

CALLING AN audible

FLYING HIGH Senior William Caldwell leaps into the air to snag a touchdown, his last one before a season ending injury.



With more injuries this fall than any other football team in the last decade, the Lions looked to unexpected leaders to carry the team — limping and hurt — into the playoffs.

Senior captain William Caldwell spins, cuts and jukes to turn a five-yard slant into a 25-yard gain. It's the second quarter and the Lions are up 12 needing 25 yards for a first down.

But it's second down and they have two downs to get there. This isn't a situation that called for an extraordinary play, but, as he has done so frequently during his three-year varsity career, he makes one.

As usual, Caldwell delivers. He delivered last season, leading SPC in most categories for receivers.

He delivered in the first game this year, twisting in mid-air to catch the game-winning touchdown above a Cistercian corner desperately trying to guard him in the dying minutes of the fourth quarter.

As always, extraordinary circumstances called for Caldwell.

But now he can't deliver.

On one of these expected displays of brilliance, he snapped his fibula so severely he needed a metal plate inserted. Somebody needed to step up.

And the players who were called upon to fill his size-13 cleats plus those of the other team members that were injured have done just that.

Besides Caldwell, there have been a total of nine players who have faced with injuries during the game — a number far greater than teams from past years.

Senior Zak Houllion, who has led the Lions' offense in receiving yards with four touchdowns since Caldwell's injury, has been one of the many players that have stepped up the plate.

Houllion believes the injuries should not take away from the team's drive to make the playoffs.

"I think the goals are exactly the same for the team," Houllion said. "Even though there are injuries, that doesn't change anything. We still have to have our mind in the same place and still achieve what we want to

achieve with these injuries because if you take a different mindset to it, you're going to get a different result and that's not what we want."

In only his first year as a high school football player, Houllion recognized Caldwell's absence and spent extra time to improve his game. His work has paid off as he has doubled the amount of yards from his first two games as a starting receiver.

EVEN THOUGH I CAN'T MAKE AN IMPACT ON THE FIELD, I KNOW I CAN STILL MAKE ONE AS A CAPTAIN OFF THE TURF.

WILLIAM CALDWELL

Houllion attributes his success to his willingness to rise to the occasion.

"At first I was kind of scared because I was thrust into the starting position with absolutely zero practice," Houllion said. "So I was kind of playing scared a little bit. But as I started to realize that I can do this and that I need to do this due to William's injury, I got more of a confident attitude, and I feel like if you take that attitude, you really start to go get the ball instead of letting it come to you and taking charge of your overall game."

After a 21-14 loss against Casady on Sep. 25 to put the Lions record at 2-3, the team was in a situation where they needed to win out in order to make the playoffs. By losing one of their most productive players in Caldwell, it seemed as if the season was going to be a lost cause.

But after a 28-16 win against an undefeated Oakridge and a 21-20 victory against Trinity Valley in overtime, it seemed like the Lions had responded well to its multitude of injuries.

Head coach Bart Epperson is hopeful for his team's chances — despite injuries.

"The biggest thing is that the team continues to pull together, and they continue to get better each week at what they can do," Epperson said. "And, if they continue to do that, with the guys being injured, we at least give ourselves an opportunity to win the football game."

That's what Epperson is hoping to do. "If we can stay together, build together and keep doing the things we need to on any facet of the game, we're going to give ourselves a chance to win," Epperson said.

With starters Michael Mosle and Hunter Alexander injuring themselves during two-a-days, the varsity team has called on many sophomores to fill starting position on the line and receiving core.

Sophomores Matthew Fornaro, William Hall and Canyon Kyle have played minutes in big games and have given the entire team hope they can push through the season.

Senior captain Drew Baxley believes a certain mentality is necessary for this situation.

"The coaches have preached a 'next man up' philosophy since day one of two-

a-days," Baxley said. "As a result, every player prepares in practice as though they are going to play that Friday. The goal is to have good athletes on the sideline able to cover every spot on the field in the case of an injury."

Sophomore Fausto Reyher has understood the importance of his role as a starter on the defense. Leading the team with 14 tackles against All Saints, he was recognized as the team's most valuable player that week.

For Reyher, the starting position was entirely unexpected for him.

"I had no idea I would be playing safety," Reyher said. "I never played that position until this year, so getting a starting position was a complete surprise to me. Now as the starting safety."

Ultimately, the Lions have responded well to the injuries and leaders Caldwell and Baxley are happy to see the change for the team.

"They've [the team] stayed resilient. They've stayed the course, trusted their abilities, and have just come ready to play and haven't let the numerous injuries really affect them," Caldwell said. "While there may have been some hiccups early on in the process, they've really bounced back. They come to work hard everyday and practice to prepare for games, and I know that all of this work will pay off."

In addition, Baxley's mindset is directed towards one game at a time as they head into the postseason.

• With a 24-21 Homecoming victory over Greenhill Oct. 24, coach Bart Epperson's football team advances to the SPC playoffs. The Lions host Houston Kinkaid tomorrow at 12 noon at Lamar Hunt Family Stadium.

"This year we started out the season very confident in our ability only to have our pride checked by several injuries at key positions," Baxley said. "This, however, does not change our goal or the way we play. We have plenty of younger guys who have been training hard all year to fill those roles. I like our chances."

Nevertheless, the team has not only built a foundation upon the younger guys, but has also given inspiration to rising players who aspire to play at the varsity level early on.

For Epperson, the team's continuous drive to respect each other's efforts on the field is the most important part of the team's goals for the football season.

"Yes, winning is very important, but for a successful season, the guys on the team need to play together as a team and respect everyone on the team when they're out there on the football field and learn some life lessons" Epperson said. "So, to me that's a successful season. Now granted, winning is important without a doubt, but if the guys can do those things that I mentioned, as a group and then as a team, that's more important to me."

Home remedies Two-way players and their solutions to staying healthy.



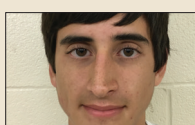
TIM SKAPEK
Senior strong safety and kicker

"I do specific stretches before practice, after practice and before I go to sleep for my position and past injuries I've had."



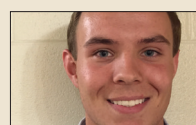
BRYCE KILLIAN
Senior defensive tackle and slot receiver

"I eat right and stay hydrated, especially on game days, with pedalyte and bananas."



FAUSTO REYHER
Sophomore safety and wide receiver

"I eat bananas and drink a lot. I even drink mustard in games to get through the cramps. I also aim lower when tackling instead of big hits to protect myself."



DREW BAXLEY
Senior center and defensive tackle

"I condition extra after practice by running sprints so that I stay healthy while playing on both sides of the ball."