

Bjornsens have Wash football in their blood

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 26 October 2013 20:57 -

The Bjornsen family has played a special role on the Cedar Rapids Washington football team through the years.

Greg, Steve and Kevin Bjornsen - three brothers - starred for the Warriors as all-state players during the 1980s. Now their sons are members of a special group at Washington this year.

Clayton, Jake and Lars Bjornsen - three first cousins and all seniors - have helped the Warriors win six straight games and reach the first round of the Class 4A playoffs during a remarkable campaign.

Washington lost its first three games, but the Warriors have not lost again since falling at Cedar Falls on Sept. 13 in the UNI-Dome. By coincidence, the Warriors will face those same Cedar Falls Tigers in the playoffs Wednesday at 5:30 p.m. at Kingston Stadium.

It's been an exciting year for the three cousins, who experienced a 3-and-6 campaign last season as juniors.

"It's been really neat," Jake said Saturday. "Not too many people get an opportunity to go to school with their family. I think it's really great to be able to play sports with them and be with them at school."

The season has been equally exciting for their parents, who are reliving some good times and cheering for their sons.

"Oh yeah," said Lars. "They seem to get excited as much as we do. They enjoy watching us play together."

Bjornsens have Wash football in their blood

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 26 October 2013 20:57 -

"I think they get more excited than me sometimes," agreed Clayton. "They love it, too."

The three cousins have been playing together since they were little kids. They all live in the Washington district, and Jake and Clayton used to live across the street from each other.

"We were really close," said Jake. "We were always hanging out at each other's house and we'd be together every weekend. We were pretty close growing up."

"We were always in the back yard, playing football or basketball. We were real competitive growing up."

They still are.

Clayton, No.7 in your program, and Jake, No.15, are two of Washington's captains. "I'm proud of them," said Lars, No.80, a tight end and reserve linebacker.

Jake, a wide receiver and strong safety, caught the game-winning touchdown pass against Cedar Rapids Prairie two weeks ago and has 77 tackles. Clayton, the tallest of the three cousins at 6-foot-1, has made 22 catches for 233 yards and three touchdowns and has 25 tackles. Lars has five catches.

That doesn't count the tackles and catches they've made in family pickup games on Thanksgiving and Christmas. Fathers, sons and cousins choose sides and toss it around.

"Still today," said Jake. "Every holiday or family gathering, we're always playing sports. The dads will get involved. They always join in, no matter how old we get."

Bjornsens have Wash football in their blood

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 26 October 2013 20:57 -

"It gets competitive," said Jake, smiling. "We're all trying to win. Usually it's all for fun."

Their fathers don't talk a whole lot about their playing days in the 1980's, but the cousins know their dads were excellent players and had a good time on the field.

"He loved it," Clayton said about his father, Kevin Bjornsen. "He always has good stuff to say about it. I think he's real proud of me and everyone else who's playing now."

"They always say our dads were tough guys and good athletes."

Washington Coach Paul James was an assistant coach for the Warriors in the 1980's. He coached all three of the Bjornsen brothers and now he's coaching all three of the Bjornsen cousins.

Greg Bjornsen, the oldest of the three brothers, was an all-state running back who once held the school record for most yards in a single game. Steve Bjornsen, next in line, was an all-state receiver. And Kevin Bjornsen, the youngest, was an all-state linebacker.

"Kevin was probably one of the toughest two or three kids that I've been around," said James. "He was a hitter."

James has enjoyed having their sons on the club this year.

"They're very coachable, and they all work hard," he said. "I think they're good leaders. They lead by example of how hard they work."

The cousins have upheld the family name with honor, but each player is his own man. "They're not the same as their parents," said James. "They have their own personalities."

Bjornsens have Wash football in their blood

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 26 October 2013 20:57 -

Washington football is a family affair beyond the fathers and sons.

"Don't forget their moms," said James. "All are involved in the football moms support group and have been very active in the Washington PTA and the Washington Athletic Club."

Two of the mothers - Lori (Clayton's mom) and Molly (Lars' mom) - attended Washington themselves. Kathy (Jake's mom) went to Iowa City West.

All three cousins and all three sets of parents were honored on Senior Night at Kingston Stadium last Thursday when the Warriors finished the regular season with a victory over Dubuque Wahlert. They'll all be cheering - and playing - Wednesday night when the Warriors face Cedar Falls.

"It's going to be entertaining," said Lars. "We want to get revenge on Cedar Falls because we lost to them earlier this year. It's going to help a lot that we're at home. It will be fun."

The three cousins have played together for years. Now they're heading for the biggest game of their lives. They've enjoyed the ride.

"I guess we all just loved football ever since we started it," said Clayton. "We knew that somebody we'd be together at Wash."

They don't want their careers to end. Not now.

"It will be real exciting," said Clayton. "We've got even more pressure going now because it's one-and-done in the playoffs. There will be a lot of emotion."