



DeWitt safety makes nice gesture one to remember

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By: **High School Sports** | September 19, 2014

DeWitt's victory over Mason was secure when Mason coach Jerry VanHavel called an official to the sideline when Mason, trailing, 25-3, got the ball with over a minute left.

"Hey, will you run across the field and let Rob Zimmerman know I have a student I want to get in the game," he said, referring to the DeWitt coach, "and tell his kids just don't hit him."

The player VanHavel sent into the game was Jay Granger, a junior with mild autism.

Granger has grown up playing on all of the athletic teams with the rest of the guys in his class, including VanHavel's son, Jarrett.

"My son and other kids on this team were assigned in early elementary school to be Jay's recess helper – to be sure they included him, help him with his coat, stuff like that," VanHavel said. "Supposedly the beneficiary from all of this was supposed to be Jay, but the beneficiary from that relationship has been my son and the other boys. My son thinks the world of Jay and absolutely loves him, and the other kids do, too."

Zimmerman agreed, and Granger lined up near the Mason sideline, opposite free safety Ben Zamiara.

"Hey, hey, hey, he's right here," VanHavel said to Zamiara. "Just be cool with him."

Zamiara nodded, and then had an idea.

"Why don't you guys throw him the ball?" Zamiara asked.

VanHavel thought that was a tremendous idea and agreed.

“Just let him catch it,” VanHavel said. “He won’t run away from you. Let him get 5 yards or so and just grab him.”

Zamiara had other ideas.

“No, I’m going to let him score,” he said. “Throw him the ball.”

Backup quarterback Brad Wilton took the snap from center and threw the ball to Granger, who caught it.

And Zamiara took it from there.

“When he caught it, I tried to make sure my teammates — some of our linemen aren’t the brightest — wouldn’t come in and have an adrenaline moment and try to smack him, so I kind of stopped them,” he said. “In doing that, I kind of blocked him from the sidelines. Then he just saw me and just went to where I kind of led him to, and he ran to the middle of the field and he was off from there.”

Yes, he was. Suddenly, Granger had a caravan of players from both teams following him into the end zone.

There was a pretty neat celebration in the end zone, and the players from DeWitt were celebrating as much as the players from Mason.

“He had the happiest look on his face ever,” Zamiara said. “That was one of the coolest parts — seeing his face after he scored. It was pretty special.”

VanHavel was floored by what Zamiara did, and he pulled him out of the handshake line to tell him so.

“Ben, you need to understand, if you guys go on and win the state championship in Ford Field this fall, I know that will be real special for you,” VanHavel said. “But what you did for Jay tonight, you did the same thing for him. That’s how you made Jay feel tonight.”

The best part of the story is Zamiara already knew that. This is a young man who is mature beyond his years.

“Football is definitely a competitive game, but there are times when you have to look past the score and realize what it means to a kid like that to have an opportunity like that,” Zamiara said. “He’s going to remember that for the rest of his life. So to be able to make something like that happen, I know our team was thrilled to be able to do it.”

Zimmerman had no idea Zamiara directed the entire thing, but he wasn't surprised by what the youngster had done.

"You look at him and you don't think he's a great player, but he's a heck of a high school football player," Zimmerman said. "He's only the second two-year captain I've had. He's the epitome of the representative of DeWitt that you want."

He's the epitome of the representative of the human race that you want.

"I can't stress enough Ben – it's on that kid," VanHavel said. "He's the one who told us to do. What a great kid!"

Zamiara is 5-feet-9, 165 pounds, and he is a terrific player. He made 20 tackles in last year's state championship game, in which he suffered a concussion.

He has a 4.15 grade-point average and scored a 34 on the ACT (36 is perfect). He is applying to Michigan, the University of Chicago, NYU and Michigan State.

He wants to major in business and political science but has no idea what he wants to do with the rest of his life.

"That's kind of the million-dollar question right now," he said. "I haven't really thought of the single job I would like to do, and I'm hoping in college I can explore. College is kind of for exploring and finding what your passion is, so hopefully I can find something that I'm passionate about and something that can change the world for the better and roll with that."

I have a suggestion: President of the United States.

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