

Williamsville South's Fuzak wins Trench Trophy

By Budd Bailey
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The Trench Trophy, the top local award in high school football for linemen, usually goes to a player who can be a dominating presence in games.

That sounds like this year's winner, senior Jake Fuzak of Williamsville South. At 6-foot-5 and 280 pounds, Fuzak has a game-changing combination of size, strength and quickness.

The award, which has been given out since 2003, was handed out at the Elks Lodge in Lancaster Thursday night. It went to Jamestown's Joe Mistretta last year. This is the first time that a player from Williamsville South has won this trophy.



Harry Scull Jr./Buffalo News
Trench Trophy winner Jake Fuzak from Williamsville South is joined by his coach, Kraig Kurzanski. Fuzak is the first player from Williamsville South to win the trophy.

"I was sitting there and my jaw just dropped," Fuzak said. "There's a lot of great linemen nominated and any one of them could have gotten it."

Fuzak has been playing football since the seventh grade. He already had attracted attention because of his play as a junior. Fuzak was picked as one of the top defensive players of the region, and was selected by USA Football to take part in the 2015 International Bowl in San Antonio, Texas.

The senior rarely left the field during the 2015 season. He was very good as a defensive end, where teams had trouble keeping away from him.

"His agility is outstanding," said Rick Coburn, a scout for the Trench Trophy committee. "He really moved down the field well in pursuit. Then he really wrapped up the ball-carrier."

"He almost did an alligator roll when making a tackle. He'd get two hands on the guy, and rip him backwards. It was almost like a full slam. He really finished the tackle by putting guys on the ground."

Fuzak also was very good as an offensive tackle. Coburn, who watched Fuzak play several times this season, said the Billies' standout did some of his best work against top-flight competition this season. That's certainly a good sign as he heads up to the next level of competition.

The two-way lineman received an offer from Connecticut, but decided to stick close to home and play for the University at Buffalo starting next fall. The question became - where should he line up on the line of scrimmage? Should he play with the offense or defense?

UB opted to recruit Fuzak as a defensive player.

“What I’m seeing now is that UB likes 6-7, 6-8 tackles,” Coburn said. “They aren’t sure if a 6-5 player can have that long stretch that makes a solid perimeter for the defender to get around.”

While Fuzak will get a long look at defensive end by the Bulls’ coaching staff, there’s nothing that says he’ll have to stay there. Perhaps Fuzak could wind up as an offensive guard before he’s done with his career at Amherst.

“I’m very excited to go to UB, they have a tremendous coaching staff; wherever they want to play me I’d be happy,” Fuzak said. “If they put me at kicker, I’d be fine with it.”

When Fuzak isn’t playing football, he suits up in a different uniform over the winter as he plays hockey. Needless to say, offensive players have to take a long route to get around Fuzak when they enter the opposing zone.

That sort of “cross-training” can be helpful to a football player, according to Coburn.

“He’s definitely showing his agility,” he said. “It gives you a different skill set. A lot of hockey players are explosive in their side-to-side moves in football.

“You can see the movement in his game - how quick he pursues, how he holds off blockers. He can just run guys down and grab them.”

Fuzak makes no apologies for being a multi-sport athlete.

“I was always a big hockey fan. If you had told me six or seven years ago that I’d be playing football, I’d just sit there and tie my skates,” he said.