

SPORTS

U of A's Male Athlete of the Month

by Eva Pendzich

Chicago Bears' Walter Payton, Dallas' Tony Dorsett, New Jersey's Herschel Walker and now Golden Bears' Jeff Funtasz - what is the common thread that links these players together?

They are all running backs who have taken the football world by storm. Payton, Dorsett and Walker excell in the professional ranks; while, on a smaller scale, the Western Intercollegiate Football League (WIFL), rookie runningback Jeff Funtasz dazzles them all.

In recognition of his talent Funtasz was named the University of Alberta's Sport Chek athlete of the month for October.

The 18-year-old freshman from ArchBishop O'Leary high school was stunned at the announcement.

"I was surprised, very surprised. It was so sudden and I did not think I was playing that well," said Funtasz. Modesty.

Currently, Funtasz is ranked second in the WIFL rushing statistics, having run for 556 yards on 111 carries for 5.0 yard average and seven touchdowns. Included in his rushing totals are three 100 yard plus games.

In the Bears' home opener against the UBC Thunderbirds, Funtasz scampered for 122 yards and scored the game's only touchdown. Facing the Saskatchewan Huskies, he scrambled for 136 yards and two touchdowns. Funtasz bolstered the Bears offense this past Saturday by dashing for 146 yards and two more TD's. He picked up his other two touchdowns against the Manitoba Bisons.

Winning is nothing new to Funtasz. In 1983 he was the recipient of the Haliburton Trophy - North Division for his outstanding achievements in high school football.

He played three impressive seasons with the O'Leary Spartans, one with the junior squad and two with the senior team. In 1983, he rushed for 1300 yards and 12 touchdowns on 137 carries for a 9.5 yard average. He also caught 18 passes for 309 yards, adding three more majors and 4 two-point converts; leading the Spartans in scoring with 98 points.

Funtasz's career total for his two senior years are 2,327 yards rushing on 239 carries for a 9.7 yard average, 30 receptions for 318 yards, 20 touchdowns and 4 two-point converts for 124 points.

His performance impressed Jim Donlevy, Golden Bears' head coach, and he was asked to attend this year's spring and summer football camps.

"We (the coaching staff) wanted to recruit him badly because a type of player like Jeff rarely comes around. He is a good all-round athlete; one of the best athletes to come out of our high school system since Sean Kehoe (former Bear and now runningback for Winnipeg Blue Bombers)," said Donlevy.

Funtasz won a starting spot with the Bears' and to date has surpassed Donlevy's initial expectations of his ability.

"We refer to him as a Paul Hornung (former Green Bay Packers great), it's a natural thing, he has 'Daylight Sense' (finding the hole)," said Donlevy.

"If Jeff is not nominated as a candidate for Rookie of the Year in our league, and for that matter in Canada, I do not know who can be," said Donlevy.

Funtasz sheds a different light on his experience of adapting to inter-

collegiate ball. He found the transition from high school football to university football tough at first.

"I was terribly nervous. The athletes are superior, and the competition is tougher. We (Spartans) were a powerhouse in high school football so I had to change my way of thinking from 'it's gonna be a piece of cake' to 'we can win, but it's gonna be tough.' Now it is getting to be a bit easier," said Funtasz.

He attributes his success to his older brother, whom he took up football for, and to Don Turlock, his high school football coach.

"My brother was a big influence; because of torn ligaments he was



not able to continue on in sports so I thought I should take over where he left off."

"My coach was also influential, he helped me a lot," said Funtasz. "He was more than a coach, he was my friend."

Funtasz, a first year science student, hopes to eventually be a medical lab researcher but would be more than willing to shelve it for a few years if he had a chance to play pro football.

"Education is important to me, but I would love to play pro ball. Ya, if there is a chance I'd take it, for sure," said Funtasz.

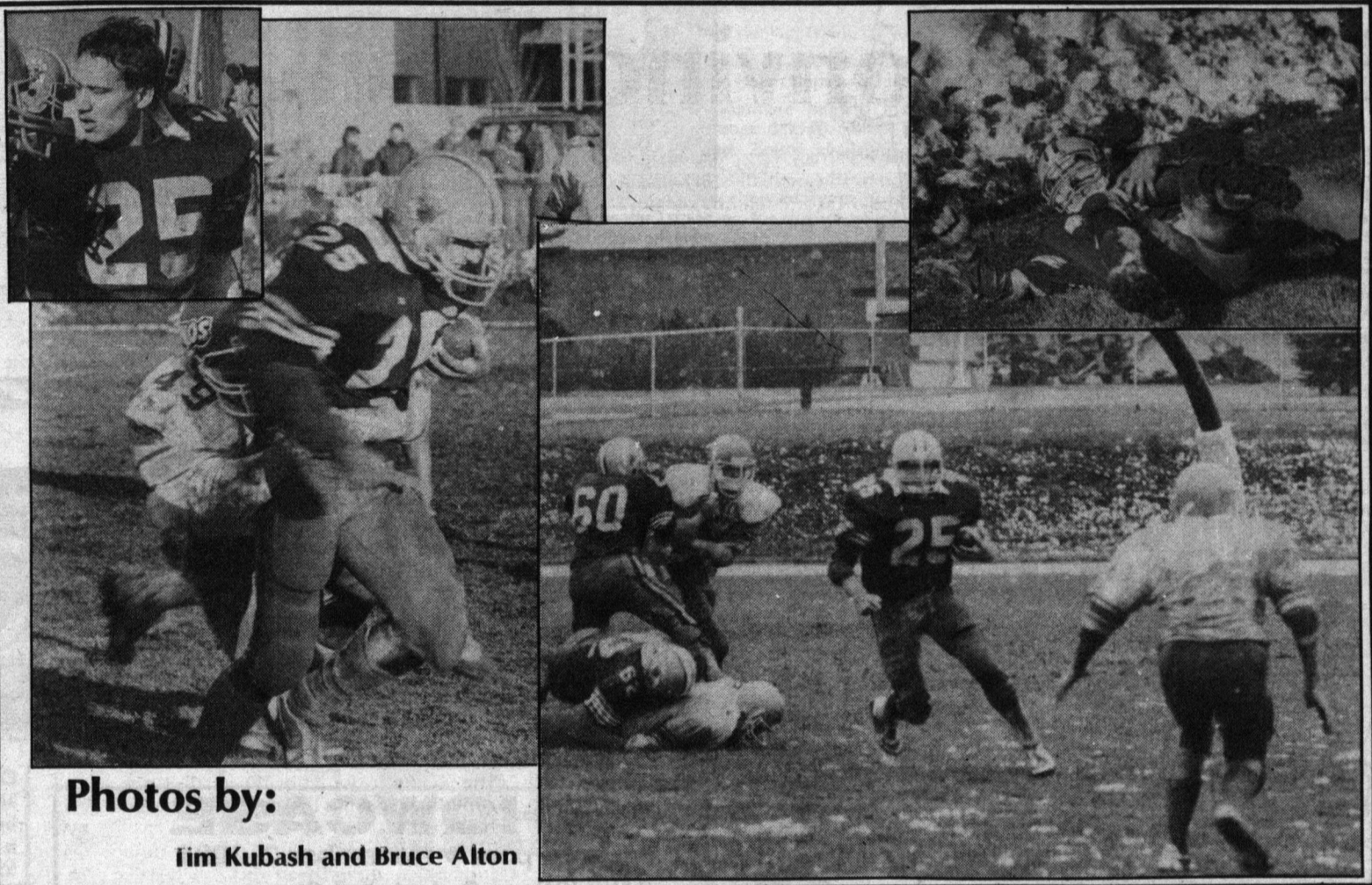
For Funtasz the draft is three years

down the road. His immediate goals are contributing towards the team's effort of finishing first in the WIFL and going on to win the Vanier Cup.

Balancing football, school work and a social life is no problem. The 5'11", 192 lb. runningback also runs, follows a Herschel Walker training program, and spends a few hours a week watching game films and going over plays.

As athlete of the month Funtasz receives a commemorative plaque from Sport Chek and \$50.00 will be donated in his name to the Canadian Cancer Society.

Impressive. Herschel would be proud.



Photos by:

Jim Kubash and Bruce Alton

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