

# What a catch

## Brennan proves worth in Cleveland

**AGGRESSIVE.** Yeah, that's it. First and foremost, Brian Brennan is aggressive. He's always known what he wanted, from his days at Birmingham Brother Rice to Boston College to the Cleveland Browns, and he always went after it.

No, wait. What about dependable? That's what his coaches call him — dependable. Steady. A sure-handed receiver who'll catch anything within a fingertip's reach.

Of course, that doesn't say enough about his smarts. Isn't that his most notable quality? He knows how to get the job done. He knows how to survive. He sees things on a football field that would escape the most astute players.

And then again, he contributes in all sorts of ways. He's a great influence in the locker room, a leader even though he's got only two years of experience. He's a contributor.

**WELL, THERE** you have it. A bundle of reasons why Brian Brennan is a quality pro football player. Which is what Brennan must have — a multitude of different qualities. Because, you see, he lacks the innate physical attributes possessed by most pro players.

In pro football the greatest needs are size, speed and quickness, all natural abilities that can't be taught. A college player might get by with two of the three, but it takes an exceptional person to make it in the pros without vast reserves of all of them.

Brennan has quickness. His speed is ordinary — actually, he's slow by wide receiver standards. And size? He's 5-foot-9, 178 pounds. In a world of Refrigerators, he's the size of a popsicle.

But everything Brennan does makes him valuable to the Browns. Actually, invaluable.

You and a dozen buddies can argue for the next decade which is Brennan's greatest quality as a pro player and not reach a consensus. But there is one that stands out above the rest. It's really a combination of all his talents.

Because what Brian Brennan is, first and foremost, is a winner.

**HOW MANY** times does he have to prove it? At Brother Rice, he helped the Warriors win a state title. At Boston College, he combined with Doug Flutie to help bring respectability to a struggling program.

The Browns, for years one of the doormats of the NFL, went to the playoffs last season. It was Brennan's second year with the team.

"Whoa there, pardner," you say. "You tryin' to tell me Brennan was the main reason these teams became winners? You sayin' he's a



C.J. Risak

franchise player?"

No, I'm not. Brennan's physical abilities are too limited to turn a loser into a winner.

But wherever he's been, his teams have won. Brennan gets the job done, one way or another. And it's guys like him, players who always find a way to win, that make winners out of losers.

**SUNDAY'S GAME** against the Detroit Lions was proof of his influential capabilities. On 17 of the Browns' 24 points, Brennan played a vital role.

• With 11:41 to go in the opening half, the Lions' Devon Mitchell cracks into Cleveland's Kevin Mack at the Lions' 2-yard line. The ball pops loose, rolling free in the end zone. The inevitable pile-up follows, but when the bodies are unraveled, Brennan is the one clutching the ball. Touchdown.

"I basically missed my block," Brennan said afterward, a smile creasing his face. "I was saying to myself, 'I'm going to hate to see this on film.' The ball popped loose and I fell on it."

• Fourth quarter, score tied at 14. The Browns mount a drive that results in a 24-yard field goal by Chris Baker. The drive goes 53 yards in 10 plays, including two clutch catches by Brennan. Both are good for 10 yards and a first down. His second catch puts Cleveland in field goal position at the 19.

It raises Brennan's receiving totals for the season to 12 catches, 154 yards, best on the team among wideouts.

• Fourth quarter still, with the Browns clinging to that 17-14 lead. Their ball, first down at the Detroit 49. As the ball is snapped, Brennan, flanked left, steps back a few yards to grab Kosar's lateral. He cocks his arm and films a perfect 35-yard strike to Herman Fontenot, who is tackled at the Lion 14. Three plays later, Curtis Dickey punches in from the 1 for the deciding TD.

"We practiced that twice this week," said Brennan of his clutch toss. "Yes, I thought it was (going to be) a touchdown. We'd run a screen pass to set up the play." Did he have anything to do with the call? "It's not my place to make play suggestions," he answered modestly. Prompted further, Brennan added, "Earlier I said (to the coaches) the defensive

backs were reacting quickly. I thought the double-pass might work."

**THAT PLAY** and Brennan's fumble recovery for a TD brought a bevy of reporters to the Browns' locker room searching for him. They all asked the same questions, and with little variation Brennan patiently supplied the same answers.

Describe your fumble recovery, Brian: "A tremendous play?" he said sarcastically, his grin widening as the TV cameras rolled. "It happened to be in the right place at the right time."

What about playing against the Lions, Brian? Weren't they your childhood idols? "My rookie year it might have meant something," was his polite reply. "I've been in the league three years now. It was no big deal."

And the pass play: "I was a quarterback in high school at Brother Rice. I like to throw the ball. I threw it a lot at Boston College. The only guy I had to worry about was the safety, and I led (Fontenot) away from him."

**CLEVELAND HEAD** coach Marty Schottenheimer called the option pass "well-executed by Brian and William (Fontenot)."

Cleveland assistant coach Joe Peardy (formerly an assistant at Michigan State) had this to say about Brennan: "First of all, he's a very good athlete. He has great quickness, coordination and agility not great speed. But he's very dependable. He'll catch the ball, and we recognize him as a big-play type of guy."

Here's Fontenot's description: "Brian is a very smart player. Most of the things he does are very intelligent. He's always there — a very reliable football player. He keeps everybody going and he gets the job done. He's a hard worker."

**SO, THERE** you have it. And there you don't have it. What makes Brian Brennan — small and slow by accepted standards in his line of work — successful is nothing. Or at least no one thing.

He works hard, he's good with the public and his teammates, he's dependable, he's smart, he's aggressive. What he is not is a loser.

As Brennan was attempting to make his way to the locker room door, he was sidetracked by yet one more reporter. "Were you lucky to win, Brian?" he asked, poking a microphone in Brennan's face.

There was no hesitation, no explanation. "No," Brennan replied firmly.

A winner never expects, and is never prepared, to lose. So winning won't ever be a surprise, and it can never be lucky.



BILL GREISER/staff photographer

Farmington's Pete Fraunheim breaks loose against Canton Monday. He scored a goal in the Falcons' 3-1 win.

## Falcons put boot to Chiefs

About the only thing harder than winning for the Farmington soccer team this season has been scoring goals.

The team overcame both obstacles Monday, defeating Western Lakes foe Plymouth Canton 3-1.

"We're starting to get the ball into the net," said Falcons coach Ed Bartram. "This was the most goals we've scored in one game this year."

Canton's Todd Nichols scored the game's first goal off an assist from Fat Frederick.

Farmington tied the game before the half on Tom Gammerath's goal from Darin Magara.

The first half was pretty much a tossup," Bartram said. "We played

more aggressively in the second half and got to the ball better."

Joey Crow, off a pass from Tom Hanson, scored what proved to be the game-winning goal. Pete Fraunheim scored an insurance goal off an assist from Gammerath.

Farmington enjoyed a 19-11 edge in shots on goal.

Farmington is 3-5 overall, 2-4-2 in the conference. Canton falls to 3-7-2 overall, 3-5-2 in the conference.

**SALEM** 3, **HARRISON** 0: It's amazing how a tiny lineup adjustment can spark a team.

Plymouth Salem coach Ken Johnson last week decided to move Mike Zaretti from midfield to defense and

anointed Dave O'Malley as his No. 1

goalkeeper. Since the change, Salem has posted three consecutive shutouts.

"We're rolling now," Johnson said.

Against the resurgent Farmington Harrison Hawks (ranked among the top 10 in Class B), Salem got second half goals from Ted Hanosh, Andy Sharma and Jeff Gold. Hanosh also had two assists. Randy Balconi also drew an assist.

Salem outshot Harrison 26-10. It was the first time this season Harrison (6-4-1 overall, 4-4-1 in the Western Lakes) has been shut out.

On Saturday, Salem blanked North Farmington 5-0.

Hanosh and Zaretti scored early to give Salem a 2-0 lead, then Dennis Reynolds and Joe Cosenza teamed up on three tallies in the final four minutes of the match. Reynolds scored one off Cosenza's assist. Then Reynolds set up two Cosenza goals.

O'Malley preserved his shutout by stopping a penalty kick in the first half.

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## Mercy runners still unbeaten

Farmington Hills Mercy's cross country team remained undefeated with a 24-37 victory against Birmingham Marian Tuesday night at home.

Although Marian's Beth Ewald won the race, 24:36, Mercy had seven runners in the top 10 as they breezed to victory.

Cheryl Madoj took top honors for Mercy, placing second at 23:54.

Marian's Lynne Porter finished in

third place at 23:57 followed by Mercy's Moira Kordel (24:02), Noelle Gates (24:59), Barb Cheaney (25:05), Elizabeth Galvin (25:38), Debbi Cool (25:46) and Nancy Carballo (26:03).

Marian's Christine Hathaway rounded out the top 10 with a time of 26:21.

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