

By Joe Sager

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COCHRANTON – Like most football teams, Cochranon prides itself on having a family-like atmosphere.

However, the Cardinals boast some real bloodlines in their nest.

Senior Walker Carroll has caught six touchdown passes from his freshman brother, Noah, in the team's first two games.

Senior running back Parker Schmitt and his freshman brother, Cole, have carried the ball this fall.

The family ties extend to the sideline, too, where Tom Haynes and his son, Ian, are assistant coaches with the Cardinals and the men behind the team's offensive attack and fast 2-0 start. Ian, in his first year coaching football after graduating from Kutztown, calls the plays, while Tom, who was head coach at Cochranon for 16 years and spent another seven at Franklin, offers input from the press box.

"They work well together," Cochranon head coach John Svirbly said. "I am sure it was a dream for them to coach together."

Being on the same coaching staff wasn't necessarily in the plans for Tom and Ian, but they are thankful football reunited them once again, helping the team to its first 2-0 start since 2021.

“It’s been great, especially since I’ve been four and a half hours away from home the last five years at Kutztown,” Ian said. “This allows us to reconnect in a way that’s been missing. Since it was so far away, it was not easy for my parents to make it to every game. I am just happy he’s getting out of the house and coaching football again.”

Tom guided the Cardinals from 1996 through 2011. He took over as head coach at Franklin in 2013 and posted a 20-52 mark before he stepped down in 2019. The last four years of his tenure, he was on the sidelines as Ian became District 10’s all-time leading passer with 9,471 yards. Ian added 95 TD passes.

A 2020 Franklin graduate, Ian headed to NCAA Division II powerhouse Kutztown University to continue his academic and athletic careers. He spent the past five seasons as a Golden Bears quarterback. He was on pace to lead the offense his redshirt junior year. However, he was injured in a 2022 game against Mercyhurst before he could even attempt his first collegiate pass. At the time a redshirt sophomore, Ian suffered a foot injury that turned out to be a serious Lisfranc fracture. It cost him the better part of two seasons.

“Initially, they thought it was a bone bruise. For the next three weeks, I suited up and tried to play, but it was not working well,” he said. “I went to see a foot specialist on a Tuesday and I was on the operating table having surgery that Thursday. I couldn’t put any weight on that foot for four and a half months. At the seven-month mark, they cut me open and took out all the hardware and I had another four-month recovery. By the time our next fall football camp was coming around, I was starting to learn how to walk around again on that foot. I was in no way, shape or form ready to play football then.”

The lost time set him back in the Kutztown quarterback room and he remained in a backup role. He finished with seven career collegiate pass attempts — all coming in a 6-for-7 outing for 58 yards last fall.

“It was tough,” he said. “Probably the year the job was there for me to take, that’s the year I got hurt. It is what it is. The Lord put me there for a reason. I ended up meeting my girlfriend there.”

During his recovery, coaching football became an interesting option for Ian.

“One thing my coaches would say about me is that I was the ultimate teammate,” he said. “I’d do whatever I could to help, even if I am just going over mental reps with our quarterbacks. I was always asking what they needed me to do; I was always available to help out. I traveled to dang near every game even though I was hurt because I was an asset on the sideline.”

Tom and wife, Ericca, were happy to be along for the ride as Kutztown claimed the past two PSAC championships.

“We bought a camper just so we could go out and spend the weekends watching his games,” Tom said. “It was a great experience. We traveled to New Hampshire, West Virginia – all over. We had a great time with it all. That’s a phenomenal program. He got hurt and that slowed the whole playing thing down, but he learned so much. He could have gone elsewhere, but he loves the place and loves the coaches so much. He is easily one of the smartest kids I’ve coached, as far as football is concerned. All he did was get smarter.”

Ian just never thought he'd have the chance to translate that high-level instruction to the high school level — and with his father by his side.

“When I graduated, I thought that was it,” Ian said. “Having the opportunity to be involved with football again with him — maybe just this year or whatever the future presents — it's been pretty fun.”

The Cardinals had a couple openings on their staff this offseason. So, Svirbly, who was a junior high coach when Tom Haynes coached football at Cochranton, was quick to call Tom, who still teaches at Cochranton, and is the varsity head softball coach.

“When I reached out to Tom about coaching, he said he had two conditions — one, he wanted to control the offense, and two, he wanted his son to coach,” Svirbly said.

“Well, I'd be a fool not to agree to all that. It's like, do you want to win the lottery or not? It was obvious.”

So, there was Ian on the sidelines on opening night at Iroquois directing the Cardinals to their first win of the season. Tom acted as his “eyes in the sky” in the press box.

“He's interesting. He sees things a little differently than I do,” Tom said with a laugh.

“We have our moments where we might disagree on things. Most of the time, I step back and let him do his thing. The kids like him a lot. He's had a positive impact on the kids in Cochranton, that's for sure.”

Ian, who grew up in Cochranton before moving to Franklin before high school, has gained an appreciation of working with youngsters through his job at Pathways Adolescent Center in Oil City.

“I am talking to kids all day, so that helps,” he said. “My biggest thing is simplifying things. My football brain doesn’t work the same as high school kids. So, it’s nice to be able to bounce ideas off my dad, who is a master of simplifying things.

“I learned a lot while I was at Kutztown,” Ian continued. “I got to watch (offensive coordinator) Marcel Quarterman, one of the best play callers I have ever seen. I’d see how he’d set up run or pass plays and how he prepared for everything. It was cool to watch that and learn from that.”

Even though he’s possibly D-10’s youngest offensive coordinator, he’s been a welcome addition to the Cochran staff, which also features former Franklin player Eli Stewart.

“We have so much fun coaching together. You couldn’t ask for a better group of guys. We mesh well together,” Svirbly said. “Ian has a future in coaching anywhere. His knowledge base is unbelievable. He is a lifelong learner. He loves the game and understands the game at a level people only wish they could.”

This season may be the only one Ian will coach for the foreseeable future, though. He hopes to attend the Pennsylvania State Police Academy in November.

“I would really love to coach in the future, too. I am not sure if it’s something I will jump into right away as a full-time gig. I’m trying to get into the state police. That’s basically where most of my attention is heading right now,” Ian said. “I am not sure how coaching will line up with that type of career.”

Until then, though, he’s going to enjoy his time on the sidelines.

“That’s the goal. The boys are working hard and it’s been pretty awesome, especially getting that first win,” Ian said. “We have a lot more work to do. But, it’s been pretty special to enjoy every day with my dad out there on the field.”