

Hawks' grad Jacob Smith rekindles WIVC football friendships with move to MacMurray

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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CARROLLTON - The transition from high school to college is usually two different approaches. You're either up for it or it's overwhelming.

For almost everyone there's a different story for how they go about it.

If you're a football player it's always a grind in some sort of fashion.

At Lindenwood University-Belleville, **Jacob Smith** was a new freshman from some small town in state, but like everyone else on a football scholarship it was basically like working for some company, or like a boot camp.

"It's been kinda up and down. Last football season was definitely a shock when you went from lounging around during the summer to instantly have a 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. schedule," Jacob Smith said. You do stuff all throughout that time and it'll get to you. It's a full-time job."

Smith is probably the best ever player to suit up and be the signal caller for the Carrollton Hawks.

He is the Hawks all-time leader in career passing yards and touchdowns.

Smith was part of the vaunted state runner-up Carrollton team in 2014 when they went undefeated in the regular season and came up short in at the state championship at Memorial Stadium.

In the 2015 regular season, Smith featured in every game as the holder on field goals and saw time at quarterback whenever games were blowouts.

His first ever play was a 24-yard completion that led to a touchdown on the following play.

If local residents haven't seen him since he left high school then they won't necessarily see much of a difference at first.

Smith still looks the same, facially with his curly, shaggy hair and beard, however he looks like he's grown a couple inches when he actually hasn't.

"I've put on 25 pounds and not all of it is muscle, but I like to think a lot of it is," Smith said jokingly said.

And it's all because of working out and more working out year-round.

"During the spring semester we had lifting three days a week in the mornings and you were expected to lift on Tuesday and Thursday on your own,"

After that phase was over the next order of business to go through was speed school, which is a fancy name for running for long periods of time.

“We ran for over an hour at 6 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays.”

All of that was a bit of a culture shock to Smith, but it’s a typical college football regimen.

However, over time Smith decided to transfer to **MacMurray College** in Jacksonville.

One of the reasons he cited for his decision was the lack of passion for football games as well as not being around his teammates outside of football.

“There wasn’t a huge crowd of football games and the students didn’t participate in going to other sporting events at all. It was so different from high school. A lot of people were commuters.”

Another reason why Smith transferred is because he wanted to be closer to home and that he knows a vast amount of the players on MacMurray’s football team, as well as liking the coaching staff.

“I felt right at home with all the coaching staff from the very beginning. I had known them before when they recruited me in high school. Just great guys with really good values that really care about each player individually.”

“They take time to look at you on individual level. We had meetings with our position coaches and with our head coach. We had to make sure we met with them in order to make sure we were caught up on our schoolwork and make sure we were improving on our lifts, all that stuff. They really take care of you. It’s a really good family atmosphere.”

MacMurray is unofficially hailed as the WIVC college because several of the players on the football team, throughout the years, attended schools in the WIVC.

“That’s kind of a running joke on campus, but it’s pretty true.”

The WIVC football schools range from the Quincy area to the Alton area and Jacksonville makes for a good central spot, which is a magnet for players that want to play football in college.

“In high school your gonna have skirmishes because we play the same teams over and over in all the sports. Your gonna have conflict, but once I graduated I made up with all those guys that we used to have words with in high school.”

Playing against the same foes leads to matching up against the same soldiers year after year.

“I think pretty much my matchup in basketball was Nathan Randle (North Greene) from fifth grade to senior year. We guarded each other in every game in that span. That’s eight years of guarding someone. Then we’re both quarterbacks in football and pitchers in baseball. It’s crazy to just play against the same people like that constantly, but it’s fun at the same time.”

Inside the Carrollton Hawks football stadium is a big wall filled with all the playoff appearance and conference title plaques.

Then there are the individual records and Smith owns all but one stat for quarterbacks.

Along with Smith, other players in his class like Cody Leonard and Luke Palan hold individual records.

“It’s a great feeling knowing that all the great players Carrollton had in the past. It’s really nice to see my name up there especially with all the other guys in my class that are up there too. We basically own the record book for the most part.”

Smith also feels honored to be recognized alongside other Hawk football stars from the past.

“It’s really awesome having my name up there, especially **Jordan Brannan**, who I always looked up to when I was younger. He was an awesome quarterback when I was growing up. To think that I’m up there with guys like him is pretty special.”

A three-year starting quarterback, Smith won 32 of the 37 games he guided the Hawks in.

Many great memories pack those three years, but what is the most precious?

“Bismarck,” Smith said.

A close second for Smith was when Carrollton beat Greenfield-Northwestern on homecoming, 30-14.

Carrollton defeated Bismarck-Henning, 26-21 in the quarterfinals at home on their journey to the state championship in an epic affair in the snow that came down to the wire.

“The last home game I ever played in, that was special. It was a huge game atmosphere playing at home and the crowd was huge. We didn’t even want to leave the field. Nick Schmidt and I were the last two on the field. Do we have to go home? Can we take it all in?”

Hopefully there will be more great memories to come at MacMurray for Smith with his buddies from Carrollton and his former rivals throughout the WIVC.