## Post-Journal Player of the Year

## Jehuu, That's Who

Clymer Running Back Caps Amazing Career With One More Award

It was about seven years ago when Howard McMullin, a teacher at Clymer Central School, decided that, if it was OK with the administration, he'd take the 100 or so fifth-,sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders who filled the cafeteria each day outside for a little recreation.

"Even if there was three feet of snow, we were out there," McMullin said. It was during those after-lunch activities where McMullin, also the school's varsity football coach, got his first look at a fifth-grader named Jehuu Caulcrick. "He was there every day," McMullin said. "He didn't miss a day."

While the kids played a variety of games, football was usually the favorite among the boys. Having the most fun, it seemed, was Caulcrick, a native of Liberia, who had moved with his family to Findley Lake a couple years before. "He was always outgoing," McMullin said. "He gets along with everybody. ...I think he had fun out there." It was a feeling that he carried with him the rest of his years at the rural Chautauqua County school.

Of course, when you turn out to be arguably the best Southern Tier high school football player in a generation, well, one can see why it's difficult to wipe the smile from your face.

And in four years on the Pirates varsity team, Caulcrick, who grew to 6 feet and 235 pounds with sprinter's speed, also put plenty of smiles on the faces of his coaching staff, his teammates and the greater Clymer community by leading the Pirates to four straight Section 6 Class D championships and four consecutive trips to the state's Final Four.

Along the way, Caulcrick rewrote the Section 6 record book, marks that should stand for years. Consider these staggering numbers:

In four years, Caulcrick rushed for 6,559 yards, which is fourth on the state's all-time list, scores 100 touchdowns and amassed 712 points. This season, he ran for 2,161 yards (fifth best in Western New York history) on 228 carries, scoring 28 touchdowns. And last week, he was named the WNY Player of the Year and the winner of the Connolly Cup, which is presented annually to the region's best player by the Riverside Athletic Club.

Now, he can add another honor and another plaque to his slew of other awards as he was the slam-dunk choice as *THE POST-JOURNAL'S* Player of the Year for the second straight time and the third time in four seasons.

"To get this award is great," Caulcrick said. "There are a lot of great athletes from Chautauqua County and a lot of deserving athletes." But none more deserving than No. 30.

If he was just a supporting player to the Pirates' success, his story would be compelling enough. But to be the best player on the best Class D team in the Western Region of the state four years running? And to do it after overcoming incredible odds just to enjoy the life that most take for granted? After all, how many youngsters can endure a civil war, be separated from your mother for two years, have your father killed in the uprisings and see all kinds of horror all before the age of 9?

Caulckirk did. How many kids, instead of letting the memories destroy their life, use it as a motivation every time they step on the field? Caulcrick did. "It made me a strong person." he said. It made Clymer, thanks to a splendid group around him, a dynamic team.

"One of the things you can't forsee is, although you have a good athlete, you have to have a fairly good supporting staff," McMullin said. "We didn't know if we had it or not. The other kids had to develop, and he was fortunate to have the support staff." The "other" athletes in maroon and white certainly helped Clymer's incredible run the last four years, but Caulcrick was the player that fans and opponents from throughout the state came to see.

And he usually didn't disappoint. Asked what runs he remembered most, Caulcrick mentioned two -- the 9-yard touchdown run he made in overtime as a freshman to defeat Maple Grove in the Section 6 Class D championship game and his 80-yard kickoff return in this year's Far West Regional against Lyons at Ralph Wilson Stadium. "I didn't know they'd kick it to me," Caulcrick said. "I expected them to kick it to Josh Shirley. Matt Bennink looked at me and said, 'Jehuu, if they kick it to you, take it to the house'"

As was so often the case, Caulcrick delivered, tight-roping down the sideline for the game-changing TD right before halftime. "I was just coming off a severely sprained ankle and I didn't have the strength to cut it back inside, so I decided to take it for what it was worth. One guy tapped my foot. I was like, 'Please don't blow the whistle.'" Somehow, Caulcrick stayed inbounds and the Pirates went on to claim their fourth straight regional title.

The Pirates ended up losing to Dolgeville in the state semifinals, 29-22, in late November. It's only been in recent weeks that Caulcrick has been able to

fully absorb the magnitude of his career.

"I'm finally getting the final stats," he said. "During the season, I don't pay attention to them. Now I think about them. There are some pretty big numbers. Maybe some athlete down the road can do it, but, hopefully, not for a few years."

With his high school football career complete, Caulcrick has Feb. 6 circled on his calendar. That's the date by which he will make his college decision. Until recently, Caulcrick appeared headed to Michigan State where he had made a verbal commitment in August. But Spartans coach Bobby Williams was fired. Now he will also visit Syracuse, Pittsburgh, Iowa, and, possibly, Maryland and Arizona. "It's disappointing (about Williams)," Caulcrick said, "but, then again, you have the opportunity to visit other schools and see other places where you haven't been."

He said that he talks to the Michigan State assistant coaches every day, but a new head coach has yet to be named. McMullin, who has counseled Caulcrick about his college choices, believes the best is yet to come for his star running back. "He hasn't reached his potential," McMullin said. "He has some ways to go." Now, that's a scary thought.