

# Tiny player becomes jewell of a quarterback

By Bill Richardson  
A Member of the Sports Staff

When Kelly Groom reported to his first football practice at William Jewell College in 1979, the coaches considered telling him to concentrate on another sport.

"He was kind of a spindly kid, 5-11, 140," said Darrel Gourley, who has served as Jewell quarterback coach in football and head coach in track. "One of the other coaches told me, 'Well, maybe you've got yourself a pole vaulter.'"

Gourley never got to see how high Groom could vault. Instead, he has spent the last three years watching Groom take William Jewell to the heights of small college football. In three seasons with Groom as their quarterback, the Cardinals have compiled a record of 31-3-1.

On Saturday, Groom will attempt to end his William Jewell career with a national championship. The Cardinals, 10-1, play Linfield, 11-0, in McMinnville, Ore., for the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics Division II title.

Groom has grown into the job. A more than adequate passer and runner, he learned the intricacies of the quarterback position rapidly during his freshman year while serving as a backup to senior Mark Capra. He won the starting job as a sophomore in 1980 and has never relinquished it. Working with weights has enabled Groom to reach 175 pounds and

has helped keep him injury-free.

"I've marveled at Kelly's progress over the years," Gourley said. "I recognized his ability to read defenses right off. And he has leadership abilities. But to handle the quarterback position from a skill standpoint real early — I think that shows how much he learned from Capra.

"He has the ability to read defenses as they set up, and then audible away from them. He's like a coach out on the field. And a lot of this comes from letting him call his own plays."

Groom, originally from Marbank, Texas, (70 miles east of Dallas), lived two years in LaGrange, Mo., after his father took a job in nearby Quincy, Ill. Groom's parents since have moved to Jackson, Mo. Groom participated in football, basketball, baseball and track at Highland High School, a consolidated school 17 miles from LaGrange.

"I was from a small school and didn't have many offers for college football," Groom said. "Stan McGarvey, the Jewell coach, convinced me that I could play college ball. I came over and visited the Jewell campus and loved it right away."

Groom didn't leave his home ties behind. During his freshman year at Jewell, Groom married his high school sweetheart. He and his wife, Kim, live in the William Jewell married students dormitory and have a 6-month-old daughter, Kendall.

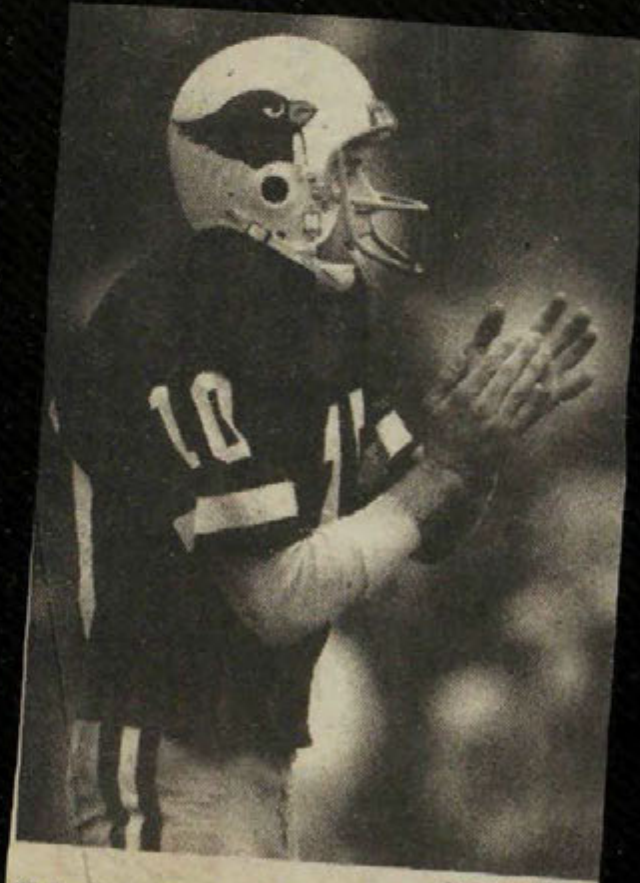
"I'm on a work-study program; I officiate basketball games and my wife is a secretary at a law firm in Liberty," Groom said. "Kim has been very supportive of my football career. She hasn't missed a game in three years, and she'll be in Oregon this weekend."

Groom is modest about his football accomplishments. He prefers to pass the credit for Jewell's winning record the last three years to his teammates.

"They helped me as I was coming along," Groom said. "I'd be only an average quarterback on any other team. But surrounded by such people as I am, it's easy to do your best. As for my play-calling, it's more a matter of execution. If everybody holds up doing their part, we'll all do well."

Groom, who has maintained a consistent 3-plus grade average on a scale of four, is majoring in physical education and social studies. He says he hopes to get into coaching and teaching when he finishes college.

"Right now the only real thing I'm thinking about is this football game Saturday," Groom said. "We're looking at this game like we have a tremendous opportunity to do something no one else has ever been able to do at this school, and that's to win a national football championship. We've been waiting three years for this opportunity. This college has meant a lot to all of us, and if we can pay back a little of what the college has given us, it's all worth it."



Mark Hinojosa/Staff  
Kelly Groom has grown into a winning quarterback for William Jewell.