

April 16, 2011

HERTZEL COLUMN: McCartney inspired by late brother

By Bob Hertzell
Times West Virginian

http://www.timeswv.com/wvu_sports/x7460791/HERTZEL-COLUMN-McCartney-inspired-by-late-brother

MORGANTOWN —The football floated softly through the Friday morning air, having left the hands of West Virginia University quarterback Geno Smith with a feathery touch. In the end zone, Smith's former high school teammate, Ivan McCartney, was being smothered by cornerback Avery Williams.

Two men, one football, suspended in the air as the two went skyward, each with a claim on the football.

... We interrupt this scene momentarily to go back in time, 21 hours back. The scene was a different one, the Jerry West Lounge within the Coliseum where a group of seven football players and a soccer player had gathered along with an audience of professors, advisors, media and even athletic director Oliver Luck.

It was the semi-annual presentation of inspiration talks, entitled "Student Athletes Speak Out," the highlight of a class by speech professor Dr. Carolyn P. Atkins that takes West Virginia athletes to Children's Hospital and local classrooms to tell inspiring stories to Morgantown's young people.

On this day Ivan McCartney had his feet firmly planted on the ground, for his was among the most poignant of tales for it told of brotherly love, a love that survives on despite the most unspeakable of tragedies.

First, let us take you away from the roar of the crowd and put McCartney in his natural habitat, which was inner city Miami, an area where the only sand covers crime scenes, where pina colodas are replaced by bottles of Ripple in brown paper bags.

This was the Miami McCartney knew in his youth.

"Some call it the cocaine capital of the world," McCarty told the group. "When I was about 11, my dad took me to choir practice. The church wasn't open, so we were waiting in his truck. Right in front of us we saw a drug bust taking place ... complete with a SWAT team and the FBI.

"It wasn't the first time I had witnessed that, but it was the most comprehensive I had ever seen."

McCartney even could recall what went through his mind at the moment.

"I remember thinking ... that is not the life I want," he said.

He got involved in sports, playing football in the street the way kids will, and it was obvious immediately that he had an abundance of natural talent, just as did his favorite player in the group, his older brother, Jarrett.

"Let me tell you about him," McCartney said, wearing a look of pride in his eyes. "Jarrett was the ultimate lady's man. He always had to look good, and he prided himself on his appearance.

"We had the typical sibling rivalry since he was only two years older than I, but when we played together, he made it fun."

It was a close, warm relationship.

But there were storm clouds in the Florida sky.

“When he was a sophomore, he and his friends were walking home from school,” McCartney said. “A rottweiler chased them, and when they all ran in different directions, my brother ran out into the street.”

A city bus was bearing down on him and could not stop. According to McCartney, his brother was knocked 20 feet away.

“He broke ribs, both legs, and his collarbone; in addition, he had a collapsed lung. He was in the hospital for 3 months and in a wheel chair for another 3 months,” McCartney said.

Time, they say, heals all wounds and according to McCartney, “Within a year, he was back on the streets playing football and chasing girls.”

It would be nice to end this tale here, but there is more. Jarrett went on to Tallahassee Community College, where he was accidentally shot and killed.

“He was cool, down to earth, a very smart kid, never got in trouble,” McCartney said of his brother following his speech. “He was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

The news of his death was devastating when it hit the family.

“We took it hard,” McCartney admitted, “but we were able to deal with his death because we knew he was in a better place. When people say they can’t believe he is gone, I say to myself, ‘They just don’t know that he never left.’”

Indeed, he is pushing McCartney on toward accomplishing his goals.

“He is always with me ... inspiring me to persevere and never give up ... like he never gave up after the bus accident,” he said. “I never give up no matter how bad things are. What he went through is way harder than what I went through, and if he could do it, I can get through this.”

... We return you now to the practice field, the ball coming down, Williams in perfect position, McCartney skying.

You probably know who came down with the football by now. It was dual possession, Ivan McCartney and his brother, Jarrett.

Email Bob Hertzal at bhertzal@hotmail.com.

- See more at: http://www.timeswv.com/wvu_sports/x7460791/HERTZEL-COLUMN-McCartney-inspired-by-late-brother#sthash.3k3HVsuSU.dpuf