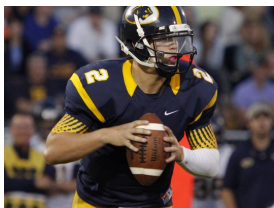


DeWitt's Johnson looking to move on from injuries at CMU

Denny Schwarze, dbschwarze@lsj.com 7:22 p.m. EST January 24, 2015



(Photo: State Journal file photo/Al Goldis)

DeWitt senior quarterback Jake Johnson was poised for a great senior season.

He was named to the Associated Press all-state team as a junior after leading the Panthers to the 2013 Division 3 state championship game at Ford Field in Detroit. His recruitment was heating up following a terrific workout and camp schedule.

"Last spring he had so many colleges in. He had a great spring and had a tremendous summer with 7-on-7s," DeWitt coach Rob Zimmerman said. "He had such a great offseason and he was ready to go."

A few Mid-American Conference offers began to arrive and Big Ten schools began taking looks, but Johnson elected to commit to Central Michigan in June — shutting down his recruitment to put all of his focus on the coming DeWitt season.

Johnson was one of the top senior prospects in the state. It's that ability that landed him as this year's No. 18 player on the State Journal's 31st annual Catch 22 list of the state's best senior prospects.

However, Johnson endured a difficult, injury-shortened senior season

Johnson played the first four games and was the lynchpin for a DeWitt offense that scored 39 or more points in three of those four contests, but he suffered a concussion against Haslett on Sept. 26 and missed the next four games.

The Panthers kept winning during those next four weeks, but the question of whether or not Johnson would return lingered.

The breakthrough came the first week of the playoffs. Doctors cleared Johnson and he played a limited role in an easy 46-7 win over Tecumseh.

In the district final round against Mason, Johnson once again took a hit to the head and felt more concussion-like symptoms. He missed the rest of the game and DeWitt's season ended with a 30-14 loss.

"It was extremely difficult," Zimmerman said. "What was the most difficult probably was how he got hurt, getting hit in the head and getting concussions. I think he felt like he was targeted quite a bit this season and that made it difficult for him."

"A concussion is kind of different than other injuries," Johnson said. "The doctor can say they're healed when they might not be. I probably shouldn't have played in the playoff game, but I did, and I don't think I was ready to play yet. It probably wasn't too smart to do what I did."

Head injuries are an area of increasing concern in football, and Johnson said he will allow more time to rest if needed as he moves to the next level.

Most of all, he's ready to reach his college destination with his injury problems behind him.

"I'm very, very excited to go up to Central with a clean slate," Johnson said.

And that destination won't change, barring a different recruiting approach from a new coach.

Dan Enos, the coach Johnson committed to, left CMU for Arkansas on Thursday to take over as offensive coordinator after spending five seasons leading the Chippewa program.

Johnson said he is not looking at other options at this time.

"I was really looking forward to playing for Coach Enos, but at the same time I know college football is a business and in a business stuff like that happens," Johnson said. "I am 100 percent still going to Central Michigan and I'm looking forward to signing Feb. 4."

CMU athletic director Dave Heeke said in a press conference Thursday afternoon the school will quickly look to hire a new coach.

In the meantime, it is unknown how much, if any, of the current staff would be retained. Assistant coaches are sometimes permitted to keep contacting recruits during live periods until a new coach is named and Zimmerman said the CMU staff, including Enos, made Johnson a priority when recruiting him.

“He’s got to finish up the school year, but I know he’s very, very excited to get up there and be a part of a college program and work through all the injuries that he’s had,” Zimmerman said.

Past Catch 22 No. 1 players

1985: John Miller, Farmington Hills Harrison — MSU

1986: Tony Boles, Westland John Glenn — Michigan

1987: Scott Kowalkowski, Orchard Lake St. Mary –

Notre Dame

1988: Courtney Hawkins, Flint Beecher — MSU

1989: Gilbert Brown, Detroit Mackenzie — Kansas

1990: Mill Coleman, Farmington Hills Harrison — MSU

1991: Tyrone Wheatley, Dearborn Heights Robichaud — Michigan

1992: Pete Chryplewicz, Sterling Heights — Notre Dame

1993: Randy Kinder, East Lansing — Notre Dame

1994: Chris Floyd, Detroit Cooley — Michigan

1995: Diallo Johnson, Orchard Lake St. Mary — Michigan

1996: Robaire Smith, Flint Northern — MSU

1997: Maurice Williams, Detroit Pershing — Michigan

1998: Drew Henson, Brighton — Michigan

1999: T.J. Duckett, Kalamazoo Loy Norrix — MSU

2000: Charles Rogers, Saginaw — MSU

2001: Kelly Baraka, Portage Northern — Michigan

2002: Gabe Watson, Southfield — Michigan

2003: LaMarr Woodley, Saginaw — Michigan

2004: Alex Mitchell, Bay City Central — Michigan

2005: Kevin Grady, East Grand Rapids — Michigan

2006: Brandon Graham, Detroit Crockett — Michigan

2007: Ronald Johnson, Muskegon — USC

2008: Nick Perry, Detroit Martin Luther King — USC

2009: William Campbell, Detroit Cass Tech — Michigan

2010: William Gholston, Detroit Southeastern — MSU

2011: Lawrence Thomas, Detroit Renaissance — MSU

2012: Aaron Burbridge, Farmington Hills Harrison — MSU

2013: Shane Morris, Warren De La Salle — Michigan

2014: Damon Webb, Detroit Cass Tech — Ohio State

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