

Both bigger. By a lot.

Both looking the part.

Ben knew in his heart that he had all the skills needed to be a quarterback, not just the arm. More than that, he knew he had the ability to do the one thing that was supposed to count the most in sports:

The ability to make a play.

It always came down to that, whether you were playing in the schoolyard at Rockwell Middle School at recess, or in the small park across the street from your house, or even on the real football field behind their school, the field they all called The Rock.

Ben still thought of himself as a quarterback even knowing he was barely big enough to play *any* position in Pop Warner football, that he was just going to make the minimum requirement for weight this season in the Midget Division of the Butler County League for eleven-year-olds.

The limit was one hundred pounds. Ben was one hundred and one, he weighed himself every morning to make sure he hadn't dropped a couple while he was sleeping.

Sometimes he couldn't help himself, he imagined they'd named the division for him, that *he* was going to be the midget on his team and in their league.

But when he'd say something like that to his dad, Jeff McBain would look at him and say, "So play bigger, big boy."

"When it's football season," Ben said, "I just want to *be* bigger."

Of course his dad was 6-2 and weighed two hundred pounds, which is what he'd weighed when he'd been a

defensive back at Boston College. It was Ben's mom who was the small one, about 5-2 and half his dad's weight. The family pediatrician, Dr. Freshman, had done all these projections and said that Ben might grow to be 5-8 someday. Probably not more than that.

Making it sound like a good thing. His father liked to joke that Ben lucked out getting his mother's looks, but he got her short legs, too.

Size didn't bother Ben in the other sports he played. It didn't. Didn't hold him back or slow him down. He was a pitcher in baseball when he wasn't playing just about every other position on the field, even catcher sometimes, though catching equipment seemed to swallow him up the way pads and his helmet did in football. He was a point guard in basketball who could pass like a pro and already knew how to create enough space to get his shot when he wasn't beating guys off the dribble with his speed.

And he could always beat people with his speed in football, no worries there, could do that carrying the ball from the backfield or catching it or returning punts and kickoffs.

But there wasn't a single day he'd ever played Pop Warner, from the time he started playing in the third grade, that he didn't think he was playing out of position.

"I'm trying out for quarterback again," Ben had said to his dad in the car on the way to tryouts.

"There's a shocker," his dad had said.

"I won't get it," Ben had said.

"You don't know that before the tryouts even start."

"Yeah, Dad, I do."