolf. I don't know how the heck he did this into his 80s."

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Box score

Lacey 37, Toms River North 20

	L	T
First downs	9	17
Rushes-yards	29-108	30-195
Passing	10-17-0	14-29-2
Passing yards	176	127
Fumbles-lost	1-0	3-1
Penalties	7-70	3-30

TR North (1-1, 0-1) 14 0 6 0 - 20

Lacey (2-0, 1-0) 7 14 9 7 - 37

Scoring summary

T: Sclafani 3-yard run (Gulla kick).

L: Belford 99-yard kickoff return (Dolly kick).

T: Sclafani 37-yard run (Gulla kick).

L: Belford 62-yard pass from Tutela (Dolly kick).

L: Belford 7-yard pass from Kelly (Dolly kick).

After the defense came up with a stop, the Lions mounted a nine-play, 83-yard drive that ended when Kelly found a diving Belford for a 7-yard touchdown pass on third-and-goal with 1:24 left in the half. The key play on the drive was a 51-yard run by senior tailback Kyle Spatz, and the touchdown gave Lacey a 21-14 lead at the half.

"(Belford) is a rising star right now," said junior defensive back Chris Jensen. "He's unbelievable. I had never seen him play until this year, and he's a great athlete."

The Lions took the opening kickoff of the third quarter and drove down to the Mariners' 8-yard line, but Toms River North ended up blocking a field goal attempt by Liam Dolly to keep the lead at seven points. However, the Mariners then fumbled on their first play to give the ball right back to the Lions. Lacey converted it into a 28-yard field goal by Dolly to extend the lead to 24-14 with 5:39 left in the third quarter.

Toms River North was still in striking distance when Jensen made a game-changing play. Sclafani ran to his right on an option play and was in the grasp of linebackers Tyler Walsh and Casey Sirotniak when he tried to pitch the ball to teammate Joey Fields. Jensen read it perfectly and snatched the pitch out of mid-air, taking off the other way for a 30-yard touchdown and a 30-14 lead with 3:55 left in the third quarter.

"I just saw him coming with the option, broke on it, caught it and

L: Tutela 7-yard pass from Kelly (Kelly kick).

L: Dolly 28-yard field goal.

L: Jensen 30-yard fumble return (kick failed).

T: Sclafani 5-yard run (pass failed).

L: Spatz 95-yard INT return (Dolly kick).

Individual statistics

Rushing - L: Tutela 3-15, Spatz 14-76, Kelly 11-12, Sayre 1-5. T: Sclafani 21-138, LaMonica 1-4, Fields 4-34, Bass 2-8.

Passing - L: Kelly 9-15-0 114, Tutela 1-2-0 62. T: Sclafani 14-29-2 127.

Receiving - L: Tutela 4-28, Boos 2-63, Belford 3-76, Kurtz 1-9. T: Singleton 3-20, LaMonica 1-12, Fields 4-34, Carrington 6-56, Majewski 2-16.

Interceptions - L: Spatz 1-95, Longo 1-50.