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SAINT MARY'S UN





His blockers are a disconcerting distance away. The kicker is somewhere

downfield, hidden behind a muscled mass of humanity. Suddenly, there is the staccato sound of cracking helmets, then the unmistakable *'whump!'* of inflated leather meeting foot. He searches the sky frantically for the spiraling missile. His instincts tell him to look down, to flee the belligerent herd thundering toward him. He must trust that his teammates will make the blocks and deliver him from harm. Trust allows him to focus on the ball, to do his job, and to help the team succeed.

what was run here before, but in other ways is exactly what this group of athletes needed."

McLean came to Saint Mary's after the dust had settled from the Nil era, and he objectively assessed his players and diagnosed what he saw as their needs. *"I saw good athletes who weren't trusting what was going on, or maybe they had information overload,"* says McLean. *"I know that Blake (Nil) was a schematic coach, whereas my philosophy is rooted in fundamentals and keeping it simple. But as much as it's simple, the players will dictate how far and how fast they will go."*

It's All About Trust

By Joe Fitzgerald, BA '94

Bottom left, left to right: AJ Tufford, Receiver; Steve Sumarah, Head Coach; David Pace, Offensive Line; Mike McLean, Defensive Coordinator; Taku Murahwi, Defensive Back; Jude Rousseau, Defensive Line; and Al Gagnon, Offensive Line

Photos on pages 26 and 28: The SMU Huskies battle the Concordia Stingers during the first home game of the season, scoring a 34-21 victory. **Our powerhouse team consists of:** Darcy Brown, Andre Grondin, Marc Beswick, Ian Shaw, Francis Best, Aldrick Birthwright, Glen Downs, Shawn White, Erik Glavic, Valentino Swasey, Michel Okelu, Carl Hardwick, Craig Leger, Michael Jack, Patrick Hooley, Ted Abraham, Joseph Doherty, Ryan Benjamin, Jacques-Olivier Lumbala, Brittan Moultry, Geoffrey Power, Michael McNair, Mark Holden, William Anderson, Billy Dee Johnson, Jeff Zelinski, Takudzwa Murahwi, Allistair Blair, Tyler Schussler, Saleem Borhot, Tyrone Roue, Jerret Laycock, Tim St., ierre, Jonathan Shreve, Taylor Bowie, Tyler Matheson, Andrew Pye, Mark Baxter, Brent Shabley, Leroy , ontaine, Jerone Daley, Andrew King, David Coens, Jeremy Smith, Austin McLennan, Kyle McNeil, Andrew , orey, Kenny Holownia, Philip Cormier, Isaac Robinson, Craig Walford, Daniel Schutte, Tommy Gibbons, Sean McCarthy, Reed Anderson, Geoffrey Zochodne, Bryan Jordan, Adam Hawco, Clayton Chiurka, Derek , eber, Paul Best, Adam Baboulas, Thomas Elinesky, Al Gagnon, David Pace, Chris MacDonald, Daniel , urbridge, Justin Palardy, Clinton Cruickshank, Jude Rousseau, Bryan Parr, Matt Lemay, Aaron Racioppa, Firass El Fateh, Aaron Tufford, Mike Krajewski, Fraser O'Neil, Bryce Fisher, Paul Grondin, Nick McQuade, Ryeon Warburton, Kyle Drake, Jake Myers, Zack Agathos, and Andrew Paopao.

Trust is a key word for today's Saint Mary's Football Huskies as they gear up for a playoff run and the chance at securing a national championship. Second year head coach and Saint Mary's alumnus, **Steve Sumarah**, is establishing his brand of football at a program still reveling in the success of high profile coach, **Blake Nil**. *"The first thing I wanted to do was instill in the players that this is a player program,"* says Sumarah. *"It has nothing to do with the coaches and all those other things. It's about the players. As coaches, we're here to facilitate and keep the team moving in the right direction. I've tried to make it a players' team – that they have a say, that they have ownership in the team."*

Giving the players an increased role as stakeholders in the program also applies to Sumarah's coaches and staff. When the University hired **Mike McLean**, a seven-year CFL veteran linebacker with the Edmonton Eskimos and 1987 Grey Cup Champion, as the team's defensive coordinator, Sumarah gave him *carte blanche*. *"You hire someone you trust is going to know what they're doing,"* says Sumarah. *"This is Mike's thing. His specialty is defense. He's brought in a philosophy of team defense that in some ways is very simplistic to*

Last year was a trying one for the Huskies, as players adjusted to the new philosophy, complete with new terminology and signals. McLean, however, was confident in his approach. *"Defense is all about trust,"* he says, *"and it took a while for the defensive players to trust me. They couldn't trust each other if they couldn't trust me. The threshold game was against Montreal when we beat up on a nationally ranked team. We didn't have that hurdle this year, so it's been seamless. Everybody's on the same page."*

While the Huskies foster a trust that generates on-field success, they have also ventured outside the stadium to garner that same trust in the broader community. If a well equipped athlete can falter in the heat of a battle they have chosen to be in, imagine what it is like to be alone, cornered and unprotected, with no one to trust. Bullying has become a big issue in the past decade, and the Huskies have been striving to impart youth with strategies to overcome what can be life-crippling scenarios.

Huskies linebacker coach and Saint Mary's alumnus, **Joe Taplin**, approached then-head coach, Blake Nil, and offensive

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coordinator, Steve Sumarah, seven years ago with the idea as a great way for the players to get out into the community. Taplin, an RCMP Officer, had been involved with the Edmonton Eskimos' *'Stay in School Program,'* which dealt with a lot of bullying issues. *"We took a core group of about twenty guys who volunteered and put them through some training sessions on how to talk to kids about anti-bullying,"* says Taplin. *"The biggest thing was not to just talk about anti-bullying, but talk about your own experiences. If you were a bully, talk about it and tell them how foolish you feel now looking back. Or if you were bullied, what happened."*

Taplin points to Huskies all-star linebacker, **Tim St. Pierre**, as a current example of how players' poignant personal stories can impact audiences. *"He's probably one of the best football players in Canada right now,"* says Taplin. *"He was bullied when he was younger, and he was telling the story of how his parents put him in karate and how he built up his self-esteem from there. He represented Canada as champion kickboxer at 19 and he's been a captain on the football team the last three years. The kids say, 'Wow, this kid was bullied!' It gives them a different light on how they can come forward and start talking about their stories as well as techniques on how to avoid bullies and who they can reach out to and talk to."*

Another initiative the Huskies were involved with this year was *Habitat for Humanity's Great Habitat Build 2007*, sponsored by the Nova Scotia Homebuilders' Association. Twenty-four players volunteered to help in the construction of a home in Lower Sackville for a family in need. Defensive Coordinator McLean understands the pressures on a varsity athlete, but expects his players to embrace community service as part and parcel of that role. *"When I was with*

Page 29, top right: Members of the Huskies football team volunteered their time for the Habitat for Humanity Build this September. Participating players included Andrew Pye, Michel Okelu, Mike Krajewski, Jude Rousseau, Daniel Schutte, Tyler Matheson, Michael Jack, Aaron Tufford, David Pace, Jeremy Smith, Reed Anderson, Al Gagnon, Austin McLennan, Jerret Laycock, Clayton Chiurka, Valentino Swasey, Paul Best, Brent Shabley, Francis Best, Jonathan Shreve, Matt Lemay, Tyler Schussler, Leroy Fontaine, and Mark Baxter.



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the Eskimos, we were always out in the community, stay in school, drug awareness, we did the whole gamut," says McLean. "Those things were expected. You're doing what's right, but the kickback, if you can say that, is the satisfaction of giving back."

Although the work was more blue-collar than the anti-bullying campaign, the effects were instant. *"For the habitat, they busted their rear ends for a whole day shoveling and laying sod, after a game day, and a long night after a game day," says McLean. "But they were all smiles and they still talk about it. Any time you do something physically and you see the results of your effort, it's immediately rewarding."* McLean emphasizes the need to teach players how to be good citizens as well as good football players. *"Wins and losses don't necessarily dictate the success of a program. If you make good human beings and role models for the future, then I think you've done a great job."*

Along with the anti-bullying campaign and *Habitat for Humanity*, the football Huskies volunteer time in the *Drug Abuse Resistance Education Campaign*, canvassing for the *Alzheimer Society*, and have a run for *Cystic Fibrosis*.

"I think the guys are quite shocked by how good they feel about doing something for the community," says Sumarah. "They get this opportunity to touch kids' lives by saying this is what's happened to me or, with the Habitat for Humanity, when they see the family that's moving in. They see the huge impact they've made on people, and it's very empowering. Any time you can show that you're not just football players, but you're humans and you care about your community, that's positive. And Saint Mary's in general has a philosophy of 'Hey we're willing to get out in the community and help out.'"

As this generation of football Huskies seek to establish their own legacy, there is a palpable bond crystallizing that is characteristic of all great teams. *"I think that when a team becomes very close, they become very secure in what they're doing," says Sumarah. "You see that on the field – that there's a trust developing. Once that trust develops, they're able to expand that, and when people meet these players, they realize how respectful they are, how polite they are, and generally are a good bunch of guys."*



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