

A Giant on the Field

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“He played like he was a giant,” said Steve Saban, Head Coach for the Hopi Bruins Varsity Football team, as he described Charles Youvella.



Charles Youvella passed away from a head injury sustained during a state final football game against Arizona Lutheran in Phoenix. Students at Hopi High paid tribute to the fallen athlete by posting memorials on his locker.

Youvella stood all of 5-foot-4-inches and weighed approximately 115 pounds but his stature didn't dictate the kind of muscle he displayed on the field. When called upon to guard someone who was 6-foot-7-inches and twice his weight, the mighty Senior raised his chin and said 'Bring it on.'

This past weekend the Hopi Bruins travelled down to Phoenix to play in the Division V state playoffs, their first game was against the top seeded Arizona Lutheran Coyotes. The Bruins had just completed an awesome season where they went 9-1, the best record in the school's history.

“It was just a beautiful season,” Coach Saban said. “We were celebrating it down there. The game was just a bonus for us.”

The 17-year old senior played “a little bit of everything” said Saban but mostly he was an offensive running back and a defensive back. When it came to playing against the Coyotes, it was Youvella who put the team's only touchdown on the scoreboard.

However, midway into the fourth quarter, Youvella caught a pass and was tackled pretty hard according to Coach Saban.

“We couldn't see it from our vantage point but the coaches from the other team said he was hit pretty hard. His head hit really hard.”

But the kind of player that Youvella was, he got right up and went back into the line for the next play. Two plays later, he was down on the field.

“He got up and tried to play another play but he couldn't stand up,” Coach Saban said. “He went down on the field and that's when I went out there.”

Youvella had suffered critical head trauma when he was tackled two plays prior. He was taken from the field and rushed to St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center. Reports say he was conscious when the paramedics took him off the field. However, by the time he arrived at St. Joseph's he was in critical condition, which is how he remained until Monday night.

Youvella, the giant who never backed down from a challenge, passed away on the night of Mon, Nov. 11, at St. Joseph's Hospital with his family surrounding him. The player who wore the number 22 and put the team's lone 6 points on the scoreboard in state playoffs would pass on from injuries sustained from playing the game he loved.

“You have to understand, Charles is by far, bar none, the toughest kid, pound-for-pound, that I ever coached,” Saban said. “It's just a tragedy. No words can be said. It feels like a bad dream. It's kind of surreal, from a high to an unbelievable low.”

Victory is not just a reflection of points on a scoreboard. It is also defined by the heart and soul that is put forth by the players. The 2013-2014 Hopi Bruins Varsity Football team has truly exemplified that they are champions in their own right. The guts they displayed on the field and in supporting their fallen teammate has been truly inspiring and dignified.

“They basically thought we were just another rez team,” Coach Saban said. “I'm real proud of our kids, they represented well.”