

# Catlin's record-setting effort mystifies Warriors

BY JIM TOTH  
STAFF WRITER

Catlin was the difference for the Red Arrows all season.

Physically, he's far from intimidating. Mentally, he's a nightmare.

Lowell High School's 5-foot-10, 175-pound specimen of instant excitement — Mark Catlin — single-handedly was the reason Birmingham Brother Rice fell short Friday of bringing home the school's sixth state football championship.

One of the more electrifying players the state finals have ever seen and unquestionably the most productive, the Red Arrows' senior Mr. Everything took matters into his own hands, and feet, in the 31-14 Division II triumph that brought home the school's first state football crown.

"That one guy makes all the difference," Rice head coach Al Fracassa said of Catlin, whose elusiveness at quarterback resulted in a state-finals record 411 yards (usually eclipsing Bill Coleman's mark of 297 in 1989) of total offense. "I can't believe one guy doing all he does — he's dangerous every time he had his hands on the ball. One guy did all that damage to us." Fracassa can take a little solace

in that Catlin didn't just single out the Warriors.

He's done that all season and throughout a brilliant four-year varsity career.

Zig-zagging his way around the Silverdome carpet, Catlin, in his second season at quarterback, was involved in all four Lowell touchdowns.

His 5-yard run in the first quarter staked the Red Arrows to a quick 7-0 lead and a 10-yard scamper in the second period helped build a 17-14 halftime advantage.

A yard plunge early in the fourth quarter provided some breathing room and, for good measure and to prove he can also play some defense, his 28-yard interception return with 1:01 remaining sealed the outcome.

"I've been trying to say all along ... I don't think that there's many kids that are like Mark Catlin who impact high school football games like Mark does," Lowell coach Noel Dean said after the special per-

formance.

He may not be on a full-ride to Notre Dame, but he certainly is one of the greatest. I think maybe today he might have cemented the fact that he may be one of the greatest high school football players since the tournaments have begun.

Catlin was the difference for the Red Arrows all season and Friday there was little the Warriors could do about it.

His yardage and scores brought his season mark to more than 4,100 yards of offense and 50-plus touchdowns, including interception returns and punt returns.

"I thought he (Catlin) was the best quarterback in the state all year," said Rice senior Jason Horton, who, in his own right, deserved a lot of praise after a performance in which three receptions resulted in 165 yards and two lengthy touchdowns. "He's really fast and elusive."

Asked after the game what he thought of the record-setting total he racked up, Catlin answered, "I had no clue. I didn't even know. I go out there and I have a short memory. I put the bad things behind me and the good things behind me."



TOM HOFFMEYER / ECCENTRIC

Brother Rice defender Chris Bilotti reaches for Lowell quarterback Mark Catlin, who set a state-finals record for total offense by one player Friday.

## RICE

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Division III final. Lowell had 29 first downs and 484 total yards compared to Brother Rice's 10 first downs and 270 yards — in addition to dominating time of possession (33:40-14:20). Each team turned the ball over twice.

"I certainly hope it brings some credibility to what we're trying to accomplish at Lowell and what we're trying to do with kids," Red Arrows seventh-year head coach Noel Dean said. "The kids just displayed great character today, and this is probably one of the greatest moments in the history of Lowell football. I'm very proud of that fact."

Trailing 17-14 at halftime, Brother Rice took the ball inside the Lowell 34-yard line three times in the third quar-

ter. One drive covered 50 yards but ended when senior line-backer Jordan Moore and Andy McQueen trapped Warriors running back Anthony Jackson for a 3-yard loss on fourth-and-2 from the Lowell 27.

Jackson set up the next drive when he intercepted Catlin and returned it 59 yards. Lowell's J.J. Wilder was flagged for a late hit at the end of the play, moving the ball to the Lowell 23, but Brother Rice turned the ball over on downs after four plays resulted in minus 3 yards.

Charlie Ryan's interception set up a third drive at the Lowell 39, but it lasted only one play when Moore hit Pickens trying to pass and the ball fluttered into the arms of Red Arrows defensive back Sean Myers.

Lowell eventually built a 10-point lead thanks to a 15-play, 65-yard drive spanning the

third and fourth quarters. Catlin scored on a 1-yard sneak and Craig Carpenter kicked his third of four extra points to give the Red Arrows a 24-14 lead with 9:06 remaining.

Pickens finished 9-of-25 passing for 126 yards and a touchdown.

Lowell bottled up Jackson for much of the game, limiting the senior standout to 30 yards on 10 carries.

"They are very quick and they went to the ball very well," Fracassa said of Lowell's defense. "I think they looked a lot quicker today than they did on film. Maybe I should have run the film faster. They were very good."

"We had success beating them over the top in the first half," Pickens said. "We tried to stay within ourselves, but they were just a phenomenal defensive team. That number 60 (Moore) ... that kid just made

every play. I mean, they just kept us off balance. We knew we could run on them, but they just really kept us off balance."

Brother Rice's touchdowns came on long pass plays in the first half. Pickens connected with senior Jason Horton on a 79-yard TD bomb with 2:48 left in the opening quarter. Horton, who caught three passes for 165 yards, caught the ball in stride at the Lowell 39 after getting behind defensive back Chris Curtis. Brian Balzerini's point after tied the score 7-7.

Matthew Foster's 23-yard field goal and Catlin's 10-yard scoring run gave the Red Arrows a 17-7 lead in the second quarter. But the Warriors used a bit of trickery to narrow the deficit as senior Al Gioutos took a hand-off from Jackson and lofted an 80-yard touch-

down pass to Horton with 5:30 left before halftime.

The Warriors had a chance to tie the game just before halftime, but

Wilder stormed in from the right side and blocked Balzerini's 31-yard field goal attempt as time expired.

Brother Rice forced Lowell to punt on the game's opening series, but the Red Arrows marched 69 yards in eight plays on their next drive for a 7-0 lead with 4:29 to go in the first quarter.

Catlin ran up the middle for the final 5 yards and he was well on his way to an unforgettable performance.

Said Catlin, who accounted for 4,100-plus yards and 50-plus touchdowns during the 2002 season: "It's great to start out on offense that way because it gives you a lot of confidence."

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