

J.J. Mahe:

His physical play on the defensive line forced teams to make him their focus

By Bruce Smith
Matchup

Wearing uniform No. 53, J.J. Mahe had a big impact on the Brighton football team.

The offensive line got most of the preseason hype but, in practice, they had to go up against Mahe. In games, it was the defense that frequently kept the Bengals alive. It started in the season opener against Davis, when the Darts were held scoreless in the second half on their home field.

The following week, Brighton blanked Fremont 27-0 and, afterward, at least one Bengal coach exclaimed, “now that’s Brighton football.”

Tough, tenacious, physical. Twenty one players weighed in at 200 pounds or more. Mahe was one of the heaviest – at 310 – and the most athletic. He said coaches often noted that he had quick feet, and that he never gave up on plays, which set him apart from other players.

“It was a great year. We did so much. Probably one of the best years we’ve had here since 2005,” said Mahe. “I’ll never forget those times.

“The best part was the excitement we felt even before the season started. It was the biggest line we had in a long time. All of our line were returning starters. We knew it would be a better year. I don’t think other teams knew. We were unexpected.”

Mahe finished with 32 tackles – ranking fifth on the team – but those statistics didn’t show how his true value. His quickness often forced opponents to adjust their plans. He frequently disrupted plays, even if he didn’t get in on the tackle.

In Brighton’s first five games, the Bengals allowed just 11.6 points per game.

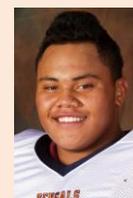
Mahe said there were two turning points for the Bengals.



J.J. Mahe followed his father to Brighton four years ago and was the anchor of Brighton’s defense this season.

Mahe’s highlights

- * - **FOUR-YEAR** varsity letterman and a team captain during his senior season.
- * - **CLOSEST FRIENDS** on the team were Uaea Masina, Hunter Smedley, Josh Menna.
- * - **FOND MEMORIES** of going to Max Linder’s home or nearby Wendy’s restaurant after games.



* - The first came at halftime of the Davis game, when Brighton rallied for a 21-14 win.

“After that game, we knew it was going to be a long, fun year,” Mahe said.

* - The second came two months later. Brighton had lost to Cottonwood 20-0 in a play-in game and faced West Jordan for the final playoff spot at Hillcrest High’s field. Some of the players were dejected, but it was the beginning of what

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BRIGHTON FOOTBALL: Senior profile



TOP LEFT: J.J. Mahe looks to block for Uaea Masina.

TOP RIGHT: Mahe and Ethan Finlinson pressure the QB.

LOWER LEFT: Mahe hustles off the field.

LOWER RIGHT: Hunter Smedley, Finlinson, Masina, coach Ryan Bullett and Mahe prepare for a coin toss.

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would be a momentous day.

“The coaches started tell us great (inspirational) stories and all of the seniors starting cheering up and got excited,” he said.

The contest’s deciding play came with about a minute left when Alec McArdle made a leaping catch of a “Hail Mary” pass and scored the go-ahead touchdown. Mahe was on the sideline when it happened, but will always remember the scene.

“I saw Alec jump up and catch it,” he said. “Then he dropped it. I just fell on my knees and said, ‘Thank God’ when he got it (the ball) back.”

Mahe’s career at Brighton started his freshmen year. He lived in the East High boundaries, but followed his father, Sione, who was an assistant

coach with the Bengals. J.J. is the oldest of five children, but so far it seems his siblings will all be Leopards.

Besides football, Mahe played on Brighton’s rugby team, which made it to the state championship game two consecutive seasons. He suffered a dislocated shoulder his junior year, which forced him to miss rugby in 2012 and play in pain during most of his senior football season.

Mahe said he had surgery shortly after the football season and had high hopes that his play would eventually result in a college football scholarship.

He planned to go on an LDS Church mission shortly after graduation.