

History of Belle Vernon Area High School Football (1965-2015)

Author's notes: This history is not intended to be a definitive study of Belle Vernon Area High School football but a summary of the past 50 years of the spirited sport in the Belle Vernon community. As a lifelong resident of the Mon Valley and one who has lived Belle Vernon Area athletics, I had the advantage of knowing the football coaches and players through the years. It is hoped that this work inspires a history of other Mon Valley high schools and their storied football past rich in memorable coaches, players and games.



Belle Vernon Area High School football has an interesting history in connecting generations with an array of colorful coaches who developed fine talent into champions competing in conference play. BVA has named three alumni as its head mentor, including Gary Dongilli who holds a winning record of 71-11 spanning seven seasons, Lou Rood, and Aaron Krepps. Moreover, several Belle Vernon Area alumni have distinguished themselves as professional athletes in Bill Contz, Scott Zolak, and Joe Rudolph. National recognition followed Penn State's Craig Fayak and Bill Contz, Notre Dame's Jason Murray, Pitt's Marlon McIntyre and Erik Gill, Wisconsin's Joe Rudolph, and Michigan's Scott McClintock. Big 33 Classic Football selections from BVA, symbolizing the best athletes in Pennsylvania since 1956, are an elite core: Jim Bair '66, Gene Belczyk '69, Bill Contz '79, Marlon McIntyre '81, Craig Fayak '90, Scott McClintock '01,

Jonathan Fowler '03, Dorian Johnson '13 and Devin Hannan '15. In its history, BVA football has earned 14 section championships and achieved WPIAL runners-up champions twice with one WPIAL crown. Dating back to 1950 only four Mon Valley football squads have won a WPIAL crown Charleroi in 1959, Monessen in 1961, Ringgold in 1982 and BVA in 1995. This is the tale of a community's remembrance of the BVA Leopard football teams. The squads were sometimes competitive, exciting, glorious, and frustrating. Football is always rewarding in a great game which celebrates teamwork and character, and in high school, it is played at its purest. This story will be told in the sequence of head mentors who, by their individual styles, led their teams while leaving their stamp on each era of BVA football.



Belle Vernon Leopards 2015 Big 10 Conference Championship Team

One of the first programs to feel the weight of the newly merged Belle Vernon Area School District was Rostraver and Bellmarete, Class A schools, coming together with a football program as one entity. Proud traditions created much sensitivity in the selection of the first BVA football coach. In the spring of 1965, the school board selected Bellmar High School Coach Baptiste Manzini, better known as “Bap.” Issues

immediately arose concerning Bap's possible role as athletic director and a salary dispute. With neither issue resolved Bap moved on to become the head coach at Thomas Jefferson High School. Here, he experienced success, eventually winning a WPIAL crown in 1980.

Bap's departure left the school board in a quandary. Subsequently, the board considered hiring a western Pennsylvania coach, Mike Kopolovich, protégé of Duquesne University's Chick Davis, who promptly turned down the offer. The school board sought a head coach of high caliber and was not interested in elevating assistants. Greensburg Central Catholic head coach, Joe Mucci, was contacted but declined. In July of 1965 the Belle Vernon Area School Board turned to famed Donora Dragon's James K. Russell. Russell was protégé to none other than Notre Dame's legendary Knute Rockne. He was the WPIAL's Dean of Coaches in years of service, having coached the Dragons for 34 years with a record of 178 wins, 130 losses, and 27 ties. With Donora ready to move down a level to Class A, the 58-year-old Russell was willing to exit to a Class AA school. Russell's credentials and hallowed tradition developed at Donora with three WPIAL championship teams and his innovative techniques and college recruitment contacts all boded well for Russell landing the head mentor position at BVA. Just his acknowledgement of a student athlete could place him at Notre Dame. Coach Russell's staff included first assistant Joe Bushofsky, Joe Sarra, Dick Fields, Jack Curran, and Tom Banjor.

Coach Russell's first BVA team competed in the fall of 1965 compiling a record of 5 wins and 4 losses in the Big Eight Conference while losing the entire home schedule and winning the away games. Many graybeards will tell you this was disappointing since BVA boasted possibly the best cast of players in the conference including four Big 8 All Conference players: Gary Cramer, 5'11", 185 lbs., and



Coach Russell's Staff, Standing Left: Harry Muckle, Don Williams, Frank Zoretich, and Tom Banjor. Front Row Left: Dick Fields, Jimmy Russell, and John Clark

the Big Eight scoring leader, Jim Bair, 6'3", 220 lbs., Chuck Duda, 6'1", 230 lbs., and Bruce Vannucci, 5'10", 175 lbs. Other memorable players included Dean Lucas, 5'11", 180 lbs., John Ottino, 5'10", 170 lbs., Sam Driver, 6'1", 184 lbs., Dennis Neupaver, 5'11", 185 lbs., and Bob Basile, 6'0", 185 lbs. Gary Cramer reflected years later that the first BVA team should have won its conference. The Leps closed the season with a heartbreaking loss to Brownsville, 10 to 7. However the year produced some satisfaction when BVA defeated arch rivals Charleroi and Monessen.

The game with Charleroi on October 15 pitted two of the greatest football minds of the Mon Valley – Charleroi's Rab Currie and BVA's Russell – before an estimated 6,500 fans at Cougar Stadium. BVA was in its debut year against Charleroi, a distinguished team since early 20th century. BVA jumped to a 6-0 lead on a 34-yard run by Gary Cramer. That was short lived when Charleroi came back with a halftime score of 7-6 when Dick Kujawski scored and Algie Labrasca kicked the first of his two extra conversions. Cramer again pushed the Leopards ahead in the third quarter racing 56-yards down the sidelines for the score. He then kicked the extra point to give his team the lead 13-7. Charleroi's Algie Labrasca came back with seven minutes remaining and scored the tying TD and then added the second extra point which seemed like the difference 14-13. But BVA was not to be denied that evening.



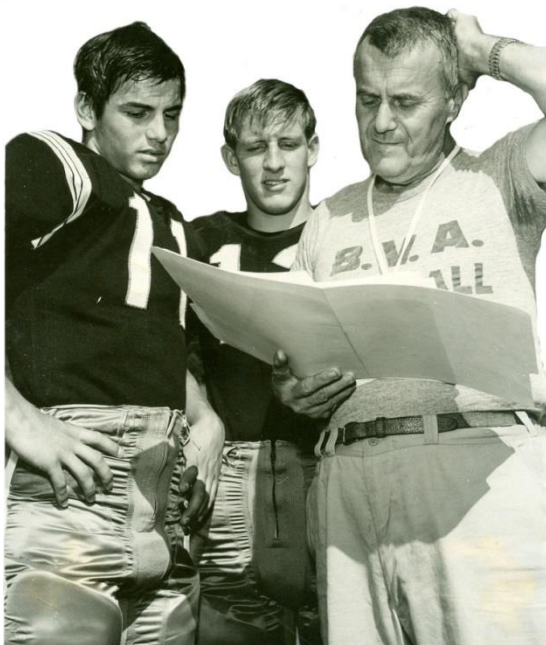
Gary Cramer

The Leopards held and forced Charleroi to punt with two minutes to play. Only 22 seconds remained when Dean Lucas flipped a long pass to the sidelines. Cramer made a great leaping catch, to come down inside the Cougars five-yard line with 12 seconds to go. Coach Russell called on his go-to-guy Cramer to kick a field goal. The snap from center was bobbled and Cramer fell on the ball at the Charleroi 16. But Charleroi was called for offsides and BVA now had new life on the Charleroi two-yard line with two seconds to go. Cramer lined up for the kick at a nasty angle and, as 6,500 people held their

collective breath, he executed a perfect kick to win the game 16-14 as the gun sounded. This was reported by Richard Wagner who interviewed Russell twenty years later. "The victory actually took the hick label off BVA when all we actually tried to do was play even with someone as good as Currie and Charleroi and put us on a par with the rest of the Big 8 becoming the Big Ten." Halfback Gary Cramer beat the defending conference scorer, Monongahela's Fred Angerman 92 to 85 points.

The 1966 season showed a 4-4-1 record with tall and lanky Ed Miller, 6'3, 185 lbs., one of the highlights for Coach Russell who called Miller, "the most natural athlete ever coached." Considering the number of athletes Russell coached, this was indeed a high compliment for Miller who was named to the All-Conference team at tight end. Miller scored 18 points while halfback Al Jo Neupaver, 5'9", 180 lbs., led the team with six touchdowns. Rich Planey, 5'10", 170 lbs., as quarterback was an integral part of the BVA offense in 1966 and 1967. Junior flanker Eugene Belczyk in '67 scored 56 points on eight touchdowns and eight extra points.

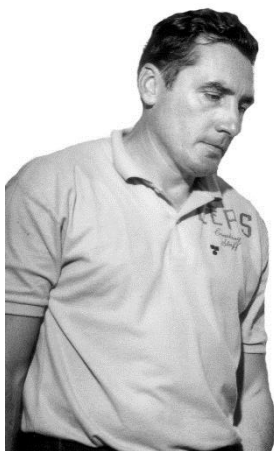
James K. Russell's coaching career at BVA lasted four seasons with a record of 20 wins, 16 losses and one tie.



Coach James K. Russell confers with Gene Belczyk and Rich Planey

Gene Belczyk, 5'9", 175 lbs., was one of Coach Russell's star performers who remembered his mentor's great offensive mind. As a halfback, Belczyk, a '69 BVA graduate, rushed for 1,396 yards on 174 carries in 1968, a single-season rushing mark record which he held until it was broken in 1995 by Jason Murray's 2,033 yards, and then surpassed by Nick Kalcevic's 2,151 yards in 1999. Belczyk could run full speed, stop, turn on a dime, and run in the opposite direction with the agility of a deer. Gene's ability as a runner, receiver and placekicker all contributed to his emergence as a scholastic football all-star. His 9.7 yards per

carry was not broken until 2000 by Nick Kalcevic, with a whopping 10.6 yards per carry, the highest average in the WPIAL that season. Gene showed a three-year total of 1,591 yards on the ground. Coach Russell described Belczyk as, “shifty, deceptive and fast.” Gene scored 129 points on 17 touchdowns along with 27 extra points his senior year but missed the conference scoring championship with 106 conference points to Monessen’s Marvin Davis’ 108 conference points in Big 10 play. The Leopards finished the ’68 season with seven wins and three losses. Halfback Ralph Iacoboni, 5’10”, 190 lbs., helped pave the path for Belczyk. In his senior year, Gene garnered Big 10 All Conference, All-WPIAL and All-State nominations. Gene also played in the Big 33 Classic in Hershey, Pennsylvania.



Coach Richard "Dick" Fields

The Belle Vernon Area School Board in 1969 elected assistant Richard “Dick” Fields as its second head coach. Under Fields in his first year, the Leopards recorded 5 wins and 4 losses. Fields was mentored under Coach John Bruno at Sewickley High School. Fields, a very likeable man, would lead the team for six years resulting in a record of 23 wins, 31 losses and one tie. Fields’ offense was positioned around rushing the ball up the middle. The Leps finished second in the Big 10 in 1971, compiling a record of 7-1-1. The Leps met the Western Conference runner-up, powerful Mt. Lebanon, who won 29 to 12. Co-captain offensive lineman Jeff Sefchok,

5’10”, 210 lbs., made the Big 10 Conference All-Stars along with co-captain middle-center running back, Gary Dongilli, 5’10”, 180 lbs., who scored 58 points. Other Big Ten All-Stars included center Lou Rood, 6’1, 197 lbs., receiver and defensive back Jack Jolley, 6’1”, 185 lbs., and quarterback Donnie Bowers, 5’11”, 170 lbs. Unfortunately, Fields proved not as successful as head coach as he was as an assistant. As reported in *The Valley Independent* on July 10, 1975, the Belle Vernon Area School Board declared the football jobs open as a result of internal problems involving Fields and varsity assistants Frank Zoretich and Dave Simon and junior

high aide Paul Barton who tendered their resignations six weeks prior to the start of the season.

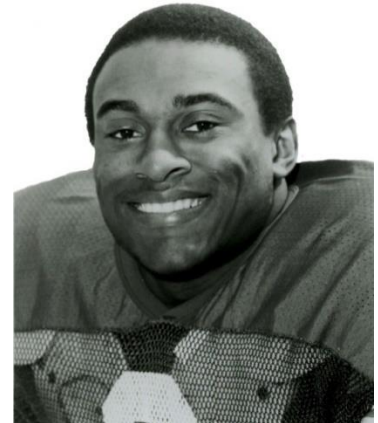
The school board decided to make a change in the coaching position for the 1975 season with two candidates leading the field of applicants, Jeff Petrucci, an assistant coach at Ringgold High School for six years who molded Joe Montana into a short-pass pocket quarterback, and BVA football legend Gene Belczyk. Following a 5-4 school board vote, Petrucci became BVA's third head coach who would usher in the first glory period of BVA football with an overall record of 46 wins and 17 losses through the 1980 season. Jeff's success was due to his ability to relate to players, recruiting athletes within the school and reaching out to the neighboring communities. He inspired young men to play for him that might not otherwise have played football. A supreme motivator, he could mobilize the individual talents of young men and synthesize these into a total team effort. With his great football IQ, he was able to build an outstanding core of assistants including his recent opponent Belczyk, Lee Sterner, Chuck Machesky, Joe Kroskie, and Dave Simon. Petrucci wanted his players to be quick and didn't believe that bigger was necessarily better. He would develop the talented smaller player and use their quickness to beat opponents. In 1979, Petrucci explained he did not have a player on the squad bigger than 190 pounds. He employed the quick lateral pass and was not afraid to use the aerial attack to quickly move the ball downfield. Petrucci was blessed with talented quarterbacks Tom Lazzari, Danny Wassilchuk, Doug Indof, and Brian Chorba.



Coach Jeff Petrucci

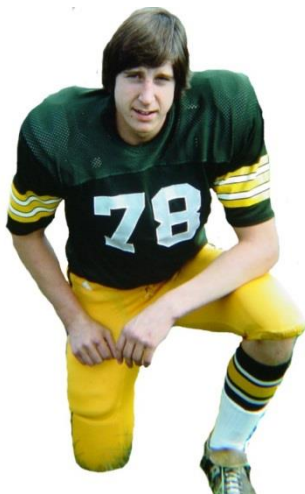
Petrucci's first three years (2-7, 8-2, 6-4) were building blocks for the future of BVA football. The coach laid the framework for future success. As a consummate professional and former All American player, Petrucci possessed an eye for true talent, and was a student of some great coaches like Charleroi's Rab Currie and California State College's Bill Hepner. These circumstances meant that success was only a matter of time for BVA football.

Petrucci's greatest prodigy at BVA was All-Conference junior-senior player Marlon "The Magician" McIntyre, 6'0", 190 lbs. Jeff made his wonder-athlete the featured back for three seasons while earning three conference championships in the process. Marlon proved to be the workhorse of the BVA offense with his elusive running ability and power. McIntyre's ability even drew famed Penn State coach Joe Paterno to Belle Vernon Area High School during the 1980 season in an attempt to recruit the star tailback. McIntyre as a running back was Belle Vernon Area's first *United Press International* First Team All-Star (1980).



Marlon "The Magician" McIntyre

In his first season Coach Petrucci, having only a week to prepare for the season, went 2 and 7 with center and defensive tackle Don Brougher, 6'2", 195 lbs., selected to the Big 10 All Conference First Team, First team All-WPIAL, and Big 33 nominee.



Bill Contz

The 1976 Petrucci Leopards went 8 and 2 with Big Ten scoring champ Dave Ross, 5'10", 162 lbs., leading the way with 76 points. In 1977 the team went 6 and 4 with defensive co-captains Jim Caccimelio, 5'10", 178 lbs. and Mike Vargo, 6'0", 198 lbs. along with quarterback Doug Indof, 6'1", 175 lbs., who led the scoring for the Leps with 42. Receiver Guy Bizzelle, 5'8", 144 lbs. was second in BVA scoring with 26.



Doug Indof



David Bashada

In 1978, BVA captured its first Big Ten Championship with linebacker-guard Mike Fields, 5'10", 180 lbs., chosen captain and future NFL player Bill Contz, 6'5", 221 lbs., named co-captain. Quarterback Dan Wassilchak, 5'9", 165 lbs., led the team with a first-ever BVA perfect ten victories in the conference, defeating Jeanette in the first playoff game 15-14, but falling to Blackhawk 13 to 7. The team scored 164 points while allowing only 15 points to opponents with the defense led by Contz. Coach Petrucci was chosen Coach of the Year by his fellow Big Ten Coaches. Dave Bashada, 5'8", 150 lbs., with his record breaking runs was named to the Big Ten All-Stars. Along with returning punts and one at 94 yards, Bashada had a 102-yard interception return versus Jeannette in a playoff game after an earlier interception of 97 yards against Laurel Highlands. His coach remarked, "Dave's been making big plays all season. He knows what's going on and always has a presence of mind."

Pat Sweeney, 5'8", 146 lbs., who practiced with a homemade goal post in his yard, was BVA's reliable place-kicker. Jim Schivley, 5'9", 157 lbs., the workout warrior runner, is remembered for never dropping a pass while anchoring Petrucci's running game. Offensive and defensive tackle Dennis "Bullwinkle" Carson, 6' 0", 185 lbs., was a three-year letterman and named to the Big Ten's All Conference offensive teams in 1978 and



Dennis "Bullwinkle" Carson

1979. The Petrucci machine would win another section championship in 1979 by going undefeated once again except for a tie with Elizabeth Forward. BVA was defeated 30-7 in a decision to the West Penn Conference champion Gateway Gators in the first round of the WPIAL playoffs. Senior nose guard David Legg, 5'8", 165 lbs., was credited with an incredible 35 tackles in a single game.



Jim Schivley

In 1980, the Leps won their third consecutive conference championship. This time it was in the Big Nine Conference with a perfect record behind quarterback Brian Chorba, 5'10", 150 lbs., with 638 passing yards, running back Marlon McIntyre with 1,079 yards, a team record of eight interceptions by Jon Miller, 5' 10", 160 lbs., and kicker Dana Chester, 5'11", 170 lbs., with a school record seven field goals eventually broken by Craig Fayak. Chester was the first specialist ever named to the Big 9 Conference First-Team in both his junior and senior year. In the quarter final playoffs, BVA defeated Greensburg Central Catholic, 17 to 14, with Chester's 37 yard field goal. However, the Leps eventually fell to Aliquippa in a heartbreaking 8 to 7 loss in the semi-finals in the rain with Eric Bell, 5'7", 150 lbs., scoring the lone Leopard touchdown. Captain Brian Chorba concluded his two-year stint as BVA quarterback going 16-0-1 in conference play and was heralded as a "superb leader who knows how to win." Coach Petrucci continued, "Brian's a winner, his statistics are deceiving and don't indicate his true value to the Leps. He is like a coach on the field." Chorba tallied over 1,300 career passing yards, a 53 percent completion rate and 14 career touchdowns (10 passing and 4 rushing) in his scholastic career. Coach Petrucci said this playoff loss was the only time he ever wept following a game.

The final years for Coach Petrucci at BVA were referred to as the "Mid Mon Valley's grid dynasty" never losing a conference game over three years. Coach Petrucci recalled, "The biggest thing was everyone was pulling in the same direction from the school board and administration to the entire student body. The team was more important than the individual. There was a common bond to win championships and we had a great following at home and on the road." Petrucci parlayed his success at BVA to become California University of Pennsylvania's head coach in 1981.

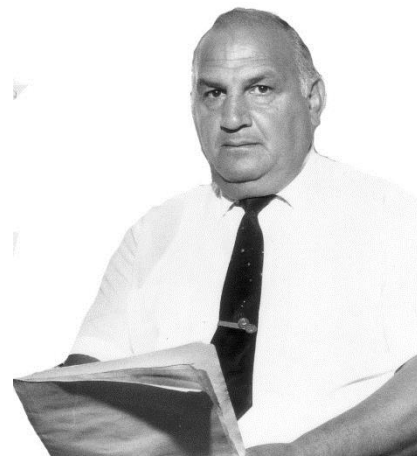


Coach Machesky's Staff, Standing Left: Don Williams, Len Volpi, Lou Rood, Joe Kroskie. Kneeling Left: Unknown, Chuck Machesky, Gene Belczyk

Petrucci's defensive coordinator, Chuck Machesky, followed as BVA's fourth head high school football coach. Like Dick Fields, he experienced more success as an assistant than as a head coach. Machesky's record was 10 wins, 29 losses and one tie from 1981 through 1984. His offensive style emphasized the ground attack over the aerial attack. Some believe that BVA would have been a firehouse of wins had Petrucci remained. Memorable players from the era included tailbacks Aaron Lee, 5'9", 177 lbs., who scored 48 points in 1981, Clint Rhodes, 5'11", 168 lbs., fullback Warren Neff, 5'9", 172 lbs., and hard nose tackle Dom Papa, 5'10", 153 lbs. Dane Astle, 6'1, 180 lbs., played a bruising style at running back for the Leps in 1981 and 1982 and was named to the Big Nine All Conference Offensive Team. Team co-captain Darrin Belsick, 5'11", 190lbs., led the Leopards in tackles and sacks in 1983. Machesky stepped down following back-to-back 1-9 showings and went on to become Superintendent of the Uniontown School District. Following the 1984 season Division I junior Scott Zolak, 6'5", 200 lbs., exited to Ringgold High School.

The Belle Vernon Area High School Stadium was renamed at a dedication on September 10, 1982 honoring long-time athletic director James Weir. A special program was designed for the occasion and through the years student athletes have come to refer to the stadium as "the Weir."

In January of 1985 the Belle Vernon Area School Board hired Dan Evans, who topped a field of 52 candidates. Evans had impressive credentials coaching 10 years in Ohio after one year as an assistant coach at Uniontown High School under Jim Render. Evans, however, changed his mind and never coached the Leps.



Athletic Director Jim Weir

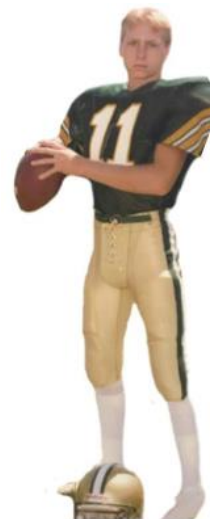
Enter the “Alley Cats” era of BVA football led under head coach Bill Conners, a take-charge guy. He had a long history of coaching at Beth Center and Ringgold High Schools capped with a WPIAL championship at each school. Conners ranked as one of the most winning coaches in the WPIAL. His reputation as a good motivator along with his commitment, dedication and organization would bring championship football



Coach Conners' Staff

back to BVA. He would like to say to his charges, “Bad to the bone,” in reference to his “wishbone offense.” He always reminded the team of his offensive philosophy that “three 4s are 12” referencing that if you are able to get 4 yards on 1st, 2nd, and 3rd down, you will always get the necessary yardage for a first down. His first season showed a marked improvement in the program with a 5 and 4 record. BVA played in a conference heavily laden with powerhouse teams like Steel Valley, Ringgold, Uniontown, and West Mifflin. Senior quarterback Jim Eley, 5’10”, 180 lbs., threw ten touchdown passes and also played defense, receiving awards including Big 10 All-Star and All-District Second team. Frank Indof, Jr., 5’9”, 165 lbs., was named to the Big Nine All-Conference Defensive Team and was recognized as a Judge Charles Marker senior scholar athlete. Early in the 1985 season, BVA defeated the highly touted Elizabeth Forward Warriors on their home field to hand EF their only conference loss of the year. After the game, Assistant Coach Tom Domen introduced the team to the ritual of the coaches picking one defensive and one offensive player for their superb contribution after each win to dress in an “Alley Cat” costume and dance in front of the squad as the team cheered! That activity helped bond the players and developed an unconscious drive in each player to strive to become the next “Alley Cat.”

Conners set the standard for scouting, knowing the strengths and weaknesses of the opposition and using this information to prepare his team. Many of Conners' assistant coaches had distinguished coaching careers on their resumes including Chuck Arrigo, Chuck Abramski, Bob Freado, Terry Dzimiera, and fitness guru Tom Domen. A football program takes on the personality of the coach, and Conners exemplified this fact to the fullest extent with his intensity and passion. Conners was a great competitor who cajoled his players into performing.



Greg Steeber

In 1986 the team made the playoffs after returning to the Big Ten Conference with a record of 7 wins, 2 losses and one tie. The Belle Vernon defense yielded an average of 6.8 points per game including four shutouts. BVA junior quarterback Greg Steeber, 6'1" and 175 lbs., was considered a Division I prospect. Steeber had good mobility, speed and was an effective thrower. BVA eventually fell to Mt. Pleasant in the playoffs 27-7, but ultimately succeeded in returning to its overall winning ways. Memorable players included



Michael Metikosh

quick and strong defensive lineman, 5'9", 175 lb. Brian Eckles. Named defense All-Conference, folklore has it that Brian made 27 tackles in a single game. Jim Cicchini, 5'10", 170 lbs., shined as a senior halfback. In 1987 the Leps again won 7 games but did not make the playoffs. Returning to the Big Nine Conference in 1988, the Leps were co-champs with Brownsville. BVA was defeated at home in the playoffs by Blackhawk 28-



Joe Rudolph

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Conners and his players won the Big Nine co-championship in 1989 with a section record of 9 and 1, losing only to Brownsville by one point. In the WPIAL playoffs, the Leopards defeated Highlands scoring 12 points while shutting out the opponent. Coach Conners remarked that Michael Metikosh, “is a heckuva of a running back.” A tailback on offense and cornerback on defense, the 5’10”, 175 lb. runner ran for 1,262 yards. This victory represented the Leopard’s first playoff victory in nine years, one highlighted by a superb defensive performance. Against Aliquippa in the Class AAA WPIAL semifinals, BVA lost 14 to 7 in a heartbreaking battle of dominant defenses. Led by an outstanding senior class, the Leps recorded five shutouts and led the Big Nine in defense, while the offense went over the 30 point mark four times finishing second in the conference in total offense. Eight seniors, Craig Fayak, Jon Vitale, 5’10”, 200 lbs., Joe Rudolph, 6’ 3”, 220 lbs., Joe Rotolo, 6’2”, 165 lbs., Darren Walters, 6’1”, 240 lbs., Dale Haney, 5’6”, 168 lbs., Dan Kovatch, 6’1”, 160 lbs., and Mike Metikosh were named to the All Big Nine Conference team. Joe Rudolph and Craig Fayak made the *Pittsburgh Press* Fabulous 44 listing and



Craig Fayak

Rudolph, a guard and inside linebacker, were named the *Press’* Washington Edition, “Defensive Player of the Year.” Individual honors, however, played but a small part in this year’s campaign, a total team over-achieving effort. At the time, some believed Coach Conners may have coached the best team in BVA history!

The versatile Craig Fayak, 6’2”, 185 lbs., did it all as a quarterback, safety, kicker, punter, and defensive back. Fayak scored 266 points in his high school career, with 125 points alone in 1989 as he led the Big Nine Conference in scoring. He passed for more than 2,000 yards and rushed for over 500. Fayak made 20 of his 31 field goal attempts as a Lep including eight of more than 40 yards. Rated as one of the best kickers in the nation, he was capable of kicking field goals from an astounding

60 yards in practice. As a freshman in a late season game against Thomas

Jefferson in 1986, Fayak converted three of four three-pointers including a school record 44-yard kick, pushing BVA to a 30-20 win. In 1989, he kicked a 48-yard field goal against Elizabeth Forward, setting a school record. Craig received the prestigious Judge Charles E. Marker Westmoreland County Scholar Athlete of the Year Award at the Greensburg 1990 spring ceremonies held routinely at Ferrante's Lakeview Lounge. While playing in the 1990 Big 33 Football Classic in Hershey, Pennsylvania, Fayak kicked six extra points in Pennsylvania's victory over Maryland.

The 1990 season was one of rebuilding for Coach Connors with one tie and 9 losses moving from the Big Nine to the Keystone Conference. The 1991 Leps had a misleading record of 4 and 6. The Leps started with a 7 to 6 win over the Peters Township Indians and ended the season with a 48 to 28 loss to the Johnstown Trojans, who finished the season as Conference champions. The 1992 season showed a record of 5 wins, 4 losses and one tie. This campaign would be Coach Connors' final year leading the squad. Connors ended his coaching tenure at BVA with 45 wins, 36 losses and three ties. He remains BVA's longest serving head mentor, guiding the Leps for eight years. Following Connors' departure, Tony Ruscitto took the Leps to a record of 3 wins and 7 losses in his first and only season as head coach in 1993. The Ruscitto hiring on November 23, 1992 did not come without controversy. Director Gerald Jackson complained that the position of head coach was not open to other applicants. Ruscitto was an assistant to Coach Connors during the 1992 season. After the '93 season, on November 22 at an emotionally packed Belle Vernon Area School Board meeting a motion was made by director James Laughland to open the football position.

Belle Vernon Area football would enter a period of phenomenal success with the entrance of former BVA football alumni Gary Dongilli in 1994 as head coach. He had a seven-year stint as Yough High School head mentor with a record of 35 wins, 33 losses and two ties. Extremely knowledgeable and clever in football and possessing an athletic swagger of confidence, the players bought into the program and performed beyond their ability. Success came as it never had before in BVA history with many talented players under his stewardship. Some described "Dongilli ball" as a more

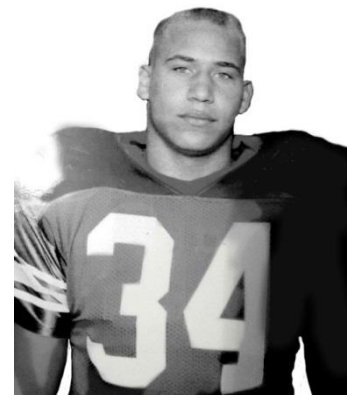


Senior Advisor Bap Manzini and
Head Coach Gary Dongelli

exciting brand of football. As impact players propelled Coach Petrucci and Coach Conners into conference champions, Gary Dongilli would coach phenoms like Jason Murray with 5,046 rushing yards by WPIAL records (4,752 BVA records), Scott McClintock (fullback-linebacker), Nick Kalcevic (4,368-rushing yards), Jesse “Tink” Cramer (4,716 all-purpose yards), quarterback Josh Cramer (4,000-yard passer), Erik Gill (tight end-linebacker) and the versatile Aaron Krepps (WR, RB, QB, DB, punter, kick returner). Dongilli presented a more exciting brand of football

demanding more imagination on the playing field. Execution was accomplished through controlled practice sessions thus making each practice valuable. The coach promoted a 60-40 run to pass ratio.

Dongilli’s most interesting prodigy was Jason Murray, 6’2”, 220 lbs., a 1997 BVA graduate, who played defensive end in middle school but was recruited in high school for offense as a sophomore replacing the talented senior Chris Druciak, 5’9”, 160 lbs., who had moments of promise with his ability to move quickly. Murray made an impressive debut in 1994 for the Leopards, scoring a touchdown on a 56-yard run against Thomas Jefferson the very first time he touched the ball. Because of his size in high school, Murray was a man among boys playing the running back position. His rare combination of size and speed allowed him to both run over and by defenders.



Jason Murray

With Coach Dongilli BVA fans came to expect the unexpected like opening a game with the long pass or even the double pass. Opposing coaches and teams had difficulty preparing for the “Dongilli magic.” He rolled the dice and had the kind of players to execute. He not only had great talent on the field, but also seasoned assistants like offensive and defensive line coach Tommy Thompson, defensive coordinator Joe Kroskie, premier assistant John Clark, and Bap Manzini as a senior adviser.



Mike Steeber

First assistant coach John Clark played the important role of enforcer for head coach Dongilli, also known as the “good cop/bad cop” role. The first assistant coach would provide the tough love while the head coach stayed above that. Winning coaches employ this kind of first assistant coach who can effectively deliver what needs to be said to players in order to fulfill their potential. The first assistant can read his head coach and becomes the “go-to” guy who works on all facets of the coaching process. Other first assistant “bulldogs” in BVA football legacy of coaching ranks were Ray Ciferno to Dick Fields, Dave Simon and Chuck Machesky to Jeff Petrucci, Joe Kroskie to Chuck Machesky, and Tom Domen to Bill Conners.

Dongilli coached BVA to seven consecutive Keystone Conference titles, a WPIAL championship in 1995 and WPIAL runner-up on two other occasions in 1996 and 1999. Under his brand of Leopard football, BVA averaged ten wins a season with an unparalleled 47-1 conference record. With an overall record of 71-11, Gary Dongilli is Belle Vernon Area’s all-time most winning coach. Under Dongilli, success became an annual expectation.



Coach John Clark

In Dongilli’s initial season, 1994, the Leps reached the WPIAL Class AAA semi-finals with an unfortunate loss to the eventual WPIAL champion McGuffey 20-13. Senior quarterback and free safety Mike Steeber, 6’1”, 180 lbs., recalled the pre-season t-shirts labeled “This Cat is Back.” The defense as a unit was excellent, with numerous sacks and turnovers created. Senior outside linebacker Justin Berkoben, 5’11”, 184lbs., led the team in sacks. Some of other stands out senior players included defensive end Mike Spitznagel, 6’3”, 260 lbs., quarterback Jeremy Dongilli, 6’2”, 200 lbs., offensive and defensive lineman Kory Freshwater, 6’2”, 245 lbs., and the tight end, linebacker, and kicker, Brian Indof, 5’11”, 170 lbs.

In 1995, BVA won its first and only WPIAL championship with a victory at Three Rivers Stadium over Franklin Regional, 22-6, behind sharp quarterback Jason Nogy, 6'0", 155 lbs. The inside linebacking senior duo of R. J. Pabis, 5'10", 190 lbs., and Eddie Weightman, 6'2", 210 lbs., led an overpowering defense. Justin Quinto, 5'9", 161 lbs., Adam Spitznagel, 5'11", 200 lbs., Eric Huss, 5'11", 174 lbs., Tom Hepple, 6'0", 165 lbs., Nick Norelli, 5'10", 155 lbs., and Bret Kalakewich, 6'0", 165 lbs., were among the members of the defensive unit which posted seven shutouts including five-in-a-row during a 14-game stretch. Captain R.J. Pabis made a remarkable 218 tackles. The offensive lineup featured Pabis at tight end and the Hawk twins, Ryan, 5'10", 145 lbs., and Bryan, 5'10", 150 lbs., as receivers; Matt Albright, 6'2", 259 lbs., and Ron Bird, 6'2", 215 lbs.; as tackles, Taylor Prosba, 6'1", 201 lbs., and Justin Jennings, 6'0", 193 lbs., as guards and Scott Shawley, 6'1", 170 lbs., at center. BVA moved on to the PIAA Class AAA semifinals losing to Sharon, 22-16, in double-overtime with Ben Keefer scoring two touchdowns. Jason Murray finished the season with 2,033 yards making him BVA's first 2,000-yard rusher in a season, with



Jason Nogy

Shaun Baker, 6'1", 210 lbs., and Ben Keefer, 5'10", 216 lbs., as running mates. Jason Nogy quarterbacked the Leopards to back to back appearances in the WPIAL AAA championship games in '95 and '96, with Ed Weightman sharing quarterback duties in 1995. Nogy's electrifying touchdown run of 41 yards in the third quarter of the '95 WPIAL championship game broke a scoreless tie with Franklin Regional jumpstarting the Leps who

went on to score 22 unanswered points enroute to BVA's first WPIAL Class AAA title. Nogy was the leading rusher for 68-yards on nine carries. Jason's running ability as a quarterback kept teams off guard and helped the outstanding offense average over 40 points per conference game.



Josh Cramer and Jesse Cramer, Jr.

In 1996 the Leps won their third straight Keystone title winning by an average of 36 points a game. BVA lost at the WPIAL Class AAA championship game to Blackhawk 24 to 6 snapping a 23 game winning streak for the Leps against WPIAL teams. Senior Ron Krepps, 5'10", 210 lbs., led the squad with 127 tackles and was named to the All Keystone Conference team. Senior Jason Murray finished his high school career with 5,046 yards to rank 11th on WPIAL's all-time rushing list as of 2010. Murray was named *USA Today* and *Parade*

Magazine's High School All

American Honorable Mention. The *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* named Murray AAA Player of the Year. Bret Kalakewich, a wide receiver, cornerback, free safety and at punt return, would hold a then school record for receptions in 1996 with 37 totaling 575 yards. Bret was named to the Keystone Conference offensive team and would end his three year stint with 51 receptions for 831 yards and ten touchdowns.



Ron Krepps



Bret Kalekewich

In 1997 the Leps won the Keystone Conference crown for the fourth time suffering an early season exhibition loss to Ringgold 10-7. With the first home playoff game, BVA lost to Blackhawk 20 to 3. Jesse "Tink" Cramer, Jr, 6'0", 185 lbs., succeeded Jason Murray, rushing 1,461 yards on 180 carries and 16 touchdowns. "Jesse is a true tailback where Murray was just a good, powerful back," commented Coach Dongilli. "Cramer does it all and he has great speed, moves and acceleration." Never coming off the field, Jesse played on all special teams' downs and as a defensive back. Brother Josh Cramer, 6'0", 180 lbs., became BVA's eventual four-year starting quarterback as a freshman. As a senior,



Ryan Russell

Jamie Guerra, 6'4", 230 lbs., was one of BVA's all time prolific pass rushers.

In 1998 the "gold and white" won their fifth consecutive conference title, sharing the honor with Thomas Jefferson because of a loss to Mt. Pleasant. BVA eventually lost to Moon in the playoffs 38-14. The season was highlighted by the most BVA points scored in one game against Southmoreland with 67 and the most passing yards in one game, 292 by quarterback Josh Cramer against Yough. In addition, Jason Shawley, 6'2", 190 lbs., became the Lep's most prolific single-season receiver with 603 (576) yards on 29 (26)

catches and eight touchdowns. Shawley was an All-Keystone Big Nine All-Conference selection. Coach Dongilli was impressed with Jason, "In today's society where there is a lack of team concept, Shawley is a role model." Erick Pabis, 6'0", 227 lbs., continued the legacy of his two brothers Ryan and RJ as a punishing guard and clutch lineman for three seasons earning All Conference awards as a junior and senior.

The 1999 season showed a sixth consecutive Keystone Conference title and a trip to Three Rivers Stadium for the WPIAL Class AAA championship against West Allegheny with BVA losing 37 to 12. Impact players included juniors Nick Kalcevic, Scott McClintock, Erik Gill, and senior wide receiver Ryan Russell, 6'1", 165 lbs. Russell electrified the crowd at the Elizabeth Forward game by single-handedly bringing BVA back from a 21-6 deficit scoring three touchdowns in a seven minute period. One touchdown was scored on a pass play, the other on an 80-yard interception, and the final on a punt return. While facing Elizabeth Forward once again in the playoffs that same year at Three Rivers Stadium in the semi-finals, Russell scored two touchdowns during a 73-second period. One score came on a 61-yard pass play and the other on a 75-yard punt return.



Jason Shawley

Belle Vernon Area routed Johnstown, 54-0 in 2000 for the Leps' seventh straight Keystone Conference title. Aaron Krepps' sixth punt return for a touchdown, a 72-yarder, tied the school record previously held by Nick Norelli. Krepps also tied a state record for the longest touchdown reception versus Uniontown, 99.5 yards, from quarterback Josh Cramer. In the playoffs, BVA routed Pine Richland 23-0 followed by a quarterfinal victory against Hampton, 39-8. Nemesis West Allegheny defeated the Leps in the semi-finals 24-7. Talented players graced the 2000 team with Nick Kalcevic, 6'0", 207 lbs., receiving the "WTAE-TV Operation Football" Player of the Year award along with recognition by the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette's* Feb 22 which included teammates Scott McClintock and Erik Gill. Kalcevic ended his career with 4,368 yards, averaging more than 10 yards a carry.



Nick Kalcevic

Aaron Krepps, one of Nick Kalcevic's teammates, reminisced on the BVA rushing champion. "Nick is a cornerstone in a long lineage of great BVA running backs. His running style was a masterful combination of speed, quickness, deception and toughness. One of only two running backs in school history to rush for over 4,000 yards, Nick's senior year was highlighted by a 310-yard rushing game against Yough, where he carried the ball only ten times and scored five touchdowns. Can you imagine to average 31 yards a carry?" Kalcevic is Belle Vernon Area's No.2 all-time leading rusher with 4,368 yards. Kalcevic for his career, 1998-2000, scored 354 points. Nick was named to *Associated Press* "Big School All-State" team as a second team running back in 2000. WTAE-TV Pittsburgh's commentator Andrew Stockey named Nick the "Operation Football-Player of the Year" receiving the most votes by the area fans. The television camera's rolled in a special school assembly for Nick Kalcevic telecast on Channel 4 WTAE.

Four Belle Vernon Area gridgers made the *Associated Press* Big School (AAAA-AAA) All-State team for the 2000 season. Linebacker Scott McClintock was a first-teamer with running back Nick Kalcevic on the second team and tight end Erik Gill and utility player Aaron Krepps as third-teamers.

Erik Gill, 6'6", 245 lbs., was a warrior for the Leopards as a rare three-year starter at tight end and linebacker. Gill finished his scholastic career as the school's all-time leading pass catcher with 54 receptions. His play on the field led to many accolades including a two-time *Associated Press* and *Pennsylvania Football News* All-State player. Erik did merit the awards bestowed: the *Pittsburgh Tribune Review* "Terrific 25," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* All WPIAL Keystone Conference, the *Pittsburgh Tribune Review* All-Class AAA, and a two time first team All-Keystone Conference selection. After high school, Erik went on to be a four-year letterman at the University of Pittsburgh and eventually back to BVA as assistant football coach under Aaron Krepps in 2009 and 2010.



Erik Gill

Scott McClintock, 6'3", 241 lbs., a three-year starter at linebacker and fullback, is arguably the most dominant defensive player in BVA's history. Scott was a talented runner and blocker on offense, but his ability to deliver bone crushing hits from linebacker made him one of Belle Vernon Area's greatest playmakers. The distinctions were noteworthy as a four- star prospect, the country's number 76 player and the number 10 linebacker in the nation as ranked by *Rivals.com*. Rated as the number 2 fullback nationally and the number 5 player in Pennsylvania by *Super Prep Magazine*, he was ranked as the nation's fifth best inside linebacker and number 50 overall player by Max Emfinger. Selected to the Pennsylvania All-State First

Team as a linebacker Scott was listed as the number 11 player in the northeast by the *G&W Recruiting Report*. Scott was rated the number 10



Scott McClintock



Coach Jesse J. Cramer

player in the Midwest by *Midwest Football Recruiting News* and named *Pennsylvania Football News* Class AAA first team.

Gary Dongilli resigned in the summer of 2001 to take the head coaching position at Hempfield High School. As a result, BVA turned to its long time junior high-middle school coach Jesse J. Cramer who had phenomenal success on that level with a record of 81 wins, 14 losses and 4 ties.

In 2001 Cramer had the good fortune to coach one of BVA's most many sided players in senior Aaron Krepps, 6'0", 185 lbs. He was Cramer's quarterback and passed for 622 yards, ran for 531, had 312 in punt return yardage, and recorded three interceptions. Krepps did three things well: catch, throw, and run! Aaron favored the wide receiver position he played his sophomore and junior years. He also was a running back, defensive back and kick returner for the Leps. Krepps was a master at returning punts during his football career. He returned eight punts for touchdowns, including seven during his junior year under Coach Dongilli. He also had four others called back because of penalties. Krepps also had one kickoff return for a touchdown. He was named to the



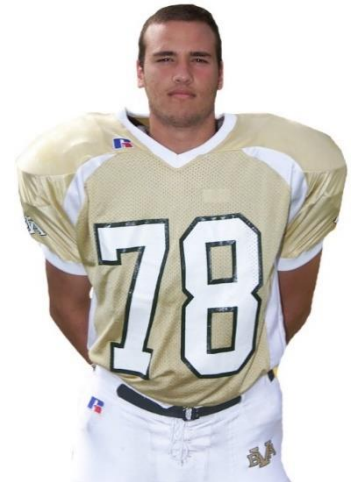
Aaron Krepps

Associated Press Third Team as a junior for his play on special teams and to the All-Keystone Conference team. Krepps received the scholar athlete BVA Richard O. Dolfi award. Aaron was recognized as a Judge John Driscoll senior scholar athlete and finalist for the prestigious top award at the spring 2002 Westmoreland County banquet. Under Cramer, over a five year-period, the Leps posted an overall 20-30 record, including 16-15 in the Keystone Conference. His teams posted three losses in the WPIAL AAA playoffs with first round defeats to West Allegheny, Moon and Canon McMillan. Cramer's most successful year was 2002 when the Leps went 7-3 including 6-0 in the Keystone



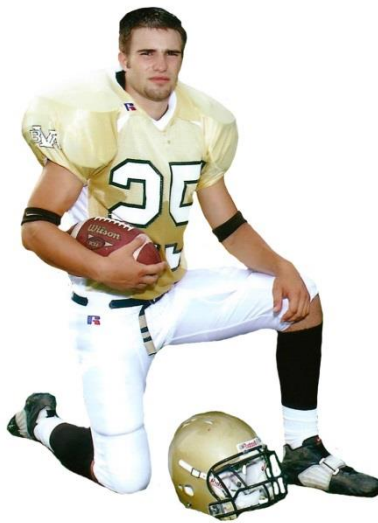
Jonathan Fowler

for the 2002 WPIAL Football AAA Section II championship. All Conference player Andrew Bell, 6'0", 170 lbs., led the Leopards in rushing with more than 1,000 yards. Bell was the team's offensive catalyst and also provided solid play as a defensive back. In the Moon 2002 playoff loss, quarterback Derek Brletich, 6'2", 200 lbs., came back after breaking his leg in week six



Patrick Biddle

against Derry to throw a touchdown pass on the first play of the game. Patrick Biddle, 5'11"; 195 lbs., was a "very coachable dedicated player," remembered Coach Cramer, and Pat played both offense and defense. Cramer coached kicker and All Conference player Jonathan Fowler, 6'1", 160 lbs., who booted the longest BVA field goal at 49 yards against Laurel Highlands in September 2002 and kicked others from 44 and 48 yards. He was an important weapon for the Leopards in establishing field touchbacks on kicking duties, defensive back would score a total and was named to in 2003.



Andrew Bell

position and recorded 10 kickoffs. In addition to his Fowler also played well at and tight end. Fowler of 133 points for the Leps the Big 33 Football Classic

In the 2003 showed a record still had six player stars including senior Brad Yates, from his junior year, running back senior Nick Maise, 5'8", 190 lbs., two-way end and punter senior Jared Naylor, 5'10", 167 lbs., quarterback and defensive back senior Trent Scott, 6'2", 190 lbs., two-way tackle senior Joe campaign the Leps of 3 wins and 7 losses but Keystone Conference all center and defensive end 6'1", 216 lbs., a repeater

Watson, 6'6", 290 lbs., and tight end linebacker junior Matt Perry, 6'0", 210 lbs.

"In 2004, going 5-5, with average talent an overachieving defensive unit got the Leps into a playoff only to lose a hard fought defensive struggle over three quarters," remembers Assistant Coach Brett Berish. On September 17, the Leopards slogged their way to a 6-0 win over Laurel Highlands in a horrific rain storm at the Weir with less than 100 people in attendance. *The Valley Independent* was critical in an editorial stating that BVA's game was one of three of the 56 games scheduled that actually took place.



Trent Scott

Cramer's style of coaching closely resembled the conservative approach of famed Ohio State Coach Woody Hayes – "with little respect for the pass, up the middle, a crunching, frontal assault of muscle against muscle, bone upon bone, will against will."



Coach Lou Rood

A forgettable 2005 season featured ten losses and an anemic offense that scored the lowest amount of points in the entire WPIAL with 35. Looking to restore the roar to the Leopard football program, the Belle Vernon Area School Board elected Lou Rood, a BVA communications teacher, as the successor to now athletic director Jesse Cramer. Rood's candidacy to become a head coach was built upon his experience in every successful era in BVA football history. The alumnus was not only an All Conference lineman under Dick Fields, but also earned the prestigious Richard O. Dolfi award as a scholar athlete. His tenure as an assistant coach

was under the tutelage of master coaches Jeff Petrucci, Bill Connors, and Gary Dongilli. To aid in the Leopards' reclamation of prominence in Class AAA, Rood assembled a coaching staff of other assistants and players from the championship squads from the 90s.

Coach Rood's first win as a Belle Vernon Area head coach in 2006 was also a school district first. The Leopards' 17-14 overtime victory at New Castle was Belle Vernon Area's first ever win against a Parkway Conference opponent. Sandwiched around this initial triumph at the start of the 2006 season were exhibition losses to WPIAL finalists Thomas Jefferson and Blackhawk. In Keystone Conference action, losses to Mt. Pleasant and Albert Gallatin backed the Leps into a corner. A scrappy, tough defensive effort and quarterback change to Jake Cramer, 5'11", 175 lbs., ignited a run to the postseason. With the sophomore, Cramer, under center and defensive coordinator Joe Kroskie's zero tolerance hit men, the Leopards shut out Uniontown, Derry and rival Ringgold to finish second in the conference and qualify for the playoffs. Despite these strong defensive efforts, it was Belle Vernon Area who was shut out in the first round at home with a defeat to Moon, 35-0.



Shane Curran

The backfield of Jake Cramer, Jonathan Krepps, 6'1", 220 lbs., and Shane Curran, 6'0", 185 lbs., returned as starters for 2007, while guard and defensive tackle Jesse Gauden, 6'2", 255 lbs., anchored the trenches. Despite a deep senior class, BVA opened the campaign with four straight losses. With sights set on again making the playoffs, the Leopards exploded on their next five Keystone adversaries. In this roughshod run, Rood's squad outscored opponents 199 to 53. Another second place Keystone finish to the champion Mt. Pleasant Vikings earned BVA a home playoff game. Shane Curran led the rushing with 958 yards and 10 touchdowns. Cramer threw for 714 yards with six touchdowns and Joe Evans, 6'0", 170 lbs., topped the receivers with three touchdowns. Jacob Dudzinski, 5'10", 175 lbs., led the kick-off returns and punt returns with 488 yards and two touchdowns. As in 1999, 2000 and 2001, a red, silver and black nemesis ended the 2007 season, 5-5. Belle Vernon Area battled Bob Palko's West Allegheny Indians in a tight contest; however, a second half



**Coach Aaron Krepps and
Superintendent Stephen Russell**

blocked punt was the game's turning point, West Allegheny 38 and BVA 18.

Changes were thematic in the 2008 campaign. BVA was re-aligned from the perennially weak Keystone Conference to the competitive Big Seven Conference in Class AAA. The resurrection of old rivals was an exodus from winning ways. Despite opening the season with a two-game winning streak, a first since 2000, Coach Rood's team was routed by Chartiers Valley 62-0. This disaster

doomed the Leopards into the first of two three-game losing streaks. The highlight of this season on the brink was a spirited upset of Trinity, 14-6. Conference re-alignment and a losing season, 4-6, preceded change for the Leopard program with a changing of the guard at the head coaching position. Rood's overall record was 14 wins and 16 losses.

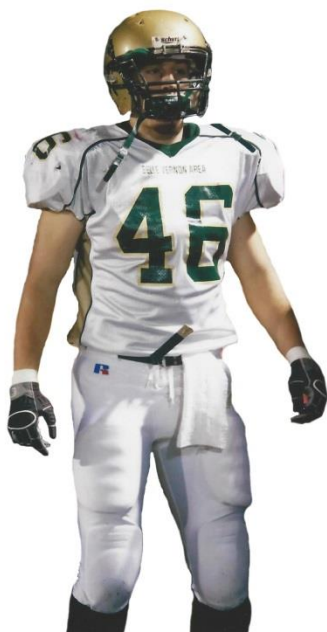
In 2009, former standout BVA athlete Aaron Krepps, 25, became BVA's lead mentor after Scott Bryer resigned the position following his election in January. Bryer chose to pursue a career in administration at Mt. Pleasant.



Matt Naylor

With his first class of Leopard gold and white, Krepps, a Washington and Jefferson graduate, brought explosive football to the Leopard den. At W & J he was a standout receiver as well as kick and punt returner. His BVA record for 2009 and 2010 ended up identical at a .500 pace (5 and 5). Coach Krepps explained that the talent and hard work would pay rich dividends with big play potential, "depending on what BVA team showed that evening. Execution and focus would determine the outcome."

In season 2009 the Leps had a deceiving 5-5 record. Coach Krepps said of his rookie campaign, "Three of our losses were by one point. We didn't finish games or put people away." One of those close defeats was at Uniontown, 21-20, in the first round of the WPIAL playoffs



Spencer Lynn

at Uniontown. The other one-point setbacks were at home to Greensburg-Salem 20-19 and West Mifflin 14-13 on successive Fridays in the fourth and fifth weeks. The Leps finished the regular 2009 season strong, winning three of their last four games with a strong defense led by team captains Spencer Lynn, 6'1", 210 lbs., Tyler Sellew, 6'3", 300 lbs., and Andrew Spate, 6'2", 275 lbs. The defeat was 26-20 at conference champion Thomas Jefferson. BVA's "mule" junior Matt Green, 6'0", 185 lbs., was good for more than 130 yards per game with rushing yards totaling 1,355. Green's play was spirited and memorable.

Belle Vernon Area became part of the Big Eight Conference in 2010 after the previous two years in the Big Seven. The loss of running back Matt Green with a leg injury in an August scrimmage was just one of many key player injuries suffered throughout the team's schedule. The season began with an exhibition loss to Hopewell 14-7 as BVA attempted to stop Hopewell's 4,000-yard rusher, Rushel Shell. He was held to 79 yards until breaking through on an 80-yard touchdown run. Through the season, the Leps moved the ball on the arm of 6'4", 230 lb. quarterback Matt Naylor, with 1,461 passing yards; to 5'10", 175 lb. Ian Dobbins, 32 catches for 754 yards; to 6'0", 205 lb. Jake Burritt, 22 catches for 420 yards known for his soft hands; the running of 6'0", 170 lb. Nick Gruber, 419 yards on 80 carries; and the injured 6-0, 200 lb. Matt Green, 582 yards on 116 carries. Fullback Nick Sewchek, 5'11", 200 lbs. had an eye for the hole and excelled at his intensity. Defense was the BVA trademark, big, fast, and sharp led by four-year starter Grant Curran, 5'11", 240 lbs., hard-nosed



Matt Green

linebacker and premier defensive man Adam Cole, 6'0", 210 lbs. with 76 tackles along with four forced fumbles, and Dylan Dominico, 6'0", 215 lbs. Other players who made All- Conference included 6'4", 215 lb. Michael Thayer; 5'11", 180 lb. Jim Roberts; and 5'10", 160 lb. Jake Campbell. Special teams were led by first-year varsity junior Zach Weight, 5'8", 165 lbs., who went 29 for 31 in extra points.

The last regular season game with perennial conference champ Thomas Jefferson held off a feisty Belle Vernon Area 14-13 to win the Big Eight Conference title. BVA once again lost a close playoff game to Indiana 42-38 by failing to make the big plays. With great defense in '09 and '10, BVA suffered on offense, special teams, and when it failed to block punts, recover fumbles, poor kick offs and an extra point block in the critical game with Thomas Jefferson losing by one point.

With Brandon Dilmore, 6'0", 195 lbs., quarterbacking the Leps in 2009, Matt Naylor threw only three passes as the backup. In 2010 Naylor became the single-season passing yardage record holder with 1,461 passing yards eclipsing Josh Cramer's 1,439 yards in 1999. Naylor had a deceiving 49 percent completion rate (75 of 153) with 14 touchdowns. Junior Ian Dobbins bested the single-season reception yards record set in 1998 by Jason Shawley of 603 yards with 754 yards.

The versatile (cornerback, receiver, quarterback) Ian Dobbins was named First-Team All-Conference and the team's Most Valuable Player by BVA coaches for 2010. Success was credited to his athleticism which allowed him to move like a cat especially in the Wildcat offense (wide open single-wing), a formation used sparingly but with effectiveness throughout the season. As a playmaker, Ian was splendid to watch especially his execution. "Ian is smart," Coach Krepps said, "and he understands the BVA offense and is an elusive runner. Ian qualified for the 100-yard sprint at the WPIAL track meet."



Corey Urlacher

Despite Matt Green's offensive accomplishments, including rushing for 2,326 yards, scoring 28 career touchdowns and recognition as one of the



Ian Dobbins

WPIAL's fastest runners winning the long jump both in his sophomore and senior years in both the WPIAL and PIAA, it was his hitting abilities as a safety that earned him an All-Conference First-Team defensive back in his senior season.

There was plenty of hope and optimism heading into the 2011 Belle Vernon Area Leopard football season, and while the team made the playoffs for the third time while under head coach Aaron Krepps, a combination of injuries to key players and the team being so young and inexperienced led to the team finishing with a record of four wins and six losses.

The bookend games, the opener on September 2nd at Hopewell, and the first round playoff loss at Franklin Regional on November 4th, summarized the season as a whole. In the opener at Hopewell, the Leps came away on the short end of the score with a 14-7 loss and in the WPIAL Class AAA first round playoff loss at Franklin Regional by a score of 28-14. In both contests, the Leopards played well for three quarters with the BVA defense playing impressive and inspired against the run. However, the team let possible victories slip away in the fourth quarter of both contests by giving



Jake Sweitzer holds the ball as Zach Weight kicks

up the big plays including a blocked punt, multiple fumbles on snap exchanges, and several dreaded turnovers. These plays caused the momentum to shift against the Leopards, and the young squad could not recover.

In both games, the Leopards faced a prolific running back. Hopewell's Rushel Shell, a 5'11" and 210-pound Pitt recruit, led the WPIAL in rushing with 2,312 yards and finished his scholastic career as

Pennsylvania's all-time leading rusher with 9,078 yards while Franklin Regional's Dane Brown, a 5'7" and 185-pound dynamo, finished third in the WPIAL in rushing with 1,907 yards. The Leopards would limit both star backs for three quarters and the defense was buffered with outstanding physical playmakers in seniors Adam Cole and Ian Dobbins along with juniors Corey Urlacher and Dorian Johnson, but Shell and Brown would make the difference for their respective teams in the fourth quarter of both games.



Adam Cole

In between the Hopewell and Franklin Regional contests, the Leopards won four of their eight contests.

BVA blew out McGuffey and South Park while winning a thrilling contest at Trinity, 27-26, and coming from two touchdowns down to beat Elizabeth Forward in the season finale to clinch their post-season berth.

In the other four contests, the Leopards had problems scoring as they were outscored by a combined 130-17 in losses to New Castle, West Mifflin, Thomas Jefferson, and Chartiers Valley. Several keys contributed to the four defeats including penalties, not being able to contain the passing game of the other schools, as well as the previously mentioned youth and inexperience. However, the biggest drawback for the Leopards came in the form of injuries to key players.

BVA saw so many injuries that they had to start five different offensive line combinations in their ten games and none of the linemen were seniors. 5'11" and 190-pound senior running back and safety Kevin McNeil missed the entire season with a leg injury while fellow senior wide receiver and defensive back Jake Burritt missed the playoff game with an MCL and meniscus injury. Another senior, quarterback Ian Dobbins, broke his throwing hand and while he made a successful move to running back, Dobbins' successor, 5'11" and 160-pound freshman quarterback Travis Snyder suffered a concussion and a leg injury which led to him missing four games. Senior linebacker Adam Cole missed several games with a MCL

knee injury, and 6'3" and 195-pound sophomore center Paul Rathway suffered a concussion that also kept him out for several weeks.

While the team did not finish the season how they had envisioned in camp, the team never gave up. The fact that the 2011 version of the Leopard football team made the playoffs was a testament to the heart and the will to face adversity head on.

Several players were named to the 2011 Big Eight Football All-Conference team and BVA was honored by linebacker Adam Cole's Conference defensive Most Valuable Player award. All-Conference First Team offense included 6'6" and 275-pound junior tackle Dorian Johnson, 5'11" and 180-pound senior back Ian Dobbins. The All-Conference First Team defense included Dorian Johnson at tackle and 6'1" and 215-pound senior



Jake Burritt

linebacker Adam Cole. The All-Conference Second Team Offense included 6'1" and 230-pound sophomore lineman Austin Fields, 6'1" and 215-pound wide receiver Jacob Burritt, and Adam Cole at fullback. Dobbins made the All-Conference Second Team defense at defensive back while 6'0" and 190-pound linebacker Corey Urlacher made All-Conference Honorable Mention. At the South Park game on October 7, Jake Burritt had an interception return for a 99-yard touchdown which ranks second in BVA school history behind Dave Bashada's 102-yard interception return versus Jeanette in 1978. Jake Burritt had 477 yards receiving on 28 catches for the year and Ian Dobbins clocked in with 940 yards rushing which

was good for tenth in the WPIAL Class AAA division.

Although Belle Vernon Area entered the 2012 season with a huge ace in senior offensive lineman Dorian Johnson, the Leps lost the majority of their offense from 2011 and several key leaders to graduation. Quarterback Travis Snyder, 6'0", 175 lbs., showed promise in running the offense especially in the game against Trinity but suffered injuries as the season

progressed and his once-promising season was cut short as he had season-ending surgery. Running back Anthony Levis, 5'8", 185 lbs., eclipsed 1,000 yards with 1,062 and 4 TD's. The defensive line improved as the season progressed. Surprisingly, the team ended the season as it did in 2011 with a 4-6 record.

Belle Vernon Area claimed a modest piece of history as the first-ever sixth-place team to qualify for the WPIAL Class AAA football playoffs. Because of the WPIAL's realignment in 2012, the top-five teams from each of three conferences in Class AAA and AAAA qualified for the postseason. That left one "wild card" opening in the 16-team field and BVA claimed a better conference record (4-5) than the other two sixth-place teams in Class AAA. According to Western Pennsylvania sports historian George Guido, the WPIAL has instituted wildcard teams twice before-in 2002 and 2003- but never has there been an instance of a team finishing lower than fourth and still making the playoffs until this year. BVA No. 14 seed was pitted against No. 3 seed Central Valley (7-2). The Leps have never beaten a team from Beaver County in the playoffs.

Central Valley's Elliott Taylor kicked a 22-yard field goal with seven seconds left to provide the deciding points, as No.3 Warriors (8-2) escaped with a narrow win against the No. 14 seeded Leopards (4-6) 17-16. Belle Vernon's Anthony Levis scored twice on a pair of 3-yard runs. It was the ninth time since 2000 that Belle Vernon Area has lost in the first round of the WPIAL playoffs.



Dorian Johnson

The year belonged to Dorian Johnson, 6'6", 280 lbs., when every major recruiting service in the country listed him as one of the top rated players in the country, regardless of position. Dorian was named to the Pennsylvania roster for the annual Big 33 Classic – the 56th class. An All-Big Nine Conference selection, the BVA senior helped pave the way for a Leopards offense, by taking advantage of his stellar pass and run blocking, which averaged 28.2 points per game in its final five contests.

The scrimmage game before the home opener was costly for the Leopards with their star junior tailback Anthony Levis, 5'8, 200 lbs., sidelined for the season with a broken leg. The first game with Uniontown on August 30, at home, saw little of the BVA ground game with veteran junior quarterback Travis Snyder, 6'0, 185 lbs., using the passing game, 6 of 8 for 142 yards, successfully with a WPIAL high five touchdowns. Snyder was named Player of the Week by *The Valley Independent*. Three TD's went to senior WR Cody Menges, 6'0, 170 lbs.; two were to senior TE Jake Sweitzer, 6'4, 235 lbs. Despite a 127-yard game-high rushing performance by Uniontown's Doug Lewis, the Leps held Uniontown scoreless until Coach Aaron Krepps went to his bench with a 41-0 lead in the third quarter. The final score was 48-20 in a Big Nine Conference win. Snyder, who was BVA's starting quarterback for the majority of last season until suffering a season-ending injury, finished with eight touchdown passes.



Anthony Levis

Belle Vernon Area visited West Mifflin on September 6 and held the Titans even through the first half. The final score of 41-6 West Mifflin was in no way indicative of how the game was played. In fact, BVA had the better play during the first half. West Mifflin's 5'9", 170-lb. senior running back Jimmy Wheeler, the Big 9 Conference Offensive Player of the year with 2,616 yards and 37 touchdowns, was held to 189 yards and three touchdowns. He was shut down most of the game while other Titan players provided big plays.

The 30th meeting of river rivals BVA and Ringgold was played at the Weir on September 13. The Ringgold Rams under, Future BVA head coach, Matt Humbert would emerge victorious 42-21. The Rams came out strong with the running and passing of their junior quarterback Nico Law, 5'10", 185 lbs., who finished with 16 carries for 220 yards and two touchdowns rushing and hit on 14 of 24 passes for 221 yards with three touchdowns. As a *Post-Gazette* Fabulous 22 selection for 2013 Nico would site this game as his most memorable. Much was made of the quarterback battle between



Derrek Verkleeren

Ringgold's Law and BVA's Snyder. The pair didn't disappoint. Snyder finished with 256 yards passing, hitting on 15 of 33 attempts. Snyder scored three of BVA's touchdowns on passes, but after injuring his knee in the second quarter, Snyder had three interceptions in the second half. And for the second straight year, Snyder, the talented signal caller, saw his season end due in part to a knee injury.

At Elizabeth Forward the Leps would again have a strong opening half scoring all their points the first quarter. Derek Verkleeren, 5'10", 150 lbs., was impressive and featured on Pittsburgh TV highlights for his 85-yard return of the opening kickoff for a touchdown. Freshman quarterback Mike Fine, 6'

1" 200 lbs., making his first career start, then scored a 1-yard run to increase the lead to 13-0. Fine would finish the game 12 of 21 for 120 yards and one interception, but the BVA offense sputtered for much of the way. The score ended 35-13 with the electrifying tandem of EF's senior wide receiver Matt Bernadowski, 6'2" 180 lbs., who scored on an 89-yard kickoff return, 45-yard punt return, 41-yard run and 10-yard reception from the QB. Coach Krepps reflected, "This is the third week in a row that we've collapsed in the second half. We lose focus and shut down. But you can't deny those two guys are tough to stop."

A nonconference game with Franklin Regional showed a battered BVA squad loss 35-0. Fortunately BVA bounced back the next week against Trinity 28-0. Menges caught four passes for 109 yards and two touchdowns and ran for another score for BVA. "We have to continue getting the ball in Cody's hands; he is a big playmaker," Coach Krepps said. Verkleeren ran for 166 yards on 18 carries and sophomore Cameron Quinto, 5'8", 145lbs., returned an interception 30 yards for a Belle Vernon touchdown. QB Mike Fine threw for 157 yards completing 8 of 17 passes. Seniors Aaron McCullough,



Austin Fields

6'0", 220 lbs., Austin Fields, 6'1", 250 lbs., and juniors Jeremy Indof, 5'10", 205 lbs., Devin Hannan, 6'4", 235lbs., combined for five sacks on the night.

On October 11 Thomas Jefferson scored on their first three possessions and never looked back en route to a 35-0 mercy-rule Big Nine Conference victory over BVA that ran the Jaguars dominance over their Route 51 rival to 13 consecutive wins. But all TJ Coach Bill Cherpak's focus was how the BVA offensive line powered his team off the line of scrimmage for new BVA sensation sophomore tailback Luke Durigon, 5'8", 150 lbs., to gain big chunks of yards totaling 132.

In BVA's win over Laurel Highlands 35-7, quarterback Mike Fine threw for 123 yards completing eight of 12 passes and three touchdowns, including two to Cody Menges, and ran for another score. Durigon added 128 rushing yards on 20 carries. The win clinched a playoff spot as a fifth placed team in the conference.

Krepps took his team to his fifth playoff game with a record of 4-5 and a 14th seed to a 3rd seed Central Valley 8-1 for a second straight year. With BVA once again overpowered 40-7 Krepps lamented, "When you lose your starting quarterback and your starting tailback and then your top receiver goes down right before the playoffs, it's never an advantage by any stretch of the imagination." QB Snyder had thrown for 1,502 yards since becoming a freshman starter, but injuries plagued his career.

BVA bright spots were Menges who finished the year as the leading receiver and scorer, 22 receptions, 517 yards, and 11 TD's. Fine threw for over 500 yards and a crew of running backs by committee that included Durigon, Verkleeren, and Taylor combined to rush for over 800 yards. It is rare for a player to make first team on both offense and defense but Austin Fields as a guard and defensive lineman received that honor from the conference coaches of the Big 9. Jake Sweitzer made first team as a tight end. Sweitzer caught 18 passes for 255 yards and scored three touchdowns. Second team selections for BVA included Hannan (tackle, defensive line), Menges (wide receiver) and McCullough (defensive line). Receiving honorable mention were Verkleeren and McCullough (guard).



Coach Matt Humbert

On November 14, 2013 Krepps stepped down from his position with a win loss record of 22-28 in five seasons. The 2002 BVA alumnus expressed the honor in coaching at his alma mater. His tenure at BVA was marked by numerous injuries to key players as he lost leaders in four of the five seasons he coached. "I think my biggest disappointment was not winning a playoff game," Krepps reflected. He was a very young head coach on the AAA level when BVA hired him at age 25.

In March, 2014, after interviewing seven candidates for the head football coaching position, the Belle Vernon Area School Board selected Ringgold High School head coach Matt Humbert. Superintendent Dr. John Wilkinson research into Humbert's reputation as a coach as well as his teaching credentials prompted him to also hire Humbert as a social studies teacher. Humbert had compiled a 30-13 record at Ringgold, including two games as interim head coach before he was hired there in June 2010. Humbert acknowledged, "It's such a bittersweet feeling, but it's a great opportunity and challenge to try and build something up here."

BVA won its last three games over Albert Gallatin, Laurel Highlands and Elizabeth Forward and was playing its best football at season's end. With early season losses to powerhouse Thomas Jefferson, Hollidaysburg, West Mifflin, and Ringgold, BVA was an 11th seeded playoff contender against Franklin Regional. It was the first time since 2007 the Leps have won three successive games and the first time they finished with five conference wins since 2010. BVA developed a potent attack offensively behind a wildcat offense that featured one of several players of varying talents. Players of varying talents included quarterbacks senior Travis Snyder (6'0, 185 lbs.), and sophomore Mike Fine (6'1", 215 lbs.), along with Luke Durigon (5'8", 150 lbs.) with 506 yards, two TD's and senior tailback Anthony Levis (5'8", 200 lbs.) with 594 yards, 8 TD's. Coach Humbert said of Levis, "a big back who can break a big run especially when methodically getting three yards." During the last three games BVA had scored 133 points. Defensively the Leps allowed only 25 points in those three games with a pair of huge tackles in senior Devin Hannan (6'4", 277 lbs.) and junior Nick Sweitzer



Philip Taylor

(also 6'4", 277 lbs.) leading. The Leopards finished fourth in the Big 9 and averaged 31 points per game and allowed 17.

BVA (5-4) met Franklin Regional (6-3) on Friday, October 31 at Franklin Regional. The home team, a perennial WPIAL playoff team, faced BVA attempting its first playoff win since 2000 when it rolled over Hampton, 39-8. It was not to be once again as BVA lost its 11th consecutive playoff game, 20-0. Each time BVA threatened, Franklin Regional made a defensive play to stop the drive. Belle Vernon ran the wildcat as did Franklin Regional (7-3) and inserted five different players in the quarterback position. Snyder led the Leopards with 47 yards rushing and completed eight of 20

passes for 89 yards. BVA (5-5) was held to 205 yards in total offense.

Junior defensive back Philip Taylor (5'10", 170 lbs.) had three interceptions for Belle Vernon.

Humbert lamented that his team was lacking in some basic situations throughout the year and he was concerned about committing penalties.

"We could very well have been 7-1 in conference play, and that is my fault.

We played some tough teams really close in games that we could have and should have won. I feel like I let three wins slip through our fingertips. I

would give this season a C-plus grade. One player we can't replace next year is offensive tackle Devin Hannan. He is a one-in-a-million player. That will be a hole we will look at closely."

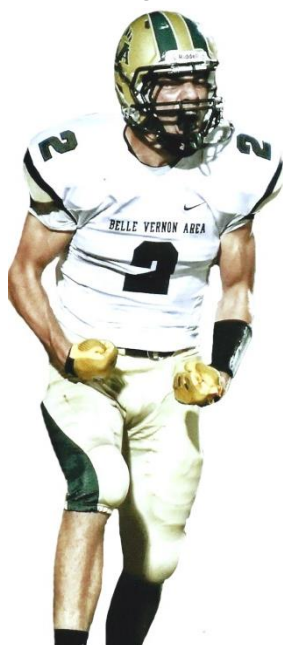


Devin Hannan

Big Nine Conference honors were awarded to five BVA players on First Team including senior Devin Hannan (OL/DL), senior Marcel McCaskill (all-purpose), junior Derek Verkleeren ((K), senior Jeremy Indof (LB) and junior Phil Taylor (DB). Hannan was the lone area player to receive two-way first team status. McCaskill caught 15 passes for 249 yards and 4 TDs and rushed for 89 yards. Verkleeren scored 4 TDs while kicking 33 extra points and one field goal. BVA's second team selections included

Taylor (WR), sophomore Ben Cole (LB), junior Luke Durigon (DB) and sophomore Tim Labuda (P). Taylor grabbed a team leading 22 passes for 277 yards and 4 TDs. Honorable mention included juniors Nick Sweitzer on defense and junior Verkleeren on offense. Devin Hannan was named to the Big 33 Football Classic June 20, 2015 in Hershey.

The 2015 fiftieth edition of Belle Vernon Area Leopards started with some major changes to the Weir including new Vegas gold turf, the first of its kind east of Mississippi River. Other improvements made to the field included new lights, new scoreboard and a new sound system. The Leopards



Noah Bukowski

finished the regular season unbeaten for the first time since 2000 and won its first section championship since 2002. BVA had a 12-game playoff losing streak to overcome in 2015. The BVA team knew perennial favorite Thomas Jefferson would be difficult to knock off their first place hold on the conference which they owned for the last decade and more. West Mifflin and Ringgold would be tough as well. Coach Matt Humbert was overwhelmed by winning the Big 10 conference title and credited it to “coachable kids and coaches invested.” The Leopards became a contender for the number 1 seed in the WPIAL playoffs with West Allegheny’s loss to Central Valley in their last regular season game. The Leopards were the lone unbeaten team in Class AAA and had the top ranked scoring defense (6.3ppg). The Leps allowed only 57

regular conference points, third-best mark in the WPIAL. Parlay that with an offense that managed to cross the 40-point barrier four times during the regular season. The Leopards unveiled new uniforms for this championship season.

Coach Humbert in his second season came into a situation the previous year where he had to change the attitudes of the players, change their preparation tactics and, this year, the stadium and uniforms got a makeover. The top returnees for the season were senior tailback Luke Durigon, 5’ 8”, 166 lbs., (1,257 yards in two years on 177 carries), senior wide receiver Phil Taylor 6’ 2”, 170 lbs., (11 catches for 83 yards in 2014)

and senior wide receiver/kicker Derek Verkleeren, 5' 10", 152 lbs., (31 catches in two years for 451 yards). Tackle Nick Sweitzer, 6' 5", 290 lbs., a Division 1 recruit, was the top returning lineman. Junior quarterback Mike Fine, 6' 1", 220 lbs., was more successful running the ball than passing it (55 of 107 passes for 769 yards over the past two seasons).

Defensive coordinator Brett Berish, BVA alum himself, credited the outstanding defense spearheaded by senior lineman Mike Semancik, 6' 1", 215 lbs., Trevor Gush, 6' 1", 230 lbs., Naquwan Dixon, 5' 9", 250 lbs., and linebacker Noah Bukowski, 6'1", 195 lbs., a KDKA-TV Extra Effort award winner during the season. *Valley Independent* sports editor Jeff Oliver called the Lep's defense "one of the best in the Big 10 conference."

"Defense wins championships with some special teams sprinkled in," said Humbert after a win over Ringgold 13 to 12, when a late blocked punt set up the winning score. BVA trailing 12-6 with six minutes remaining, BVA



Luke Durigon

senior Derek Verkleeren blocked a punt at the Rams' 8-yard line. Three plays later quarterback Mike Fine sliced into the end zone from 4-yards out to give the Leopards the go-ahead score. BVA was able to convert a fumble and a blocked punt into a pair of touchdowns for the win.

Humbert had concerns when the offense sputtered even though there were high scoring blow out games. Humbert earned a reputation with a keen offensive mind. Lightning rod for offense Luke Durigon garnered over 1,000 yards rushing for the regular season (1,044) even through games with sub-par performance. Durigon had 15 TD's and was named *The Valley Independent* Player of the Week September 29. "He is a quick runner," Humbert said, "His shiftiness and vertical/lateral elusiveness help make him a quality running back and he fits well into no-huddle schemes." Durigon also received front page billing in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* on October 10 after a key win over Ringgold. Durigon following BVA's 21-7 win over West Mifflin on October 2 said "My play and my heart is a mirror-image of this team. We're a family," after

running 197 yards on 26 carries in the game. Quarterback Mike Fine had 11 TD's for the regular season.

The early season contest against Thomas Jefferson was a test of the Leopard's mantle. BVA overcame a 17-point halftime deficit and rallied to defeat the Jaguars, 31-24 in overtime. Fine and Durigon had another big game but it was junior fullback Ben Cole's, 6' 2", 205 lbs., only carry-for one yard-that put BVA on top in overtime. This was BVA's first win over Thomas Jefferson since 2000 and snapped a 58-game home winning streak for the Jaguars. After starting the season 0-2, the Jaguars would go on to win the 2015 WPIAL Title.



Mike Semancik

Future statistical leader junior Nick Hall, 5'10", 175 lbs., played back up to Durigon. Hall had impressive games against Uniontown with 121 rushing yards and two touchdowns and intercepted an Albert Gallatin pass and returned it 65 yards for a touchdown.

The No. 1 seed in AAA did not go to BVA. Instead, it went to defending champion Central Valley (8-1), the 2014 champions of the Parkway Conference. As the second seed BVA drew wild card team Chartiers Valley Colts (4-5) from the Parkway.

For the first time in 15 seasons BVA was able to ring the victory bell Friday, November 6 following a win over the Colts 36-7 in the first-round of the playoffs. The undefeated Leps scored 5 touchdowns against the Colts. Fine rushed for 95 yards on 13 carries and scored two touchdowns. Verkleeren returned a kickoff 77 yards for a score and also caught a 5-yard touchdown pass from Fine. Mike Semancik returned an interception to the 1 yard line and collected three sacks. Following Semancik's interception, Ben Cole scored yet again for BVA. BVA's leading rusher, Luke Durigon, finished with



Nick Hall



Nick Sweitzer

48 yards on 15 carries. The Colts came out passing and outgained BVA, 405-316, but the Leps defense clapped down when needed. Coach Humbert acknowledged the defense gave up much yardage but stepped up and made key plays when necessary. Coach Humbert was honored two days later at Heinz Field as the Steelers High School Coach of the Week with a plaque and recognition at the Steeler-Raiders game, on November 8.

The Leopards thus advanced to the WPIAL quarterfinals with a game at Norwin High School, November 13, against No. 7 seeded Franklin Regional (8-2) a perennial playoff power that ended BVA's season the year previous 20-7.

Big and powerful, Franklin Regional in cold, windy conditions upended the Leopards with their power-running game 28-7. BVA went through a season without any letdown game while the Panthers experienced it twice. The BVA nemesis outgained the Leps 298-133, 264-70 on the ground. It was an uncommon stat line for BVA this year.



Mike Fine

BVA surrendered just 64 points over its first 10 games. Uncommon as well were three interceptions by quarterback Mike Fine who finished 5 of 16 for 71 yards through the air and had 50 yards on 16 carries. BVA tied the game for halftime when quarterback Mike Fine hit junior Timmy Labuda, 6'1", 170 lbs., with a 14-yard touchdown.

Big Ten 2015 All Conference honors went to 15 BVA players. This included eight First Team BVA players including Mike Semancik (DL), Noah Bukowski (LB), Phil Taylor (DB), Ben Cole (LB), Nick Sweitzer (OL), Trevor Gush (OL), Luke Durigon (RB), and Derek Verkleeren (K).

There were six Second Team players including Naquwan Dixon (DL), Jake Powell (DB), Mike Fine (QB), Jake Herron (OL), Noah Bukowski (TE), and Tim Labuda (Punter), and four BVA players received honorable mention,

Collin Johnston (LB), Tim Labuda (WR), Phil Taylor (WR), and Alex Hillingham (OL). Additionally, Mike Fine and Nick Sweitzer were named to the *Tribune Review* TERRIFIC 25. Mike Fine passed for 400 yards and rushed for 708 with 13 TD's. Sweitzer was a dominating tackle who helped the team earn 2,647 rushing yards and was recruited to play for Georgetown. Durigon, with 1,101 yards for the conference champion, was also honored as a member of the *Post-Gazette* SOUTH FABULOUS 22.

Coach Matt Humbert expressed disappointment but expressed his appreciation for the pride brought back into the program. "No one predicted us to be where we are, to win the conference. This is the most resilient team I've ever been around and I'm extremely proud of them. They are a special bunch of players led by a special bunch of seniors."

Mark 'Cookie' Cook, devotee of BVA football describes the tradition as "a big part of the school and the community of the Belle Vernon Area. Leopard Football is about Tradition! The Leopards are not always the biggest, the strongest or the fastest, but Leopard players are hard-nosed about football. They play with grit; they play with pride, they play with enthusiasm; they play for the man next to him, and most importantly they play for the love of the game! As times goes by, new football players will don the Gold and White uniform and you will see and sense the Leopard Tradition under BVA's Friday night lights."



Trevor Gush



Cookie leads the 2010 Belle Vernon Area Leopards in their season opener, 9/3/2010

Now the mighty Leopards prepare for the future with new feats and championships to be won. Belle Vernon Area football is one of our community's most cherished traditions, and with their 2015 undefeated regular season, the team has been revitalized and the fans inspired for what the future holds. The Leopard Tradition is a thousand players strong and growing! The historical record for BVA is currently at 289 wins, 227 losses and six ties.

Author: Stephen V. Russell, BVA Superintendent (2008-2012)

Editor: Nicholas Gruber, BVA Class of 2011

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BELLE VERNON AREA FOOTBALL RECORD 1965-2015

YEAR	CONFERENCE	RANK	WINS	LOST	TIES	COACH
1965	BIG 8		5	4	0	RUSSELL
1966	BIG TEN		4	4	1	RUSSELL
1967	BIG TEN		4	5	0	RUSSELL
1968	BIG TEN		7	3	0	RUSSELL
1969	BIG TEN		5	4	0	FIELDS
1970	BIG TEN		2	7	0	FIELDS
1971	BIG TEN	2	7	2	1	FIELDS
1972	BIG TEN		4	5	0	FIELDS
1973	BIG TEN		1	8	0	FIELDS
1974	BIG TEN		4	5	0	FIELDS
1975	BIG TEN		2	7	0	PETRUCCI
1976	BIG TEN		8	2	0	PETRUCCI
1977	BIG TEN		6	4	0	PETRUCCI
1978	BIG TEN	CHAMP	11	1	0	PETRUCCI
1979	BIG TEN	CHAMP	8	2	1	PETRUCCI
1980	BIG NINE	CHAMP	11	1	0	PETRUCCI
1981	BIG NINE		5	5	0	MACHESKY
1982	BIG NINE		3	7	0	MACHESKY
1983	BIG NINE		1	9	0	MACHESKY
1984	BIG NINE		1	9	0	MACHESKY
1985	BIG NINE		5	4	0	CONNERS
1986	BIG TEN		7	3	1	CONNERS
1987	BIG TEN		7	3	0	CONNERS
1988	BIG NINE	CO- CHAMP	7	4	0	CONNERS
1989	BIG NINE	CHAMP	10	2	0	CONNERS
1990	KEYSTONE		0	9	1	CONNERS
1991	KEYSTONE		3	7	0	CONNERS
1992	BIG NINE		5	4	1	CONNERS
1993	BIG NINE		3	7	0	RUSCITTO
1994	KEYSTONE	CHAMP	10	2	0	DONGILLI
1995	KEYSTONE	CHAMP	12	2	0	DONGILLI
1996	KEYSTONE	CHAMP	11	1	0	DONGILLI
1997	KEYSTONE	CHAMP	8	2	0	DONGILLI
1998	KEYSTONE-BIG NINE	CO-CHAMP	8	2	0	DONGILLI
1999	KEYSTONE-BIG NINE	CHAMP	11	1	0	DONGILLI
2000	KEYSTONE	CHAMP	11	1	0	DONGILLI
2001	KEYSTONE	2nd	5	5	0	CRAMER
2002	KEYSTONE	CHAMP	7	3	0	CRAMER
2003	KEYSTONE	4th	3	7	0	CRAMER
2004	KEYSTONE	3rd	5	5	0	CRAMER
2005	KEYSTONE	6th	0	10	0	CRAMER
2006	KEYSTONE	3rd	5	5	0	ROOD
2007	KEYSTONE	2nd	5	5	0	ROOD
2008	BIG 7		4	6	0	ROOD
2009	BIG 7	3rd	5	5	0	KREPPS
2010	Big 8	2nd	5	5	0	KREPPS
2011	Big 8	4th	4	6	0	KREPPS
2012	Big 9	6th	4	6	0	KREPPS
2013	Big 9	5th	4	6	0	KREPPS
2014	Big 9	4th	5	5	0	HUMBERT
2015	Big 10	CHAMP	10	1	0	HUMBERT
		TOTAL	289	227	6	