

HALL OF FAME TEAM AWARD



Members of Tyrone's 1999 PIAA Class AA championship team include. Front row, from left: Pat McNelis, Jamal Owens, Josh Lucas, Steve Johnson, Nate Verilla. Second row: Jason Crowell, Doug Roseberry, Mike McNelis, Larry Thompson, Jesse Jones, Eric Latchford, Tyler Beckwith, Scott Gummo, Dave McCahan, Brandon Hoover. Third row: Evan Klesius, Justin Moore, Tim Dry, Garrett Desch, Jon Medina, Mike Mueller, Tyler Mertiiff, Ben Johnson, Tony Lalli, Joe Lehner. Fourth row: Eric Sloss, Jerry Wilson, Byran Conrad, Mike Whitby, Clayton Ellenberger, Josh Taylor, Charles Otto, Chris Woomer, Jon Nye. Fifth row: Ron Shoenberger, Brad Tuskovich, Brian Moore, Tae Ayers, Brad Owlett, Jason Kurtz, Ryan Hildebrand, Adam Kobuck, Dan Miller. Back row: Heidi Banas Bloom, Tony Yaniello, John Meredith, John Gressler, Luke Rhoades, Craig Sechler, John Franco, Chuck Banas, Dan Bender, Rick Hatch, Darren Elvey, Al Shoenberger.

Blazing a trail of black and orange

1999 Golden Eagles made PIAA football history

By John Hartsock
Altoona Mirror

Scott Gummo and his wife, Caroline, welcomed their first child, a son, Maverick, into the world this past January 29.

The child's birth afforded the Gummos the most profound example of unconditional love.

"It's a pretty cool thing," Scott Gummo said about his role as a first-time father. "You don't know how much you love somebody until you have your own kid."

As thrilling as Gummo's new experience of fatherhood is, he has another life memory that ranks right up there with



John Franco leads a pep rally in Dec. 1999 prior to the PIAA championship game.

it. Gummo was a two-way starter at tackle for the Tyrone Area High School football team back at the turn of this century, and a valuable member of the 1999 Golden Eagles squad that won the PIAA Class AA state championship and is being enshrined into the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame as part of the 2012 induction class.

"Some of my best memories in my whole life are of being on the football field with my friends at practices and games," said Gummo, who was a two-time, first team all-state selection as a Tyrone defensive lineman after both the 1999 and 2000 seasons.



Jesse Jones broke a late touchdown run to clinch Tyrone's PIAA championship in 1999.

"We had a lot of great athletes at every position, and we had great chemistry — the players on that 1999 team got along with one another so well.

"To this day, we're all still great friends," added Gummo, also a former minor league baseball player in the Tampa Bay Rays organization who still lives in Tyrone and works in his family's State College clothing store. "We still call each other and hang out. Ten years out of high school, not too many people can still say that."

That Tyrone squad posted a perfect 15-0 record and became Blair County and District 6's only PIAA state football team champion to date. The Golden Eagles also reached the PIAA Class AA state championship game in 1996 and last season, 2011, but lost in

the title game those two seasons.

"It's a special thing," Gummo, now 29, said of winning a state title. "There isn't a day that goes by that I don't think about it, or that somebody doesn't come up and talk about the 1999 team. That team was Blair County's only state (football) champ and Tyrone's only state (football) champ. That team will always be remembered as something very special."

Jesse Jones was a star junior running back on the 1999 state championship squad. Jones, also a two-time all-state selection, rushed for almost 7,000 yards and scored more than 100 touchdowns in four seasons with the Golden Eagles.

Jones, who is now a self-employed remodeling contractor in

the Harrisburg area, also remembers the sense of team unity on the 1999 squad.

"There was a lot of camaraderie on that team, and we still hold that state championship close to our hearts," Jones said. "We were a very small school, and many people didn't think we could do it, but winning the state title gave us a very special feeling."

Starting quarterback Brandon Hoover, also a junior on the 1999 title team, watched the Golden Eagles rebound from a 6-0 halftime deficit to District 4 power Mount Carmel to post a 13-6 win in the state title game at Hersheypark Stadium.

Senior defensive end Tim Dry's runback of an intercepted pass produced the go-ahead TD in the third

quarter for Tyrone, and Jones tacked on a late fourth-quarter touchdown run to cement the victory.

"We turned it around in the second half," said Hoover, 29, who now works as a plant operator in the maintenance department at J.C. Blair Memorial Hospital in Huntingdon. "We didn't make any mistakes, we forced a turnover or two, and we were able to capitalize and win the game in the end."

Tyrone's fiery defensive coordinator at that time, the late John Meredith, gave an inspired speech to the team at halftime.

"Coach Meredith came into the locker room and told us that we weren't giving ourselves a chance to win," Hoover said. "He told us that we were better than what we had been playing, and to go out and play like we had been playing in our first 14 games that season."

The '99 Tyrone team — which beat Forest Hills in the District 6-AA championship game, bested Sharon in the quarterfinal round of the playoffs, and Waynesburg in the semifinal round — came out on a mission in the second half of the state championship game.

"It was just one of those things where we had 24 minutes to go and we let it all hang out," said Pat McNelis, 29, a senior starting guard and defensive tackle on the 1999 team who still lives in Tyrone and now works as a therapeutic staff support member in the Tyrone Area School District helping children and adolescents who suffer from behavioral disorders and autism.

McNelis' twin brother, Mike, was also an outstanding two-way lineman on the championship team.

"Jesse Jones was the complete package as a running back, and we had a lot of depth from the sophomore through senior classes," Pat McNelis said.

Until earlier this year, Tyrone's head football coach had been John Franco, who led the Golden Eagles to all three of their appearances in the Class AA state title game in his 18 seasons as their coach.

This past January, Franco — who is



Dave McCahan celebrates the Golden Eagles' title after beating Mount Carmel at Hersheypark Stadium.

already a member of the Pennsylvania State Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame — decided to become the head football coach at Altoona Area High School for the second time.

Franco remembers the 1999 Tyrone squad as one in which all the players and coaches worked together for a grand result.

"We had so many great players, great leadership, and great competitiveness," he said. "Somebody always stepped up when there was a big play to be made — whether it was on offense, defense or special teams. To beat an outstanding Mount Carmel team at Hershey Park was one of the special moments in Tyrone and Blair County high school football history, if not District 6 football history."

The 1999 Tyrone team earned a thrill that will last forever for each of its players and coaches.

"As a player, everybody wants to win a state championship," Hoover said.

"It's a great feeling that I'll remember for the rest of my life."

A perfect season

REGULAR SEASON

Tyrone 24, Bellwood-Antis 0
Tyrone 31, Huntingdon 8
Tyrone 41, Lewistown 7
Tyrone 50, Bellefonte 24
Tyrone 41, Bald Eagle Area 2
Tyrone 30, Central 6
Tyrone 49, Phillipsburg-Osceola 0
Tyrone 38, Indian Valley 7
Tyrone 62, Punxsutawney 6

DISTRICT 6 PLAYOFFS

Tyrone 58, United 13
Tyrone 42, Penns Valley 6
Tyrone 22, Forest Hills 8

PIAA PLAYOFFS

Tyrone 24, Sharon 7
Tyrone 17, Waynesburg 13

PIAA FINAL

Tyrone 13, Mount Carmel 6