

JMU Nation

A Schor thing

Quarterback personifies the re-emergence of JMU football BY KEVIN WARNER ('02)

When Mike Houston arrived as James Madison's new football head coach in January 2016, he had one quarterback on the roster. Inconsistent and inexperienced, Bryan Schor had been thrust into action with the 2015 season-ending injury to star Vad Lee. A few flashes of promise ended with a sour playoff loss at home against Colgate.

That loss sparked Schor's offseason drive. Houston's arrival and the signing of Football Bowl Subdivision transfer quarterback Connor Mitch truly put the ball in Schor's court to decide his destiny.

"Bryan was very mature and knew it was his job to lose," Houston says of Mitch's signing. "From that day forward, he was a different player. Connor wasn't even here yet. It was 5:30 p.m. on a Friday and there was one person on the Bridgeforth field. Bryan Schor was dripping sweat. By the time fall camp started, it was

never a competition. He seized the reins of the offense."

With Schor under center, the season got off to a noteworthy start. Schor and the Dukes put up gaudy numbers on offense, competed with a quality FBS opponent in the University of North Carolina and began to rack up a few significant conference wins.

As the Dukes dispatched their opponents, Schor's confidence soared. "I started making passes that I knew were risky, but I was confident that our wide receivers would make a play on them, that they could correct it."

Victories over traditional rivals Delaware and William and Mary and a clutch win at Richmond continued to raise the stakes. "I always say, I learned the big-stage performance mentality from Vad [Lee]," Schor says. "I watched him play in big moments and that's something I said I wanted to be able to do. Never let a stage change who you are or what you do."



Head coach Mike Houston and quarterback Bryan Schor embrace following JMU's victory over five-time defending national champion North Dakota State in the semifinal round of the FCS playoffs.

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The Dukes were 8-1 and in first place heading into a Nov. 12 top-10 showdown at Villanova. A win and JMU would earn back-to-back league championships for the first time in program history.

JMU took the early lead against, statistically, the nation's best defense. Schor, playing in front of friends, family and his high-school coaches in his home state of Pennsylvania, had the team poised for another score with an 11-yard scamper to the 16-yard line. Then it happened.

Schor suffered a broken collarbone on the Dukes' first drive of the second quarter. "I said, 'Here we go, second year in a row, JMU has a good thing going and the starting quarterback gets hurt late in the year. I immediately thought I was done for the season.'"

Houston was concerned too. "The season has a chance to be special and now there's a freak injury. For Bryan, you think, 'Why does it have to happen like this?'"

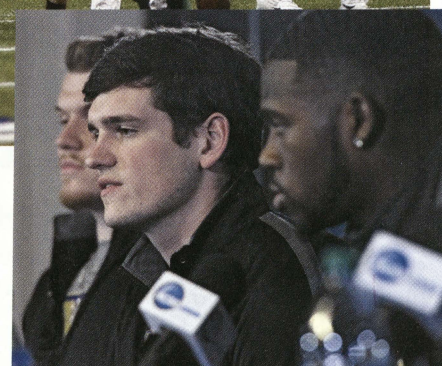
Not one to feel sorry for himself, Schor was back on the sideline in a sling to support true freshman quarterback Cole Johnson. With a lift from JMU's defense, the Johnson-led Dukes held on to defeat Villanova 20-7 and claim the league crown.

With the door of opportunity still open for the Dukes, Schor was encouraged by a conversation with Dr. Kent Diduch, medi-

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cal director for JMU's athletic training programs. "He told me of cases where people came back [from a broken collarbone] and played in three weeks. When I heard that, I was ready to do whatever I had to do to come back in three weeks."

In what Houston dubbed "one of the most remarkable performances of his life," Schor did indeed do what it took to return in three weeks. In Schor's absence, JMU dispatched Elon in the regular-season finale, earning a first-round bye in the FCS playoffs.



(Top): Schor signals a play against the Bison amid the deafening noise of the FargoDome. (Above): Answering media questions on the eve of the national title game.

Any uncertainty of Schor's condition was silenced in round two against New Hampshire. In a career performance, Schor went 30-for-37 passing while tying a JMU record with five touchdown passes and racking up the fifth-most passing yards in program history with 371. "It was nice to come back and feel that I could still perform at the same level as when I left."

When the fourth-seeded Dukes trounced No. 5 Sam Houston State, then ranked first in media polls, Houston felt JMU and its confident quarterback had a chance to go all the way.

His adversity and steady approach all season long set the stage for Schor to continue excelling in the toughest of environments.

"That's the only reason he played the way he did in those games," Houston says. "It's a credit to the way he handles everything. He didn't get too high after Richmond or other

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wins and never too low after a Villanova or North Carolina. He was always even-keeled.”

Schor reveled at the chance to perform on the big stage against defending national champion North Dakota State in a raucous FargoDome. “I remember in the summer [tight end Jonathan Kloosterman] and I were imagining being able to play there before we graduate. The very first play of the game, I called a play in the huddle and he was right next to me. He looked at me saying he had no idea what I had just called. It was a fun experience.”

The Dukes became the first team ever to defeat the Bison in the FargoDome in the FCS playoffs. Three weeks later, the scene was all purple as Schor and the Dukes captured the national championship, 28-14, over Youngstown State in a frigid Toyota Stadium in Frisco, Texas.

“When we went to Frisco, we felt like everyone came with us,” Schor says. “The support at JMU has been incredible.”

Equally incredible was the season compiled by Schor. He was named an All-American, CAA Offensive Player of the Year and the Player of the Year in Virginia, among numerous accolades. He led the nation with a com-

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— JEFF BOURNE,
director of athletics

pletion percentage of 73.1 while passing for 3,002 yards and 29 touchdowns to go along with 10 scores and 569 yards on the ground.

Not one to rest on his laurels, Schor’s commitment to improvement has extended into this season. “I expect him to be himself and be the leader of our team,” Houston says. “He was the only returning player voted by his teammates as a permanent team captain. I thought he was better this spring than last fall. That’s his commitment to improving every day.”

Motivation has never been an issue for Schor. “My upbringing is what drives me and what motivates me. I watched my dad get up every morning at 4:30 and never

miss a day of work. That taught me that no matter what happens, you go out and do your thing. My mom always taught me to look at everything in life as a positive.”

It’s been a long and trying road that has catapulted Schor into hero status in JMU history. In many ways, that road has defined the person he is today.

“He dealt with a lot of uncertainties and challenges early in his career. You have to think that those challenging times built the fabric around him and made him the person and leader that he is today,” says JMU Director of Athletics Jeff Bourne. “I think sometimes you learn, you grow and you’re better prepared. Bryan’s a great example of that.”

His journey has ensured that Schor will never look too far ahead. With the NFL potentially looming at the end of his final campaign, it would be easy to lose focus.

Not for Schor.

“If we go out and we’re successful as a team, if the NFL’s meant to be, it will happen. But I’m not going to think about it until the end of the season. That’s what I owe to my teammates and to the season that’s in front of us. I’ll wait to put my mental efforts into that at the end of the season.”



Schor hoists the national championship trophy as JMU Nation celebrates the Dukes’ 28-14 win over Youngstown State on Jan. 7 in Toyota Stadium in Frisco, Texas.