

Alex Villanueva injured; Childress to start Friday

Written by Mike Kelly

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The Avery Vikings were cruising along, enjoying their best season in nearly five years. They were 4-0, ranked seventh in the state in Class 1A, and their high-powered offense had erupted for 155 points. Quarterback Alex Villanueva was the man responsible for Avery's turnaround.

The junior, who was coming off an impressive season last fall, stepped up his game another notch this year. Unfortunately, that all came to a crashing halt on Tuesday afternoon, when Villanueva was injured in a freak injury at practice. Playing wide receiver on the scout team, he tripped over a teammate and landed awkwardly breaking his collarbone. The end result, Villaneuva will be out five to six weeks.

"It was just crazy," said Avery coach Darrell Brewer. "He was trying to help us out playing on the scout team, and he got hurt. At our level (Class 1A), the quarterbacks usually play both ways. But I was protecting Alex.

"I only let him play offense, and then he gets hurt like this. What can I say. It was a freaky accident."

Villanueva had surgery Thursday afternoon at the Watauga Medical Center in Boone. Orthopedic surgeon, Doctor Chris V. Benson did the operation.

"Dr. Benson was just great from day one," Brewer said. "He was very positive and supportive. Alex was very upset when he got hurt, and that's understandable with the year he was having. Heck, he kept apologizing for getting hurt. It wasn't anyone's fault, it just happened."

The Vikings hope to get Villanueva back with a least a game or two left in the regular season before the state playoffs begin on November 12. In the meantime, senior Dustin Childress will get the starting nod in Friday's Western Highlands 1A/2A Conference opener at Black Mountain Owen.

"Dustin has seen limited playing time," Brewer said. "But the team, as a whole, has a lot of confidence in him. Owen has an excellent team, and even with Alex healthy, would have been a huge challenge for us. But we all have to step it up now.

"It's the job of everyone on this team, including the coaching staff, to keep us moving forward. Injuries happen, you can't avoid them, they're part of the game."

Villanueva was 56-102 for 949 yards with ten touchdown passes and three interceptions before the injury. He also had 143 rushing yards on 27 carries.