

Through it All, Roberts Has Kept the Faith

By Jerry Hill
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Ryan Roberts' faith has never wavered. The fifth-year senior quarterback firmly believes that God "put me here for a reason."

Even when Baylor never recruited him out of Keller High School, despite the fact that he earned District 5-5A MVP honors and ranked No.1 in the state among Class 5A passers with 2,598 yards and 32 touchdowns. Or when the coaches didn't return his calls after he started four games and threw for 984 yards and eight TDs as a redshirt freshman at Division II Midwestern State University.

"I just felt like God was leading me to come here," he said.

So he gave up his scholarship at Midwestern and turned down a full-ride offer from Blinn College to walk on at Baylor, where nothing was ever promised.

"I could have gone (to Blinn), spent a year and maybe got picked up by somebody else," said the 6-foot, 218-pound senior. "But I felt like I could take out student loans for a year, prove myself and the loans would be worth it. Maybe earn a scholarship and get a chance to play at Baylor."

Roberts called it a "God thing" when then-head coach Guy Morriss hired assistants Lee Hays and Wes Phillips from West Texas A&M. In his first start at Midwestern some three months earlier, Roberts had thrown for 230 yards and three touchdowns in a 47-44 loss to . . . West Texas.

"I had the best game of my life," he said. "It was a four-hour game, and we missed like six extra points. But it seemed like it was such a God thing that I was able to basically have a tryout for the future Baylor coaches.

"When my mom called and told me she had seen the internet article about Baylor hiring these coaches, I was like, 'Mom, that's amazing. I don't even need a highlight film now. They know what I can do.' I think that at least opened the door for me."

After spending the 2006 season on the scout team, Roberts was a surprise entry in a crowded quarterback derby last year that included a Division I transfer (Michael Machen), an MVP of a junior college conference (John David Weed) and two other scholarship players (Blake Szymanski and Tyler Beatty).

In the 2007 spring game, Roberts was the leading passer, completing 9 of 13 for 104 yards. But by the fall, his faith was tested again.

"I went from being 1 and 2 (on the depth chart) and leading the spring game in passing," he said, "to all of a sudden (going into fall camp) being fifth string. But I was determined to keep working like I was the starter, because I felt like eventually I would get my opportunity."

Although he had been relegated to scout-team duties again, Roberts' opportunity came in the seventh week of the season.

After a mid-week promotion from scout team to No. 2, Roberts replaced Szymanski on the second series in the third quarter of a 58-10 loss at No. 20 Kansas. In his two series, Roberts was 3-of-5 for 28 yards, leading the Bears to one first down, but getting sacked on a fourth-down play near midfield.

"I felt like I had been preparing for this for about a year and a half," he said. "I got out there, and I felt like the speed of the game was fine. I felt comfortable. I wish I would have gone in there and thrown a few touchdowns and led us back. It didn't happen. But it really was a blessing to be able to see at least some of the hard work pay off."

With a new coaching staff that he calls an "answered prayer" and three new quarterbacks in the mix this year, Roberts was in the familiar position of having to prove himself all over again.

So far, he's been on the scout team. And on Thursday, Roberts suffered a setback with a shoulder injury that will require several weeks of rehabilitation. But his mindset has never changed.

"Every week, I have to prepare like I'm the starting quarterback," he said. "As history has proven, anything's possible. I have to have myself ready, because you never know. Fourth string, fifth string, whatever it is, I still have to prepare myself the same."

Part of Roberts' dream came true in May, when he earned his undergraduate degree in general studies. He will begin working on his masters degree in sports management this fall and plans to become a coach.

"That was a thrill walking across the stage," he said of the commencement ceremony. "That was my plan coming out of high school was to get my degree from Baylor University."

Another answer to prayer came just before the start of two-a-days when Roberts found out he was one of seven former walk-ons being awarded scholarships for the 2008-09 academic year, joining receiver/punt returner Joe Bennett, deep snapper Carter Brunelle, linebacker Ty Findley, offensive lineman Chris Griesenbeck, defensive tackle Sam Sledge and fullback Larry Washington.

Roberts said there are times when "negative thoughts will come into my head." Like what if he had stayed at Midwestern? Daniel Polk, who shared the QB duties with Roberts in 2005, is a free-agent receiver now with the Dallas Cowboys after becoming the first player in Lone Star Conference history to pass for 2,000 yards and rush for 1,000 in the same season.

"What if I would have done this, or what if I would have gone to Blinn?" Roberts said. "But I have a peace in my heart that God put me here for a reason. And I have no regrets, I really don't. I've thought about it long and hard. It really has been a blessing to be here and be part of this team and be around these guys. And I wouldn't take anything back or change a thing."