

High School Quarterback Penalized for Thanking God

Mexico High School quarterback Dante Turo was raised by his parents to give glory to God—especially on the football field.

“When you score touchdowns, when you make big plays, it’s easy to become proud,” Geno, his dad, told me. “It’s easy to take credit for yourself. I didn’t want my son to get caught up in that.”

Geno, who lives in a small town north of Syracuse, New York, encouraged his son to find a subtle way to praise the Lord after making big plays.

“He wanted to do something at that moment to take credit away from himself and give glory to God,” Geno said. “God gives us the ability and the talent. As Christians, we want to be sure to give that back immediately.”

So on Oct. 17 when Dante ran 73 yards for a touchdown, the 17-year-old quarterback raised a single finger to the sky.

Dante was honoring the Lord. But a referee said he was taunting.

Video shows the quarterback running into the end zone and briefly raising his finger before tossing the pigskin to the referee.

As soon as he raised his finger, the ref tossed a flag. He was penalized 15 yards for unsportsmanlike conduct—excessive celebration.

“I talked to the referee and told him I wasn’t trying to do anything malicious or arrogant—I was just trying to give praise to God,” Dante told me. “He told me, ‘Don’t do it again.’”

Dante wasn't the only one to address the issue.

"I tried to explain to the referee that threw the flag and the head referee, but they just said, it's taunting," head coach Tee Murabito told me. "I told them he was praising God. How is that taunting?"

Coach Murabito told me Dante is a good kid and God is a "very big part of his life."

A website that covers high school sports in the Syracuse region tried reaching out to the Mohawk Valley Chapter of Certified Football Officials. No comment, they replied via email.

"It has been a longstanding policy that the Mohawk Valley Chapter of Certified Football Officials does not address the media pertaining to penalty calls or any other actions made during a football game," they wrote to the website: .

Geno told me that he's proud of his son.

"He's brave," he said. "I brought him up to be fearless in the face of opposition."

Granted, it's just a football game—but what happened in New York over the weekend is an example of something that's happening across the country.

Christians are being told to keep their beliefs to themselves.

"It troubles me," Geno said. "I think people have forgotten that we settled in this land to flee religious persecution. We're supposed to have religious freedom here. But it seems like instead of religious freedom we are being persecuted for our beliefs."

Dante will be back on the football field Friday night. And should he be fortunate enough to score a touchdown, the young 17-year-old told me he will honor God.

“Without a doubt I will raise my finger,” he told me.

Without a doubt. No matter the cost.

Dante Turo is indeed fearless in the face of opposition.