

In toughest times, Brittingham proves worth

By Todd Zolecki

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It took Woodland Hills just two plays to see that Jamar Brittingham did not fall like the other running backs it had faced this season.

It took Brittingham just two plays to see that the cold rain and the muddy field did not bother him at all.

"Once I broke that first one, I knew," he said.

On the second play from scrimmage in the PIAA Class AAAA state championship game at soggy Hersheypark Stadium on Dec. 8, Brittingham, a 6-foot-1, 190-pound running back from Neshaminy High, broke a 32-yard run to put the ball in Woodland Hills territory.

He was on his way.

Redskins fans had seen Brittingham, The Inquirer's football player of the year, run through defenses before. Now he heads the all-area team, which includes high schools from Southeastern Pennsylvania and South Jersey.

Woodland Park, which had entered the state final undefeated, had not seen anybody run through its defense like that all season.

That was why it was such a big play, worth much more than the 32 yards he gained.

"It gave us confidence," Neshaminy coach Mark Schmidt said. "Somebody told me that was the biggest run they had on

them in eight games. Nobody ran the ball on them all year. We did."

He did.

Brittingham, who made big plays out of the backfield all season for the Redskins, made his teammates believe on that first drive — even though the drive ended with a missed 32-yard field goal.

It helped them believe they could win the state title.

Woodland Hills had outscored its opponents before the title game by 47-115. It was coming off a 34-0 win over Altoona in the state semifinals.

Almost everybody expected the Wolverines to cruise to an easy victory.

Instead, Brittingham carried the ball 30 times for 157 yards with two touchdowns in the Redskins' 21-7 win. He caught four passes for 96 yards and completed one pass for 31 yards.

He stole the show.

"We were pretty confident going into that game, but maybe a few guys weren't too sure," Brittingham said. "After that first drive, we felt pretty good."

Neshaminy's victory still seems to upset the high school football followers in the western half of the state. Some western coaches recommended at a recent meeting that the state title games be moved to Altoona, where there is a field with an artificial surface. Their thinking? At least in part that the

muddy field at Hersheypark Stadium helped cause seven Woodland Hills fumbles (it recovered all seven).

Brittingham never fumbled, even though the Wolverines defense knew that he would be getting the ball on almost every play.

"I told him before the game, 'This is a power game. Let's not get cute. You've got to get after it. You've got to lower those shoulders and show them who's the boss,'" Schmidt said.

"I'm ready," replied Brittingham, who said he modeled himself after Dallas Cowboys running back Emmitt Smith.

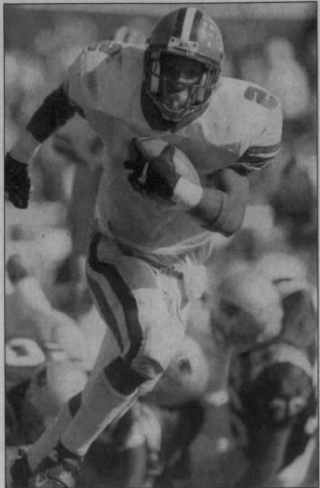
"Tuck it," Schmidt reminded him. "When you get up there, tuck it. It's going to be wet."

"Gotcha," Brittingham replied.

Brittingham carried the ball 364 times for 2,585 yards and 30 touchdowns this season. He lists Boston College, West Virginia, North Carolina, Pittsburgh and James Madison as his top five college choices.

Other schools have shown more interest after that state title game, which proved to almost everybody in the stands that he is the best player in the state.

And certainly the best player in Southeastern Pennsylvania and South Jersey.



SCOTT S. HAMRICK / Inquirer Suburban Staff

Neshaminy's Jamar Brittingham carried 364 times for 2,585 yards and 30 touchdowns this year and led the Redskins to the state title.

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