



AIA FEATURE STORY By: Don Ketchum

CENTENNIAL LIKES INSTANT REPLAYS OF LB REGGIE UMUOLO

PHOENIX, AZ (December 10, 2008) – Football players from Peoria Centennial enjoy watching video of senior linebacker Reggie Umuolo.

“He’s had seven or eight huge hits this year,” said Centennial coach Richard Taylor. “We show them on Saturday, and everyone says, “Wow! Run that back!’ ”

Taylor and his players are confident that Umuolo has a few more big hits left in him on Friday at 4 p.m., when Centennial plays in the Class 5A Division II championship game for the fourth straight season and goes for its third straight title against Desert West Region rival Avondale Westview at University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale.

Centennial defeated Westview for the 2007 state title, and brings a 13-0 record into this contest.

The 5-foot-11, 200-pound Umuolo is one of the team’s top tacklers.

“He is every diligent about his preparation and is every strong. He bench-presses about 375 pounds, which is pretty good for a guy his size,” Taylor said. “He also is very intense, and he makes great decisions on and off the field.”

Umuolo is an Arizona native. He moved with his family to the state of Washington when he was young and then returned midway through his freshman year. He missed football season that year, but joined the varsity as a sophomore.

Although he didn’t get a lot of playing time then, he soaked up everything he could and became a starter as a junior.

“I like the contact, making those big hits,” Umuolo said.

A number of colleges have noticed. Umuolo likely will play for UNLV, and was in attendance when the team upset Arizona State in Tempe earlier this season.

He watches a lot of video of opponents, trying to read the offensive linemen to get an indication of the direction in which the play might be going.

Umuolo also sees occasional action on offense as a fullback and tight end. He enjoys blocking for tailback John Hughes.

“He and I are cousins, so I don’t mind blocking for him at all,” Umuolo said.

There has been improvement for Umuolo in many areas since last season, but the biggest might be his role as a leader, according to Taylor.

“We had lost several guys from last season who were leaders, so at the beginning of this season, we told some of the guys like Reggie who were coming back, “You are the guys who are going to have to step up and talk,’ ” Taylor said.

“Players don’t want to be motivated by coaches. They hear stuff from us all the time. What motivates them a lot is hearing things from other players. It means more coming from one of your peers. So Reggie has been much more vocal this season. When he talks, they listen.”

Umuolo said it means a lot for the younger players to look up to him.

“I enjoy it. They ask me all sorts of questions. I hope they learn something,” he said.

They will need all the knowledge they can get on Friday against a quality team like Westview.

“I tell them that they (Westview) is going to be very motivated and will come at you harder than the last time, so you have to be ready,” Umuolo said.

Westview will have to be ready, too, for Umuolo and the possibility of absorbing a big highlight-reel hit or two.

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