



# Provitt a player for all seasons

By Staff Report , Herald-Tribune / Thursday, August 21, 2014

By **MICHAEL SCOTT DAVIDSON**

## VENICE

**Langston Provitt** is a throwback.

Twenty years ago, nearly every high school could boast of athletes who played all three of the major team sports — football, basketball and baseball.

But in an age when ever younger athletes are being guided to specialize in a single sport, Provitt has become a rarity, if not downright unique — a standout in all three sports for Venice High School.



Langston Provitt, 17, at a 175 pounds is a rarity: One of the very few athletes in our area to start varsity on the three major boys varsity team sports: football, basketball and baseball. (August 19, 2014) (Herald-Tribune staff photo by Thomas Bender)

The 17-year-old is believed to be the only area athlete to letter in all three sports last season and, in his senior year, he is aiming to do it again.

He will start at cornerback, wide receiver and on special teams tonight, wearing the No. 3 jersey, when the Indians open their season against the Southeast Seminoles in a Kickoff Classic game at Powell-Davis Stadium in Venice.

Provitt's choice is a trend that one long-time area coach says has all but vanished over the years. Three-sport high school athletes — particularly football, basketball and baseball players — are nearly extinct.

“The normal athlete cannot play three sports anymore. It's just too hard,” said

**Kerry Baker**, 70, who has played and coached in the area since the late 1950s.

“The workouts, the studying. You have to be a special kid to balance all of that stuff.”

Baker, a former three-sport athlete himself at Cardinal Mooney High, estimated that today, only about 10 percent of high school athletes nationwide play football, basketball and baseball all in the same year. In his opinion, the trend has been on a steady decline since the early 1970s.

The cause is an ever growing demand for elite high school athletes, who in turn will compete for a small number of

college scholarships. Players are encouraged to specialize in a single sport and to take part in summer leagues to continue training year round.

“Football was over, then basketball started,” Baker recounted. “Basketball was over, then baseball started. There wasn’t as much overlap in the sports.

“Now, they burn out a lot of kids.”

That’s not an issue for Provitt. He thrives on the aggressiveness and physicality that the three sports share.

“I like to think of myself as a ball magnet,” Provitt said. “When the ball is in the air, I like to go get it, knock it down or intercept it. I’m a competitor, I don’t like letting people make plays on me.”

He’s not one to shirk practice or opportunity either. This summer he kept his skills sharpened by practicing each sport on an almost daily basis.

He’d wake up before sunrise for football practice in Venice, and afterward drive to North Port, where he resides. Provitt wasn’t headed home; instead he opted to hone his baseball skills with other players of an Amateur Athletic Union baseball summer league team.

Then he would eat and nap. But not long after he would be up again, working on his basketball-handling drills at home.

Basketball was the last sport Provitt lettered in, walking on Venice’s basketball team in his junior year. His integration into the roster was as seamless as it was beneficial, Venice boys basketball head coach **James Slaton** said.

“He came in with no agenda, no attitude, no, ‘I’m better than you.’ He came in and just worked. He’s the one who hit the shot that won our first round of regional games and put us in the Sweet 16.”

Slaton’s praises of Provitt’s work ethic were echoed by Venice head football Coach **John Peacock**.

“He’s the real deal on both sides of the ball,” Peacock said. “He continues to get better each week, each day. I really think the sky’s the limit for him.”

Provitt said his passion for football stemmed from his first all-star football game. At age 6 he played on the Youngstown State University field in Ohio, the state he lived in until he was 7. The league was meant for 8-year-olds, but Provitt was allowed to join after requesting to bypass his town’s flag football league in favor of tackle.

Now he stands 5-foot-11 and weighs 175 lean pounds. He said even though he was young, he realized at that all-star game that he wanted to play college football.

“I felt like I was playing on something humongous, I was so little,” he said. “It was overwhelming but I loved the experience.”

Two years prior, he began his athletic career when his parents signed him up for tee-ball. That soon turned to baseball, also known as the Provitt “family favorite.”

The Provitts are an athletic bunch. Langston’s dad played minor league baseball and his two older sisters played softball.

Provitt said his older brother Larry pushed him to develop his skills at a young age. At age 17, he began taking Provitt, then 9, to practice football, basketball and baseball with his high school friends.

“I’d make him play with me so I could be better,” Provitt said. “I’d play with the older guys so when I got to the kids my age, it wasn’t as much of a challenge.”

Larry ended up walking on at the University of Central Florida, which made Provitt’s own aspirations of playing Division 1 football seem more attainable.

Peacock is confident Provitt will play college football.

“I really think he’s one of the top football players in the state,” the coach said, adding that Provitt is scheduled to tour UCF’s campus and meet with athletics faculty in the near future.

“They’re very interested in him, so hopefully that will work out,” he said. “If not he’ll have plenty of people knocking on the door after this season is over.”

It seems like college would be a good fit for Provitt, because academically, he’s no slouch either. He holds a 3.6 GPA, 4.2 weighted, and is taking honors physics, advanced placement economics and a dual enrollment written communications course this semester.

It stands to reason that Provitt’s high school life can be hectic and even seem overwhelming at times. Practices overlap, school work demands attention and there’s an ever-present soreness in his muscles, so much that drawing ice baths at home has become a staple of his routine.

“I really have to focus on recovery on weekends,” he said. “I have little free time, but I don’t abuse it by going to

parties.”

It’s a sacrifice Provitt makes so he can play football, basketball and baseball.

“I have a passion for all three of them, so I definitely don’t want to give that up,” he said. “And college coaches like to see players that can play multiple sports. I feel like it gives me a little bit of an edge that I play more than one position and sport. They all in a way help each other help me get better.”

His decision was supported by Baker, who said he'd like to see more students skip specializing and instead play additional sports that interest them. Enjoying yourself, he said, has intangible perks.

“Most guys remember their high school careers,” he said. “They have reunions, especially teams that win state championships or went deep. It’s a camaraderie that stands a lot of years.”

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