

sports

Logan Bolin: jackpot king

PAUL MURRAY  
Reporter

Junior wide receiver Logan Bolin stepped into the huddle for what would be the last time that game.

With only three seconds to spare, the Eagles faced formidable odds. 52 yards away, while playing on the road against one of the best defensive teams in the country. Only in the last five minutes of the game had the Eagles’ offense truly began to flourish.

The huddle grew quiet, the calm before the storm. They awaited the words from quarterback Austin Brenner, yet they all knew the play. “Big Ben” is what they call it, a hail mary play named after Pittsburgh Steeler quarterback Ben Roethlisburger. They have ran it before, many times in practice, but never in this type of situation... never with the outcome of a game at stake.

“We’ll protect and you guys go make a play,” one of the offensive lineman said as he adjusted his pads, preparing for the dog fight soon to commence in the trenches.

Brenner leaned in and spoke with a calm but confident tone as he made the call: gun formation, one left, trips right, Big Ben...on one.

They broke the huddle. Logan Bolin ran to his position on the field, nerves running through his whole body. His hands tingling. The roar of the Grand Valley crowd was deafening in his ears. He took his spot among his fellow wide receivers and awaited the snap.

As quick as a hiccup, the ball was drawn back to Brenner and the play began. Bolin flew off the line, and with a few quick steps he slipped past the cornerback face guarding him. He sprinted down the turf, accelerating with every muscle in his body, determined to get open for Brenner. He knew his quarterback could get it there, he just had to give him the opportunity.

Now having the one defender beat, Logan Bolin was rapidly approaching the goal line. He turned over his left shoulder to look for the



EVAN LAUX

Logan Bolin walks off the field alongside junior wide receiver Dakota Hobbs before facing the Davenport

ball. His eyes widened, his hands tensed, he saw it. The leather projectile floated through the cold October sky, hurtling right towards him.

After a few more steps, he jumped over the cornerback who had closed the gap and positioned himself right in front of Bolin. Bolin’s arms stretched out, durable and flexible like that of a thousand rubber bands.

But just as he did so, his mind drifted back to when he was seven years old playing “jackpot” in the backyard. Just a group of kids pushing and shoving, scrapping for the football as it soared through the sky.

The ball hurdled right towards him, he quickly snapped back into reality. The pigskin entered the atmosphere and came plummeting down towards his chest.

Umph. Thud.

The ball crash landed into Logan’s chestplate. He had it, the ball was in his grasp as he levitated above the field. Logan pulled the ball in close, covering and protecting it with the ferocity of a lion defending its cub – he was not losing this one. His body hit the ground. The crowd roared. Grand Valley players ripped and clawed at him, desperately trying to jar the ball loose.

Through all the commotion, Bolin had no idea where he was at. Did he make the goaline? Or was

he short? Only one way to find out. He maneuvered his head from the bottom of the pile, just barely able to see past the bodies surrounding him. Through this small window, he was able to see a sideline referee sprinting towards him with his hands raised victoriously in the air.

Touchdown.

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“It was wild. Like something out of a movie.” Bolin said, recalling the game winning touchdown.

“I wasn’t even sure I was in the endzone, I knew I caught it but I thought I was still near the 10 yard line. Only after I hit the ground did I realize that I was in,” Bolin said.

The 52-yard pass lifted AU over Grand Valley State, with a final score of 20-17. This win brought the Eagles to a winning record of 3-2. The Lakers were the No.8 ranked team in the country, but were jostled from this spot after the last second theatrics performed by the Eagles. Bolin’s display, as pointed out by wide receivers coach Dominick Orsini, all comes back to their strong rooted philosophy.

“I tell them: do the right thing, and do your job. When the opportunity comes, make the play. That’s exactly the deal with Logan Bolin, he makes plays. He’s the most reliable receiver we have,

and we are lucky that ball came to him.” Orsini said.

The Eagles practice “Big Ben,” the play used against Grand Valley, once a week. The play is run once, with either an emphasis on the defense or offense. During this particular week of practice, it is no surprise that the offense was specialized during the “Big Ben” play call.

During these practices, however, Bolin is hardly ever the main target for the play. Typically, the play call is designed for 6’6” redshirt freshman Jake McLoughlin to catch it.

“We send three guys down, and usually have Jake go up for it. The other two receivers are in the endzone looking for a deflection. During the game, the defender on Logan turned to look for the ball as his teammates went for a swat. It left Logan in the perfect position to make the catch.” Orsini said.

That play for Bolin sparked something in his mind, it reminded him of his youth. Playing “jackpot,” a football game with his friends, and having his dad coach him up on the mechanics of the game.

“It was like when you are a little kid playing jackpot in the backyard, everyone going up for it. I knew I only had to beat the man in front of me, so I just went up after it.” Bolin said.

His father, Ray Bolin, was a running back at AU, where he was awarded All-American in 1986.

“Growing up, my dad always coached me,” Bolin said “We always had that father-son/mentor-student relationship. From when I began playing in second grade up through high school, he was always a position coach, telling me everything he knew.”

Ray Bolin, alongside his wife Carrie, was able to see the result of all those years of coaching come to fruition when their son hauled in a pass that will likely go down in AU football history.

“To have my parents at the game was amazing. I ran over to my mom and dad and hugged them. My dad was laughing like crazy. Mom said he was a grumpy old man when we were losing, but now he was ecstatic,” Bolin said.

After the game, the players celebrated in the locker room. Music was on, players were recording videos and the whole team was dancing. The guys would later check their phones to see AU was being featured on various media outlets. ESPN and Barstool Sports had already picked up the story and were running the final play footage on their sites.

The video alone got 1.5 million views on twitter and even made its way onto Sportscenter’s Top Ten plays.

“I walked into class on Monday and one of my professors was showing the catch on the projector. That catch really blew up. A lot of people were reaching out to me that I haven’t talked to in a while. It’s awesome to get that kind of exposure, but to win like that on the road is even better,” Bolin said.

Even with this new found fame and exposure, Bolin says the plan is the same.

“At the end of the day, I’m just the tail end of that play. The offensive line did a great job, Brenner threw an insane pass, and that defense kept us in the game. It was fun to celebrate, but we have five games coming up that are just as big. We need to go crazy every quarter, we are going to come out early and get in a groove. These next games are the ones that matter now.” Bolin said.

AU recruitment pushes “school first, athletics second”

CHANTE RUTHERFORD  
Reporter

When students begin to think about college, there are many minor aspects they have to take into consideration. Factoring in the tuition, distance, activities and the experience as a whole all build to the experience of finding the right school.

For those who are wanting to continue their athletic career in college, these decisions can make a larger impact. Decisions such as these can even predate back to their freshman year of high school.

The coaches keep tabs on many students throughout the school

year. They are looking for athletes who will not only perform well within the team but will create a bond amongst those who are involved in the program, expanding outside of the uniforms they wear for each game.

The criteria that coaches look for are different in each sport and at each school. Along with what they want in athletes, the time span they have for choosing a school is unique as well.

“Wrestling is different in many ways. Some students will wait to choose in May of their senior year and some will think about it during their junior year,” Ashland University head wrestling coach Josh

Hutchens said.

Hutchens, who is in his seventh season, understands that wrestling creates a pathway for students to gain a higher education once high school ends.

“Even though we want the best students and the best wrestlers, we want the best people,” he said. “We want to show them what life is like here and explain what is going to be expected while they are here. We want people that are motivated.”

Committing to school can help student athletes become better versions of themselves due to the environment and people they have surrounding them.

“Students have come in who didn’t do well academically and never placed in the state tournament who become four-time All American,” Hutchens said. “What you do here is most important.”

Not only does the scholarship amount matter, but more importantly so does the school itself. If the environment is not the best fit for the student, this may impact their time at the school they have chosen.

“We push them to choose the school first and the sport will be second. Make sure the school is the right fit for you,” Hutchens said.

Each sports team has a different way of finding new additions to their team which widens the area they cover.

“Typically, people on the east coast begin the recruitment process earlier than others,” AU head swim and dive coach Kyle Walthall said.

Walthall, who is currently in his first year as head coach, takes the idea of a deadline for decisions and flips it around to let the students choose when they want to be recruited.

“I speak with their coaches, get them on campus to meet the team but it really comes down to when they want to make that decision and let them dictate,” Walthall said. “It’s a tough decision... a decision that will impact four years of their life.”

This mindset that Walthall has applies not only to student-athletes within the U.S., but to students around the world.

“We have students from Greece, Albania, Bosnia and have spoken to students from South Africa, Egypt and more,” Walthall said.

According to Walthall, the diversity within the team allows for athletes to accumulate new and interesting experiences and interactions.

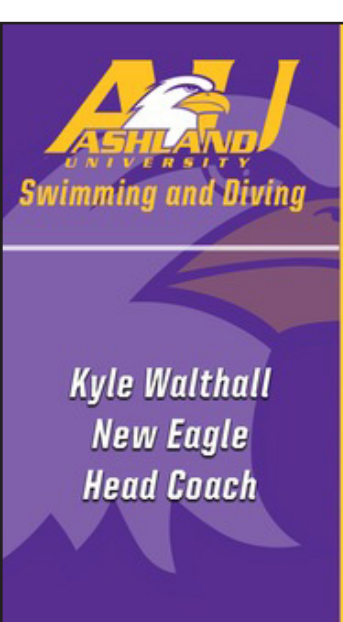
“It makes the team culture very fun and it changes the experience than if everyone was from the same place,” he said.

While this decision is important for students and coaches, the parents are also a great factor in the recruitment process.

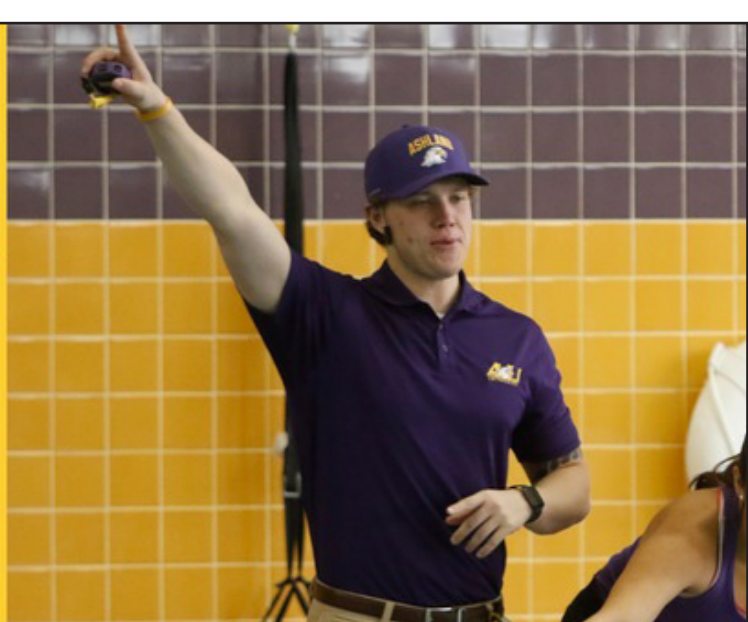
“Some parents are really involved and have some experience while others leave the decision into the hands of the student,” Hutchens said. “We want them to ask questions and get involved. Question what we are doing here. Make sure this is the best fit for your child.”

As the student goes through the recruitment process, the parents will become part of a whole other family once the school year begins. They are a part of this big change.

“The thing I like to say to the parents is that I am recruiting their child to make that decision, but they are joining the Eagle family as well,” Walthall said.



Kyle Walthall  
New Eagle  
Head Coach



AU ATHLETICS

Head swimming and diving coach Kyle Walthall is in his first year with Ashland University.