

HIGH SCHOOL

'Shocking' and 'heartbreaking': Why Indianapolis' top passer watched his final game from home

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Published 9:34 a.m. ET Nov. 2, 2020 | Updated 9:53 p.m. ET Nov. 2, 2020

Henry Hesson was in class, his last period of the day on Friday afternoon, at Avon High School. In fewer than five hours, he would take the field with his Orioles teammates for perhaps the final time as Hendricks County rival Brownsburg visited for a Class 6A sectional semifinal game.

Win or lose, it was a night Hesson would remember forever. He was 49 passing yards and two touchdowns from breaking Brandon Peters' career records at Avon. The coaching staff and players believed they had a game plan that would give them a chance to knock off fourth-ranked Brownsburg.

“It was the game I'd always wanted to play my whole high school career,” Hesson said. “It was the game I was looking forward to all season. For four years now, it felt like we'd grown as a family together. It was heartbreaking to not be able to play. When I got the news, I was shocked.”

Hesson was called out of class to the athletic office and then out to the football building next to the stadium where coach Mark Bless and principal Matt Shockley delivered the news to Hesson that he would have to quarantine due to contact tracing from a classmate who had tested positive for COVID-19.

That meant, of course, he was out for Friday's game.

“Coach Bless was pretty much speechless when I came in,” Hesson said. “He didn't really know what else to say. You could tell he hurt from it and he was there for me.”

Hesson texted his senior teammates and wide receivers. Blake Fisher, Avon's big offensive tackle and Notre Dame recruit, thought Hesson was joking. “Stop playing,” Fisher said.

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“We have a group chat with the seniors and I reached out to them before they heard the news from anyone else,” Hesson said. “They were all super supportive. I heard from a lot of others, too. I told the receivers what was happening and told them Mason would be their QB.”

Mason is Mason Reynolds, a promising freshman who performed better than could have been expected, passing for 321 yards and a touchdown in Avon’s 34-31 loss. Reynolds took some confidence from a 72-yard swing pass to Chrishon McCray on a first-quarter touchdown drive and kept it rolling from there.

“I wouldn’t say I was surprised,” Hesson said of Reynolds’ performance. “But he did a lot better than I thought he would. He has a huge arm and can throw it all over the field. I talked to him a lot before the game, texting him back and forth and telling him he’s got it and the receivers got him. I told him they are really good and if he put the ball in the air, they will make plays. He stepped up huge. He probably got no more than 10 reps all week. They played their hearts out and gave it everything they had.”

Hesson watched the game in the most 2020 way possible, streaming it at home with his family. It raised his spirits to be able to see the Orioles battle Brownsburg deep into the fourth quarter before losing on Spencer Porath’s 34-yard field goal with 9 seconds remaining.

“It brought me up watching the guys do what they could and put that effort into the game,” Hesson said. “I was hoping we’d have another one.”

Avon has its postseason senior talks today at school. Hesson, who holds a scholarship offer from Miami of Ohio, will appear via Zoom. If there is a lesson to be learned from this situation, Hesson said he found at least one.

“It definitely taught me not to take anything for granted,” he said. “To not be able to play your last game, it makes it tough. It makes you more mentally tough. I thought I did everything I could, honestly. I don’t know how far away I was from (the student who tested positive). I had a mask on at all times and I was sitting in the corner of the room. I was doing everything I could because this game has meant so much to me.”

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