

Gridiron glory put on hold

By **CHRIS SIMNETT**

Free Press staff writer

This past week was a weird one for Chad Penner.

First, the 17-year-old local football standout found out he was chosen to play for Team BC this summer during a series of games in Alberta, then he found out there would be no Team BC.

Only 25 of the 35 players selected for the team committed themselves to go on the two-week tour and organizers decided it wasn't worth the effort if they couldn't take a full-squad.

"I'm really disappointed," says Penner, a six-one, 275 pound offensive and defensive lineman for the Prince George Midget Raiders. "Living up here you don't get that many opportunities to be seen and get noticed and I'm not eligible for the team next year."

Penner, who looks and acts more like a gentle giant than a hard-hitting lineman, earned a spot on Team BC at the week-long Senior Bowl in Vancouver during Spring Break. Locals Rob Murphy and Mark McLeod also went, but they weren't selected to the team.

Penner lives in Willow River, a tiny community about 30 minutes northeast of Prince George and says he is on the smallish side compared to other linemen, but he makes up for his lack of size with quickness.

"I'm one of the smallest linemen we have," says the defensive tackle and offensive guard. "The average for offensive line is six foot four and about 300 pounds. I'm a good lineman because of my size, I'm still pretty big, and because for my size I'm really quick. I'm deceptively quick."

But he still has some work to do if he hopes to move on



Chad Penner, with dog Nipper, was excited to make the Team BC football squad but was bitterly disappointed when the team was dissolved. JOHN MCKENZIE/FREE PRESS

to the next level, either university football or the B.C. Junior Football League.

He tried out for the Okanagan Sun of the BCJFL at the beginning of June, but hurt his back and couldn't attend all of the practices.

"I still have to work on my foot-speed and I have to hit the gym," says the recent graduate of Prince George Secondary.

While Penner plays ironman football, meaning he is on the field for both defensive and offensive plays, his favourite position is on defence.

"I like pass rushing, I like any rushing," he says with a smile. "I'm good at bull rushing, I like to go straight through. I'm too short to put the moves on anybody so I

just bull rush through guys."

Like most football players, he loves to hit. He started playing football eight years ago and looks forward to every season like it will be his last.

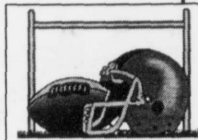
"I love football," he says. "The best thing is when you go to hit a guy. It's just an awesome feeling. Hitting is my favourite part of the game. As far as I'm concerned, it's the only part of the game."

As a lineman, Penner gets to do a lot of hitting but he doesn't get a lot of respect.

Linemen are the infantry soldiers of a football team, they do the lions share of the work, but they don't get much recognition.

"Linemen don't get noticed and I think it's kind of bull," says Penner. "I think we've got the most important position on the field. Without us, there would be no 80 yard runs down the field. When a running back makes a good run, people forget that it was us who opened up the hole for him to run through."

Prince George Minor Football Association



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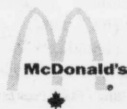
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