

Coach's son Lou Baechler lives for Canton football



Canton — Lou Baechler wasn't about to let a little ol' broken arm keep him from finishing his senior season.

After all, Baechler wanted to help No. 14 Canton (9-1) win the Kensington Lakes Activities Association championship, followed by a successful state playoff run.

Baechler, a 5-foot-10, 205-pound linebacker, is the son of longtime Canton head coach Tim Baechler and lives for Chiefs football.

"I broke my arm, but it's so sweet to come back," Lou Baechler said following Canton's 42-14 pre-district win over No. 15 Saline Friday night.

And, yes it sure was sweet for Baechler, who missed two games before returning for a Week No. 7 win over Howell (45-8), then helped Canton defeat Brighton (35-10) and earn a 35-21 victory over Livonia Churchill in the KLAA title game before getting in on 11 tackles against Saline, also returning an interception 45 yards to set the tempo with a 13-0 first-quarter lead.

“I love playing for my Dad, I love having him as a coach and I know he does a great job of turning the on and off switch from coach to father when we get home and I feel like it gives me an advantage when I can ask for film or know the scheme before we get to school on Monday and know what’s going on, it helps so much and he’s such a great coach,” Baechler said.

Lou grew up going to practices and watching games, helping out as a water boy, then in other ways, even playing his freshman year with his brother, Broc, as a senior on the team.

“Honestly, I remember being little and watching every game on the sidelines and thinking ‘I’m never going to be this old, it’s going to be forever,’ and now it’s here, almost over,” Lou said. “I was the water boy, I-pad boy, everything.

“I love Canton football. I’d die for them, all my boys. We always talk about being the toughest team in the state and I think that’s why we won (against Saline).”

Baechler thinks better wheels has been reason for his improvement.

“I think I definitely got faster, got stronger and I think my weakness was my speed where I ran a 5.2 or 5.1 (40) the last two years and now I’m running a 4.82 and gotten leaner, playing at 202 now instead of 220 like last year and I feel it’s paid off,” Baechler said.

Lou is one of the captains, a player who calls the signals.

“It’s easy to be a leader when you have such good kids on your team that listen to you and they all get the scheme,” Lou said. “Someone has to make the calls and I think I watch the most film so I think I’m that guy to make the calls.”

Tim Baechler is one of the top coaches in the state. He owns 207 career victories, including a record of 171-52 in 20 years at Canton, leading the Chiefs to a Division 1 state championship game appearance in 2005, a 31-21 loss to Rockford.

They advanced to the state semifinals two years ago and will carry a nine-game winning streak into Friday night's district final with Belleville — 10-0 and ranked No. 1 in The News Super 20 poll.

Canton knows what it takes to win in the playoffs, owning a 27-16 record in postseason play under Baechler.

"It's all in the expectations and I feel we do a great job of treating every single game like it's the Super Bowl so when we get into the playoffs we don't say, 'Oh, this is a special game and we have to do this now,' because every game is special and it's now just business as usual and we just have that expectation and that mindset," pointed out Baechler.

"Our offensive scheme and our defensive scheme is helpful too because not many people run what we run on offense and or defense so people don't see it a lot. I think we have a really good understanding with it and our kids believe in it and it's tough football."

Canton uses the full-house tight-T formation offensively and has averaged 44 points and 393 rushing yards during its nine-game winning streak, led by a pair of standout runners in junior Steven Walker (131 carries, 1,379 yards, 17 touchdowns) and senior Colin Troup (141-959, 12), along with senior quarterback Connor Engel who has completed 45-of-63 passes for 964 yards and 11 TDs.

And, Canton's defense?

"We're a 3-4 team and sometimes we slant and angle a little bit, sometimes we play help technique and some of the leads I have my linebackers doing are probably pretty unconventional and it's a pain in the butt to teach, but once they get it they find the ball," Baechler said.

Canton's defense is anchored by Lou Baechler.

"He's incredibly strong, a weight room freak and he's worked so hard on his speed," said Tim of his son who has offers from Concordia and Hope College. "He's deceiving quick and fast and super strong, and basically playing with one arm. He can't get off blocks very well except for his one arm and I'm just so proud of him.

"He's a great player, just gets it, but what makes him really special is he can get the pre-snap read, he makes all our checks and calls and then find that minute focus on his keys and he's never wrong.

"You just tell him once and he's got it."

So, how bad was his injury?

"He was playing in tremendous pain, but it's getting a little better," Baechler said. "He broke one of the two bones in his forearm, missed two games and has been playing with it for three games now. The problem is his thumb is sticking out in the cast, just got a new cast which is his fifth one.

When they took it off his thumb was huge, purple so he hurt his thumb which is a really bad sprain, but even if it was broken it wouldn't have kept him out.

"He was born a football player. We were always playing catch, always in the yard, always him and his brother tackling each other in the basement. "Being a little brother helped. Broc made him tough. This has been a lot of fun."

Saline head coach Joe Palka has high praise for Lou.

"You can tell he is a coach's son," Palka said. "He plays extremely hard and does not make mental mistakes. He is always in the right spot.

"He is like having another coach on the field for them."