

Pass It On®...

Winning at the Game of Life.

College football player gives up his scholarship to make more possible for a teammate.

No team wins every game. And, like the game itself, sometimes life feels unfair. For most student athletes in all sports, the support they get from their teammates is what helps them get through the challenge of balancing work, school and athletics. The lessons learned are valuable for life. It's never going to be easy. Career, family, and the unpredictable nature of both can bring trials that test your character.

Football is one of those sports that develops a strong bond between teammates. It requires every member to trust the player next to him. Trying to juggle the financing of an education can be the most difficult play of the season. At Eastern Michigan University, offensive lineman Zack Conti was doing everything he could to keep up with team practices, studies and paying his way. He was even donating plasma regularly to help cover expenses. By his teammates' assessments, he was one of the hardest-working players on the team. But he was not on scholarship.

That's when his teammate Brian Dooley stepped in. Dooley's scholarship was one of only 85 allotted to Eastern Michigan by the NCAA. As Chris Creighton, head football coach, explains, schools can petition for more, they can beg and plead. But the rule is hard and fast: 85 scholarships. Period.

So Dooley did the unimaginable. He talked to his family, and then he went to his coach. Creighton remembers: "Brian Dooley comes into my office and he says, 'Coach, that guy has earned it. And I've talked this over with my family. If there is a way to make this happen, I am willing to give up my scholarship as a gift to Zack Conti.' I've never seen anything like that ever before."

At a team meeting, Coach Creighton made the announcement, and Dooley walked over and handed Conti the scholarship. The team erupted in cheers, and Conti was soon buried beneath a huddle of cheering teammates pounding him on the back, jumping up and down in celebration.

When asked about the incredible gift, Dooley shared, "I did it because I've seen Zack grow over the years. Seeing him walk away from something that he loves did not sit well with me. He works hard and gets in extra work with me all the time. In my eyes, he earned it 100%. Giving up my scholarship so he can stay and play means everything."

In the throes of competition, true character is revealed. We hear too often about the occasional bad apples. But competition can shape us to be better people. Through competition, we can learn that a team isn't really about competing at all, but cooperating to reach a united goal.

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