

Mr. Football 2009: Bingham High's Tuni Kanuch

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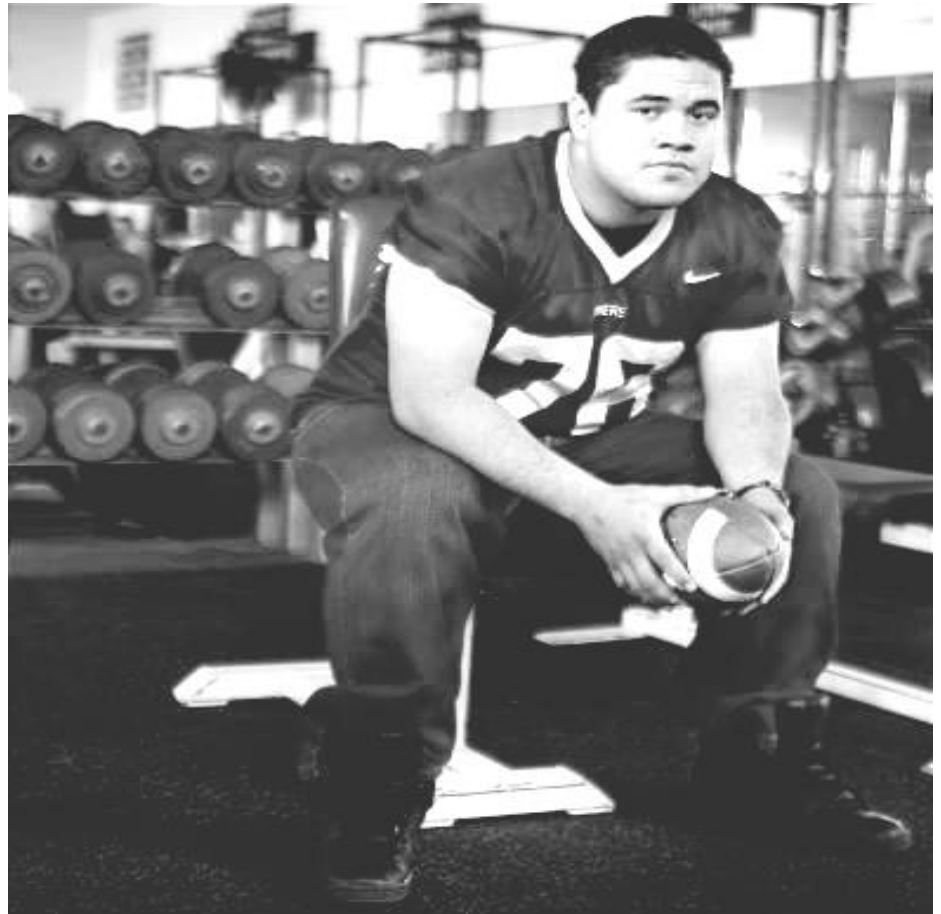
A devastating blocker, a three-year starter and the anchor of the state's most dominant offensive line. Those are the on-the-field credentials of Bingham right guard **Tuni Kanuch**, the Deseret News 2009 Mr. Football award recipient. Kanuch played an integral role in opening holes for running backs such as **Harvey Langi** and **Richie Vakapuna**, and protecting quarterbacks **Ty Hannay** and **Stefan Cantwell**.

But what Kanuch meant to the 5A state champion Miners can't be measured in any statistics or even highlight film. He led his team with words and by example, and who would question a teammate that stands 6-foot-3, weighs 300 pounds, squats 615, benches 405 and runs a 4.9 40 anyway?

"Tuni has a lot of qualities," said Bingham coach **Dave Peck**. "He's a great leader. Anytime I go to speak or one of the coaches go to speak, Tuni is the first one to make sure that everyone listens. When Tuni speaks, everyone listens."

A teammate had to learn that the hard way.

One of the highlights of Kanuch's leadership at Bingham



came when he intervened in a conflict between a sophomore football player and a sophomore coach. The player had been out of line, and outwardly disrespectful to the coach in front of his teammates. Once Kanuch heard about it, he had a conversation with the player to make sure it never happened again.

And it didn't.

"I got more mad thinking about it," Kanuch said of the time between hearing of

the incident and taking care of it. "I threw off my gear, waited for him in the sophomore locker room. When he came in, I just started screaming at him that we don't do that here, and we aren't disrespectful."

The player wasn't the only one to get the message.

"The whole team was pretty good (about being respectful) after that," Kanuch said.

While his leadership

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qualities in the offseason, on the practice field and in the weight room were important to the Miners, Kanuch's play was obviously instrumental in Bingham earning its second state football championship in four years.

Kanuch anchored an offensive line that wore down opponents. The Miners rushed for 352 yards in a 62-42 win over Jordan in the first round of the playoffs. More impressively, they rushed for 293 yards against Davis in the 5A title game.

Kanuch had plenty of help around him on both sides of the ball, but he was the leader of Bingham's group of players that put the hammer down on opponents in the trenches.

"You watch some of these teams that we played that had guys going both ways," Peck said. "Going against Tuni play after play and then turning around and going against **Seni (Fauonuku), Kesni (Tausinga)** and some of the other guys we had on defense, you could see it. You could see them start to get up slower and slower as the game wore on. These were as tough a kids as you're going to find, and it starts with him (Kanuch)."

The Miners don't keep track of knockdown blocks, or what some people refer to as pancakes. If they did, Peck is certain that Kanuch would be the school's all-time leader in the category. He usually had double-digit knockdowns in individual games, which is simply a staggering number.

"He's the most devastating blocker that I've ever coached," Peck said. "He has more knockdowns than any kid I've ever been involved with. He just gets after it."

Kanuch has orally committed to play at BYU and will sign with the Cougars in February. He expects to continue to play on offense, but BYU is known to shuffle players around and Kanuch could end up as a defensive player.

Peck wouldn't have minded using Kanuch on the defensive side of the ball, and he thinks Kanuch would have preferred to play over there.



Tuni Kanuch was asked to carry the ball once during the season – here against Copper Hills – and someone managed to get a photo of it. So, for one play, Kanuch was probably the biggest running back in the state.

But Kanuch did what Peck thought was best for the team, as the Miners try to build their offensive line first with their big guys, and then move over to defense.

"We knew Tuni was our best kid," Peck said.

Peck was alerted to Kanuch's abilities before he ever attended Bingham High by Jon Sudbury, the Utah Jazz superfan and a guy who served as a mentor to Peck during his formative years. Sudbury always said Peck was the best player he's ever coached in little league, but that's a title that may now go to Kanuch after Sudbury coached him.

It only took a day or two of practice prior to Kanuch's sophomore season to make Peck a believer in his abilities. Kanuch became a rare sophomore varsity starter for the Miners.

"We recognized right off that he was something special," Peck said. "He's was too good not to be starting. He learned the system and became the leader on the O-line and actually took pride in it."