

## **LIBERTY'S BIGGEST WINNER**

### **Jim Tkach's first trip back to Hershey since son's tragic death a successful one**

**By Joshua Funk**

**For PA Football News**

HERSHEY, Pa. - The scene following Bethlehem Liberty's thrilling overtime state championship victory against Bethel Park went like most other celebrations.

The team gang-piled its leader, and game hero, Anthony Gonzalez. Helmets were thrown in the air. Tears were shed. The team captains accepted the golden football trophy before running over to the metal fence separating the bleachers to find their family and friends to celebrate.

In that sense, the postgame scene on Liberty's side of Hersheypark Stadium was typical. But one postgame embrace, one between Hurricane head coach Tim Moncman and assistant coach Jim Tkach, wasn't.

How so?

Coach Moncman has a 3-year-old son, A.J., who is blind. Coach Tkach had a son, Bo, who committed suicide after battling depression and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). Both know first-hand the challenge of having a son dealt some difficult circumstances in life.

What was said during the embrace?

"He (Moncman) said, 'Bo's watching. Bo saw the whole thing, Coach,'" Tkach said. "And I just came apart."

It was Bo Tkach, Jim's son, who played quarterback for his father in the late 1990s. Bo was a two-time All-state 1<sup>st</sup> Team selection, and led the Northern Lehigh Bulldogs to their first-ever District 11 Class "AA" title in 1999. Northern Lehigh lost in the Eastern Final to Mount Carmel that year, 25-13.

Bo went on to college, graduated, and worked with Lehigh Valley youth. He also ran seminars for six area high school football teams, one of which was a Class "A" juggernaut named Southern Columbia.

But in the summer of 2007, Bo, who suffered from depression and OCD, committed suicide. His father was two years removed from retiring as head coach of Northern Lehigh football. The loss was devastating.

Jim Tkach's other son, Tyler, who attends the University of Pittsburgh, issued his father a challenge.

"My son told me that he wasn't going back to school unless I got back into coaching," Tkach said. "He told me, 'You won't make it, Dad. You'll die.'

"And I (probably) would have. But out of something horrible, God gives you a blessing. And this (Liberty football) is a blessing."

Tkach alluded to the Liberty football team rallying around and accepting his family when he first came to Liberty.

"It's been an incredible experience to see young kids rally around a cause bigger than their own," Tkach said. "A lot of these kids come from tough situations. It's just amazing what they've done."

Part of what the Hurricane football players did was wear Bo's name and number 3 on their jerseys. They also had stickers made for the first game with city rival Bethlehem Freedom, a game which drew close to 13,000 fans.

"The kids just reached out. I came in tonight and they had Bo's name and number on (their jerseys). These kids have tough lives. They didn't need to come out and do those kind of things," Tkach said.

But Liberty did. And through all of their causes, some known, some unknown, Liberty rallied around and overcame the District 11 critics and naysayers. Also, they overcame the WPIAL, winners of the last four "AAAA" state titles by a margin of 166-37.

"This is the best cure for an aching, broken heart," Tkach said of the state title. "It's a beautiful evening."

However, don't think that the Hurricanes' state title victory automatically erased all of the hurt Tkach feels. It's still an ongoing process, he said.

"There's always going to be a lot of healing," Tkach said. "I don't know if you ever get used to the loss of losing a child. What you do is learn to find a purpose through losing him."

Tkach found that purpose in Liberty Hurricane football. The Liberty players found a purpose in supporting their newest assistant coach, among other causes.

Together, it helped lead them to a state title.

*Information for this story came from [Pasportspage.com](http://Pasportspage.com) and the [Bo Tkach Memorial Web site](http://BoTkachMemorialWebSite.com). To learn more about depression and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, visit*

<http://www.botkach.com/index.html>. To make a donation to the Bo Tkach Memorial Fund, visit [http://www.botkach.com/you\\_can\\_help.html](http://www.botkach.com/you_can_help.html).