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CLIMAX - There are some who believe the best way to teach a child to swim is to throw him in the deep end of the pool. It's not the preferred way, but there are those who say it's the most effective way.

High School football coaches certainly don't want to take that approach when it comes to the quarterback position, but sometimes there is no other choice.

Providence Grove High School football coach Calvin Brown had no other choice than to throw then-freshman Luke Thomas into the quarterback position after an injury to his starting quarterback in the third game of the 2019 season.

"We knew Luke was going to be our guy in the future, but we didn't think the future was going to be that soon," Brown said. "We had to change our scheme a little. We had to ease him in."

In his very first drive after starter Andrew Poteat suffered a torn ACL on the very first play of the third game of the season, Thomas led his team down the field and into the end zone, connecting with Griffin Payne on a scoring strike.

"In all honesty, it was pretty terrifying," Thomas remembered. "I didn't even have my helmet to go in. It was the third game of the season and I got thrown right in. It was a lot to take in and it was really hard. I had so much to take in and I had little practice. Andrew was a senior and he was great."

Thomas said he remembers his first drive.

"I knew it wasn't going to be that easy," he said,

It wasn't as the Patriots dropped four straight games before Thomas and his teammates regrouped to win four straight. The Patriots scored 103 points in that winning streak and it was a taste of what the Patriots would accomplish under Thomas.

While learning on the go, Thomas finished 64 of 149 in the passing department for 787 yards and the Pats completed the year 6-6.

"Staying cool under pressure," Thomas said of one of the most important lessons he learned that freshman season. "There will be games where you are not having your best game. You have to play



Luke Thomas. Photo by PJ Ward-Brown Photography.

the next game. There are times after a pick I would have my head down, but you have a drive right after that. You don't want to get too high or too low. Football is a long game, so you have to stay collected on the field."

In his sophomore year, the Patriots' finished 8-4 as Thomas threw for 2017 yards with 17 touchdowns. He added three more scores on the ground.



Luke Thomas. Photo by PJ Ward-Brown Photography.

The Patriots started this season with a pair of tough losses, falling to Eastern Randolph 22-14 and then Randleman 28-21. Against ER, Thomas passed for 230 yards and ran for a score and against the Tigers, he threw for 219 yards and a touchdown while running for two more.

PG evened its record at 2-2 with a pair of wins in the next two games. In a 57-0 win over Trinity, Thomas threw for 158 yards and three touchdowns while also adding a rushing score. In a 49-0 victory over Wheatmore, Thomas threw for 190 yards and added a rushing touchdown. In all this campaign, Thomas has thrown for 803 yards and four TDs while adding five more on the ground.

"He has always had a strong arm and been very athletic," Brown said of Thomas. "His understanding of the game has increased every year. His pre-snap reads and post-snap reads. He's able to take that knowledge and transfer it to the field."

Thomas, who set a school record in the 40-yard dash with a time of 4.49, doesn't run a lot in the Patriots' offensive scheme, but he isn't afraid to turn the corner and take off.

"We don't run him a lot, we don't want him taking too many hits," Brown said.

With receivers like Questin Overman, Zander Cheek, Zane Cheek, Cam Way and Caleb Rogers coming out of the backfield, Thomas has plenty of targets on each play.

Thomas is just as accomplished on the baseball field and the pitcher/outfielder said he'd love to play both in college. He still has plenty of time to decide.

"The goal is to get a scholarship in one and walk-on the other," Thomas said, adding he'd love to go to Appalachian State or Coastal Carolina. "I love both sports and play them as much as I can."

For now, there's the remainder of his junior season and then his final year as a Patriot.

But he's already made a giant impact in PG athletics.