

FOOTBALL

# Father and Son Combine To Lift Don Bosco to Top Harlem

By GRANT GLICKSON

From the time he could walk, Brian Toal was in prep school locker rooms, observing two-a-day practices, attending football summer camps and cheering Greg Toal — his father and favorite coach — and his two older brothers to state football titles in New Jersey.

"When I was younger, I just admired them," he said. "I would go to all their games and learn about football. I always thought that I would play high school football for my dad at either Hackensack or Ramapo High School."

Mike, Brian's oldest brother, helped Hackensack to two of their father's five Group IV state championships, in 1995 and 1996. With Greg Toal serving as an assistant coach at Ramapo, Greg Jr. teamed with Chris Simms to win the North Jersey, Group 3 title in 1997. Mike, 24, played safety at William and Mary in Williamsburg, Va., and Greg, 23, is the starting fullback at Boston College.

Then their father took a head-coaching job at Don Bosco Prep in Ramsey, N.J. "When my dad first talked to me about going to Don Bosco, I wasn't real excited about it," Brian said. "I grew up not even liking Catholic schools. It wasn't my idea of playing high school football. But I've seen my brothers play for my dad, and I kind of left it up to them to make the decision for me, because they had been through it and they knew what it was like to play for my dad. I had to trust them. It kind of worked out good for me."

A punishing running back and a hard-hitting linebacker, Brian Toal is one of the best two-way high school football players to play in New Jersey. An 18-year-old senior, he is the state's No. 1 recruit. He has narrowed his Division I-A offers to eight colleges: Boston College, Miami, Michigan, Nebraska, Penn State, Oregon, Tennessee and Virginia Tech.

Greg Toal, a tailback at Virginia Tech in the early 1970's, has continued his winning ways at Don Bosco Prep. Toal (173-32-2) won his eighth state championship last season. He has led three high schools — River Dell, in Oradell, N.J.; Hackensack; and Don Bosco — to 10 league titles, 8 state championships and 5 undefeated seasons. He is a five-time coach of the year in Bergen County and was the New Jersey coach of the year in 1996.

Don Bosco Prep, which had not won a state title in more than a decade before the Toals arrived, is now favorably compared to the state's dominant teams. The Ironmen (8-0), winners of 21 consecutive games, have outscored their opponents by 450-60 this season, including routs of St. Joseph-Montvale and Hackensack, perennial powerhouses. USA Today rates Don Bosco as the top team in the East and the No. 2 team in the nation. Don Bosco will play St. Peter's Prep (10-0), the state's No. 2 team, in the Parochial Group 4 semifinals today.

"Brian Toal makes such a difference on that team," said Tony Karcich, the St. Joseph-Montvale coach and the career leader in victories (241-51) in Bergen County. "He is the best two-way performer that I have ever seen."

At 6 feet 2 inches and 225 pounds, Toal is a powerful runner who prefers to steamroll defenders rather than run around them. On defense, he uses his speed to wreak havoc on ballhandlers. He has 301 tackles and 30½ sacks as a four-year starter.

Despite all the fanfare for Brian Toal, Don Bosco Prep is not a one-man show. The Ironmen's explosive spread offense — which averages 56.2 points a game — features three talented players at skill positions. Toal shares the ball with his fellow seniors Mike Teel, a 6-4, 205-pound quarterback, and Marquis Liverpool, a 5-9, 180-pound receiver.

Toal, a three-year starter at tailback, has rushed for more than 3,000 yards and 54 touchdowns. Teel, who will attend Rutgers next year, has completed 177 of 481 passes for 3,405 yards, 46 touchdowns and 11 interceptions. Liverpool, who is sifting through Division I-A offers of his own, has caught 82 passes for 1,536 yards and 19 touchdowns. Don Bosco has been so dominant that it has punted only seven times this season and its defense has allowed only 7.5 points a game.

"Don Bosco Prep is one of the best and most well-coached teams that I have ever seen," said Mike Miello, who compiled a 178-89-3 record while winning five state titles at Hackensack and Ramapo in 23 years as head coach. Miello is now Rutgers's program coordinator. "I would be hard-pressed to say that anybody was any better than them in this modern era."



Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

st of the Harlem Hellfighters finally got Youth Football Fund offered a \$10,000 spring by Duke Ferguson, who played Bills in the late 1970's, has a 1-2 record.

They did reach the end zone, Brown hitting Raymondo Townsend with a 37-yard pass, although they were losing, 34-0, and there was only a minute and change to play.

The fans, knowing what it took to get that far, gave them a standing ovation.

The Hellfighters' record stands at 1-2 going into the last game of the makeshift season today, in another rich town, New Canaan, Conn. In any such matchup, Ferguson's players know what they are in for. They understand, at this point, that they are dependent on the kindness of strangers.

Two weeks ago, they were blasted by New Hyde Park, 64-0. What does the losing coach say to his opposite in such a moment? Duke Ferguson said thank you for the game, thank you for having us.