

Sports Week

SPORTS BRIEFS

Dallas Rotary Club plans golf tourney

The 23rd annual charity golf classic sponsored by the Dallas Rotary Club to support Dallas Rotary Charities will be held Monday, Sept. 18 at the Irem Temple Country Club. The captain and crew event will begin with a shotgun start at 12:30 p.m.

The club is also looking for looking for hole sponsors, according to chairman Kevin Smith. There were 80 hole sponsors at last year's tournament and this year's goal is 100. Hole sponsorships are available for \$100. Each sponsor will receive a sign prominently displayed near a green or tee.

Individual and team registrations are being accepted. The entry fee is \$100 per person, which includes the greens fees, cart and a steak dinner. All proceeds will help charities such as the Back Mountain Library, the annual Christmas shopping spree for 45 underprivileged children, the Dallas and Lake-Lehman high school book scholarships and essay contests, the annual boys and girls leadership camps, the Luzerne County Fall Fair and the Back Mountain Food Pantry.

To register or for more information, call Smith at 696-5420. Sponsors must respond no later than Sept. 12 to allow enough time for signs to be printed. Players are urged to register as soon as possible.

Soccer boosters holding event

The Dallas High School boys Soccer Booster Club will hold its annual "Meet The Team" night from 7-8 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 31 at the high school soccer fields. Family members and friends are invited to attend. Guests are encouraged to bring a lawn chair. The monthly board meeting will be held at 6 p.m. in front of the high school.

Fall hoops league holding registration

Dallas Youth Basketball will hold registration for its boys fall league from 6-7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 30 at the W.W. Kubis Memorial Little League field on Church Street in Dallas.

The cost is \$30 and sessions will be held Monday and Wednesday nights from Sept. 6 through Oct. 18 at The Rock recreation center. The facility is located next to Back Mountain Harvest Assembly Church on Carverton Road in Trucksville.

Players in third, fourth, and fifth grades will practice from 6:30-7:45 p.m., while sixth, seventh, and eighth grade players will practice from 7:45-9 p.m. For more information, call George Gracely at 639-1467.

Softball tournament to benefit autism

The final day of a co-ed softball tournament being conducted by Lake-Lehman High School students Amanda Kotulski and Katlin Evans will be held Sunday, Aug. 20 at the Lake-Noxen Elementary School field and the Harveys Lake Little League field. The fields are across the street from each other on West Point Avenue in Harveys Lake. Games will be played most of the day.

Proceeds from the event will benefit Supporting Autism & Families Everywhere. Kotulski and Evans are organizing the tournament as part of their senior project to raise awareness of autism. There will also be a celebrity auction with memorabilia signed by celebrities in both the acting and sports arenas.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL



PHOTO COURTESY PITTSBURGH SPORTS INFORMATION

Former Dallas High School standout John Simonitis (60) is entering his fourth season as a starter at the University of Pittsburgh.

Ready for his curtain call

By DAVE KONOPKI
Post Editor

Simonitis hopes to make his final season at Pitt a great one



PHOTO COURTESY PITTSBURGH SPORTS INFORMATION

John Simonitis (60) is expected to be one of the top offensive linemen in the Big East Conference this season.

With his final season of college football – and a possible shot at the NFL – on the horizon, John Simonitis decided to make the most of the opportunity during the off-season.

"I really think this year will be my best year," said the Dallas High School graduate, who will begin his redshirt senior season at the University of Pittsburgh when the Panthers host Virginia on Sept. 2 at Heinz Field. "I'm stronger, bigger and faster than I've ever been. I really worked hard in the weight room during the off-season. I'm in the best shape of my life. I also have a lot of experience and I think that's going to play a big role."

The 6-foot-4, 316-pound Simonitis is one of the most experienced players for head coach Dave Wannstedt. The three-year starter at right guard has made a team-high 30 starts going into the season. The Panthers are coming off a disappointing year in Wannstedt's debut season as head coach. Pitt entered the 2005 season with high expectations, but struggled to a 5-6 record.

"Last year's seniors didn't provide a lot of leadership," said the 21-year-old son of John and Debbie Simonitis of Wyoming. "The coaches have been pushing this year's seniors during the spring and summer. I think I've become one of the leaders. I'm not a big talker on the field. I like to lead by example."

Simonitis says he made great strides during the spring and summer while working with offensive line coach Paul Dunn.

"I had a couple of problems with my game and I spent a lot of time looking at film," he said. "I had problems with my pad level and coming off the ball. I've been working on that a lot. I'm getting a lot lower and I'm quicker off the ball."

The former two-time all-state selection at Dallas is hoping his improved play can help translate into a better season for the Panthers. Last year's team ranked seventh of eight teams in rushing offense,

first downs and time of possession. It was also last in fourth-down conversions and rushing touchdowns. Highly-touted quarterback Tyler Palko was sacked 30 times.

"I feel this year's team is a lot more prepared than last year's team," said Simonitis, who is majoring in administration of justice. "This year, we're all on the same page. Our first goal is to beat Virginia on Sept. 2. That's what we're focused on right now. Obviously, we have a goal to win the Big East championship. But right now, we're concentrating on beating Virginia."

Simonitis has caught the attention of several college football magazines. He's a pre-season Big East second-team all-star selection in at least two publications and at least two Web sites have listed him among the best offensive guards in the nation.

"A lot of people have told me about it," said Simonitis, referring to the accolades. "I try to avoid thinking about it. A lot of times, players read all of those things and it starts to go to his head. I'm going to do the best job I can. I'd love to be a first-team Big East selection at the end of the season. And, who knows, maybe even an All-American."

He's also hoping for a shot to play in the National Football League. And at least one person with lots of first-hand experience in the league thinks Simonitis has the tools to play professional football.

"Coach Wannstedt (a former head coach with the Chicago Bears and Miami Dolphins) thinks I have a real good shot," he said. "He says it's up to me. He told me I have the talent to play in the NFL. It's a matter of wanting it badly enough and believing in myself. I'm going to have the best season I can and see where that takes me. I'd love to play in the NFL."

Simonitis says he's happy with the decision he made five years ago to attend Pitt. He's played in a Bowl Championship Series Game and several games on national TV.

"How can I not be happy?," he said. "I came into a major Division I program and I'm going to be a four-year starter. I'm also getting a very good education. I can't be disappointed."

From quarterback to defensive tackle – Suppon has grown at JMU

By DAVE KONOPKI
Post Editor



Suppon

The thought didn't remain in Chuck Suppon's head for too long. And in the end, his love of football and the opportunity to receive a quality education far outweighed his desire to be in the spotlight.

After throwing for a school record of almost 4,000 career yards at Dallas High School, Suppon went to James Madison University to play quarterback. After a short time, the coaches moved him to tight end. Then offensive tackle. And, finally, to defensive tackle two years ago.

All of that switching around – combined with a weight gain of more than 50 pounds – was difficult to take.

"It was tough," said Suppon, who is entering his redshirt senior season at Division I-AA James Madison. "There

were times when asked myself if I wanted to keep doing it. I was the starting quarterback in high school for four years and when I get to college, I'm not playing that position anymore. I kept changing positions and it was tough mentally. But I was on full scholarship and I didn't want to give it up. I also wanted to play. I just wanted to be on the field."

Suppon entered the Harrisonburg, Va. school with a 6-foot-5, 230-pound frame. That quickly changed.

"I lifted weights in high school, but it was so much different in college," he said. "When I started getting on their program, before I knew it I was 250 pounds, then 280. Right now, I'm about 290. The more I lifted weights, the bigger I got."

Although he's embraced his new position, Suppon sometimes longs for the chance to take snaps under center.

"I miss quarterback, it's hard not to," he said. "Switching over to defense was a big learning experience. I never played defense in high school. I went from get-

ting hit as the quarterback to hitting the quarterback. There's a little more glory being the quarterback, but it's more fun to hit the quarterback."

Suppon is expected to play a key role for the Dukes on the defensive line this season. He has the combination of size and athleticism to be a top performer at his position, according to the JMU Web site. Suppon played in all 11 games last season, including six starts. He recorded four quarterback sacks and also returned an interception 33 yards for a touchdown.

"There's a lot more I can learn," said the 23-year-old sports management major. "I've only been playing the position for three years. Some of these guys have been playing defense all their lives. I'd like to add a little more muscle and work on my quickness and hand speed. But I've improved a lot physically and mentally."

Suppon was a member of the 2004 team that won a Division I-AA national championship.

"I was young, only a sophomore, and I was in and out of the starting lineup," he said. "But it was pretty cool to be part of it."

And Suppon says expectations are always high on the JMU campus.

"We go into every season hoping to win the national championship," he said. "We know that's not going to happen every year, but that's one of our goals. We've been looking real good this year. We lost some (key) people and we only have 15 seniors, but we all start. It would be disappointing if we didn't have a very good season."

If he continues to improve his game, Suppon says he might get an opportunity to play at the next level.

"Our defensive line coach (former Virginia Tech standout J.C. Price) played in the NFL and he told me that if I have a good season, I might get a shot. So, I'm going to take advantage of it. This isn't the situation I expected to be in when I left Dallas, but it might turn out to be for the best."