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## 'Everyone loves Matt Hoey'

By Michelle Prego-Milewski / Special to The Citizen

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**S**YRACUSE - Before Auburn had played a down of football this season, coach Dave Moskov figured Matt Hoey would be a big part of the Maroons' success or failure.

Never in his wildest dreams would Moskov know just how right he was.

Of all Hoey's positions - running back, receiver, punter, defensive back and place kicker - the latter was what would make or break Auburn's season.

Normally an accurate kicker, Hoey missed an extra point in the second half of Saturday's Class AA State Championship game. The miss kept Auburn ahead by seven points and Monroe-Woodbury eventually tied it late in the fourth quarter to send the game into overtime.

And then, in the extra session, to give the Maroons a state championship in a season that can only be described as unbelievable, he missed again.

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But in another twist in the long and winding road that has been Auburn's 2006 campaign, he was given another chance when Dan Mauriello was flagged for roughing the kicker. And when the ball sailed through the uprights on his second try, he proved Moskov's prediction true.

Hoey's right foot had just given the Maroons a 27-26 victory over the defending state champion, and nobody could be happier about it than Hoey himself.

"If I didn't miss that first one, we wouldn't have even been in overtime," said Hoey, who was also named the game's Most Valuable Defensive Back. "I felt it was kind of fitting that the game came down to me. I really wanted to do it for my team."

"It came down to the kicking game for both teams," said Crusader coach Pat D'Aliso. "Not big hits, not quarterbacks, not running backs, not defense. It came down to extra points."

It was almost fitting that an extra point would become so crucial.

In the regular season, Auburn defeated Corcoran for the first time in 25 years because the Cougars were stopped on all four of their two-point conversions.

Just last week, Marshall missed its first extra point, forcing it to go for two on each of its two ensuing scores. Just like the Cougars, the Jurists were stopped.

Even on State Championship Saturday, each kicker - Hoey and Crusader Jamie Boyle - missed an extra point in regulation.

Boyle, a transplanted soccer player, also couldn't connect when Monroe-Woodbury scored in the extra session. After Dave Landesberg rushed in from 2 yards out for the first score in overtime, Boyle's kick went left by inches.

"No kid who is a 15-year-old sophomore is going to be 100 percent," D'Aliso said. "It's part of playing high school football. They're kids and they're going to make mistakes."

“Being a kicker - it's a tough thing,” Hoey said. “You know a lot rides on you. You can leave the game either a hero or a zero.”

After Boyle's miss, Auburn tied it up on its first chance. Darnell Murphy found an open Jeff Richardson from 20 yards out on the Maroons' first overtime snap.

While Hoey said he mis-hit the first attempt, holder Chris Gomez admitted the Maroons were a little too excited when it came time for the kick.

“It was a slow snap and we weren't ready for it yet,” Gomez said. “We were still hyped from the touchdown.”

Moskov spotted the flag before he saw the ball ricochet off the left upright. He was positive Hoey would convert on the most crucial play in Auburn sports history.

Hoey's kick was nearly right down the center, and the Auburn team that was initially left out of the Section III, Class AA playoffs left the Carrier Dome with one more piece of hardware for its trophy case.

Do-all player Hoey left as Auburn's newest hero.

“Everyone in Auburn loves Matt Hoey tonight,” Moskov said.

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