

Jay McGee on the upswing

By DON SAMUELSON

BROCKTON / Some people are an open book, wearing their heart fully exposed on their sleeve.

Jay McGee wasn't like that. The former Brockton High School star running back was an enigma which few people understood.

McGee graduated in 1982 from Brockton High, leaving a field full of heroics before going on to regrets and heartaches at the college level.

"Jay is one of the finest running backs in Brockton High School history, on a level with a Rudy Harris," said 21-year Brockton High football coach Armond Colombo. "McGee did everything he could have done on the field in a Brockton High School uniform, encompassing lightning speed, strength, agility and instinct."

The elusive McGee (5'7", 180-pounds) was a three-year starter with 67 career touchdowns and over 3500-yards rushing. In his junior and senior years, McGee led the state in scoring.

During his career, Brockton High

was 29-4, with three of the four defeats coming in the Division 1 Super Bowl.

Thus far, that's the bright side of McGee's career, but beneath, there are several myths which surface at the very mention of his name.

"I've heard many of the innuendoes, everything from flunking out of school (the University of Hawaii) to doing cocaine," McGee said. "I was a poor black kid whose formative years were spent growing up in the projects, having little family support."

His parents were divorced when he was in the second grade and football was a way out, a time to release frustrations.

"My idol was Tony Dorsett and I dreamed of winning the Heisman Trophy," McGee said. "Football provided an outlet from everyday life."

Nights were spent walking the streets outside of the projects as his family life was in a shambles.

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OILERS RUNNING BACK - Jay McGee of Brockton now does his running for the Randolph Oilers in the Eastern Football League. (Staff Photo by Carol Hardman)

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McGee was the only member in his entire family, including brother, Skip, sisters, Sharon and Victoria, to graduate high school.

"My own mother and father never saw me graduate, that hurt beyond words," McGee stated. "My Mom (Charlene) saw me in two home Thanksgiving Day games, but Dad never came once."

Saturday's hero was living a nightmare the remainder of the week.

"We were on welfare, sometimes living without electricity," McGee said.

Some evenings, McGee would wander the streets of Brockton not knowing where he would sleep.

"Most people go home; I didn't have one to go to," McGee said.

Home for McGee was the athletic fields, playing soccer, basketball and baseball at West Junior High.

However, it was on the football field where people began to take notice of the talented athlete, as McGee played for Howard Johnson's in grades 6-8 and the team went 18-0.

"Jay caught my eye when he was 11-years old; this kid was special," said Howard Johnson's coach Nick Zibelli, who's a sportscaster for WBET and a manager at Sargents Supply.

"Jay was the most enjoyable high school back to watch in the past 15 years, a pure runner, relying on speed, balance and instinct. He never had that bruising back in front of him."

McGee and Zibelli became good friends and he credits his former coach for helping him get by.

"The day Jay left for Hawaii, I cried," Zibelli said.

Hawaii was a chance to escape the streets of Brockton, where he had

been a star, but not without problems.

By his own admission, during the track season of his sophomore year, McGee was caught smoking pot outside the Brockton High yellow cafeteria with five other students.

McGee was given a three day-school suspension and removed from the track team, where he was a standout sprinter and jumper, for the second half of the season.

"I've always felt that incident caused a used Coach Colombo embarrassment toward the football team and may have strained relationships between us," McGee stated.

These days, McGee visits with Colombo before the start of double-sessions each year and stops by before the Thanksgiving Day game.

"I still have a tremendous amount of interest in the Brockton High School football program, seeing as many games as possible," McGee said.

When McGee's career was over at Brockton High, he was contacted by several schools, including Michigan, Iowa and Purdue.

"They all wanted to convert me to a receiver slot," McGee commented.

"I was a running back, pure and simple."

When Hawaii came along with a scholarship offer, McGee was off to the land of sunshine to join transplanted Brockton resident Rich Milano, who now plays for the New York Jets.

"Rich and I had attended grade school together, although he was two years older, we both played on the same Midget Football League team," McGee said.

Milano told the Hawaii coaching staff about McGee and Colombo showed them the films.

From the beginning, Colombo wasn't sold on Hawaii, believing it wasn't in McGee's best interests.

Boston College coach Jack Bicknell was very interested in McGee, but wanted him to attend a year of prep school.

"I advised Jay to attend Bridgton Academy in Maine, enabling him to improve upon his grades," Colombo said.

"We did for him what we would do for any student, the ultimate decision rests with the individual and his family."

McGee decided on Hawaii and during the preseason workouts, he pulled a hamstring and eventually lost his scholarship and returned home.

"I never flunked out of school," McGee stated. "I was far from home, confused, frustrated and missed my mother."

He would go back to Hawaii in the fall of 1983, working out with the football team and holding down a job, while going to school night and day.

With the around-the-clock schedule, McGee was attempting to reinstate his scholarship status.

Unfortunately for McGee, the final scholarship offer went to a Hawaii resident and he returned home with help from his grandmother, Martha Duarte.

When he got back to Brockton, McGee joined the Randolph Oilers of the Eastern Football League and began working at the J.M. Huber Company in Westwood.

While he's still playing football, McGee isn't chasing the dream anymore.

"I have no delusions of being spotted by anyone, a scout, a coach, etc," McGee said. "Friends tell me to attempt free-agent camps, open

tryouts and Arena Football. That's not reality."

Instead, he hopes to play for a couple of more years and help the Oilers to the championship that he never obtained in high school.

McGee's best year with the Oilers was in 1987 when he ran for 980-yards and 12 touchdowns as the Oilers finished with an 8-2 mark.

These days, McGee shares the running duties with Mike Wathe and Terry Branch for the 3-1 Oilers.

"Sometimes I feel I have two or three years left in me, but this could be it," McGee said. "Down deep, it's difficult walking away without ever having been on a championship team."

With the Oilers, McGee has found the home that he never had in Hawaii.

"When Jay initially came to us in 1986, we had players in front of him, but he accepted his role with dignity," said Randolph Oiler general manager Peter O'Kane. "I can't say enough about Jay as a person. He is a team player and leader."

It's been a long journey for McGee, from the projects to Hawaii and then back home.

"I'm still a little shy, quiet, a loner at times but always easy going," McGee said. "Someday, I would enjoy coaching football. I believe I have something to offer."

With two years of college credits, McGee thinks seriously of returning to college for a degree, but it won't be through the football route again.

"A kid's head is easily turned by a college recruiter, who will promise anyone the world," McGee said. "It's vital that any student hit the books at every grade level."

That's a lesson that Jay McGee learned the hard way.