

HIGH SCHOOLS

It's Conners' time to lead Malvern

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So, you've waited patiently for 2 years to quarterback the varsity football squad at Malvern Prep and, finally, the squad is yours.

The first play is nothing extra challenging. Just a simple flip on a screen pass.

"I threw it over James Connelly's head," Billy Conners reported. "He got in my ear a little about that. He was busting on me. For that to happen on my first pass, it made me a little nervous."

Perhaps you were in attendance yesterday as the Friars opened their season by hosting La Salle, which was already 1-0.

If so, and we'll assume you paid rapt attention, you're probably saying: "You're nuts. Conners didn't botch an opening screen pass."

You are correct, sir!

The wild flip occurred last weekend in Malvern's first and only scrimmage, against Hun School of New Jersey. It was the end of Conners' miseries.

"I got into my flow after that, and things went well today," he said.

And how.

The 5-11, 175-pound Conners, who's bound for Duke to play lacrosse (defender), was impressive early and often as Malvern rolled, 47-21. He accounted for no fewer than five touchdowns, passing 9-for-11 for 192 yards and three TDs, while collecting two scores more on sneaks.

Conners backed up Ryan Nasish, now at Syracuse on scholarship, last season.

"He was one of the best quarterbacks in the city, so I knew I'd have to wait my turn," Conners said. "I learned from him in practice and at least I was starting on defense [at cornerback] and that was going well [first team All-Inter-Ac as junior]."

"This was a great start for our offense. I can give the ball to

James [Connelly] and Neil Willis and pass it to them and Joe Price and CJ Mooney. It wasn't hard to make my throws. The line was blocking well on every play. Just had to stand there and pass. No pressure. I don't think I got knocked down at all. Just had to scramble one time on a bootleg."

No matter how well he plays this season, this will be Conners' grid swan song.

"It is kind of weird that I'm going to college for my second-favorite sport," he said. "But I'm only 5-11 and there's not much I can do about it."

Duke has one of the best lacrosse programs around and great academics, of course. So it's a great situation.

"Football is by far my favorite and there's no way I was going to miss this, especially with the chance to play QB. My lacrosse coaches encouraged me to play as many sports as possible."

Conners' father, Bill, was a star running back at the old Bishop Kenrick, in Norristown, then played at Villanova.

"He coached me from the time I was little, but never pushed me," said Billy, who plans to major in economics. "He used to be an assistant with the CYO team at St. Agnes, in West Chester. We always had fun."

Conners hit Price (4-117) with two of his TD tosses while Connelly (3-39) caught the third. Connelly also ran 17 times for 96 yards and Willis ran for the game's first two scores.

For La Salle, Drew Loughery passed 17-for-35 for 221 yards and two TDs to Connor Hoffman (9-108). Sam Falecia added six snags for 85 yards.

"La Salle did a great job against us," said Gaspare "Gamp" Pellegrini, Malvern's coach. "They were better conditioned. More seasoned. We did a nice job moving the ball, though. Conners led us, the way I expect him to."

The way he's been waiting to. ★



Conners

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