

# Slippery Rock mini-man plays as big as anyone

By Alan Robinson  
Associated Press

PITTSBURGH (AP) — When tiny Tim Kelly reported to Slippery Rock University's preseason camp four years ago, the coaches took one look at him and decided he was too small to be a running back.

So he became a defensive end.  
You've heard of Dallas Cowboys defensive end Ed "Too Tall" Jones? Meet Slippery Rock defensive end Tim "Too Small" Kelly.

At 5-foot-6 and 195 pounds, Kelly might be the smallest defensive lineman in college football. He's a funny-sized player at the school with the funny name, but around the competitive, 14-team Pennsylvania Conference, he's no laughing matter.

Kelly has 36 tackles, including a team-leading eight for losses, two quarterback sacks and two fumble recoveries this season. Last week, Slippery Rock (3-1-1) played a 28-28 tie with unbeaten Shippensburg (5-0-1), which was fourth-ranked in NCAA Division II.

"A lot of bigger guys take one look at Tim and say, 'I'm gonna whip this guy every play,'" Slippery Rock coach George Mihalik said. "When they realize they can't, it frustrates them, and that gives Tim a psychological edge."

A senior who is Slippery Rock's defensive captain, Kelly never gives his size a thought. Maybe it's be-

cause he never gave a second thought to not playing.  
"I've grown up in a football family," said Kelly, who played at Duquesne High School, a perennial Pittsburgh-area small school power. "I never thought about playing. I've enjoyed it for so long."

Kelly was a blocking back and linebacker in high school, and Slippery Rock's coaches were initially reluctant to even let him practice on the defensive line.

"We thought about asking him to become a student manager," Mihalik said.

But, Kelly said, "After I got a shot, nobody said a thing."

Kelly got his first start as a sophomore against Edinboro University, and played so well he was named the Rockets' "Player of the Week." He's been lining up against players as much as a foot taller and 130 pounds heavier ever since.

In one of the more bizarre matchups of this season, Kelly faced a 6-foot-7, 320-pound tackle from the University of the District of Columbia in Slippery Rock's opener.

"I looked at it as another game to play, no matter who was out there," Kelly said. "I don't look at anybody as being better or worse. The attitude I take is no matter how big or small they are, I don't underestimate them - or overestimate them."

Because he is strong and quick - he can bench-press 320 pounds - Kelly's size actually gives him an advantage against some much linemen.

"I'm quick off the ball, and, playing defensive end, the biggest thing is getting control," he said. "I fire off the ball and stay low and that makes it tough for guys to get at my shoulder pads. I get leverage and control."

Kelly has actually been laughed at by bigger players, Mihalik said.

"A lot of guys talk and laugh the first couple of plays," Kelly said. "Then they figure out they're going to be in for a long game, and the laughter stops."

"One guy told me, 'You're too small, why don't you give it up?' But I beat him a couple of times, and he got frustrated, a little guy beating him all over the field. He talked less and less as the game went on."

Last year, Kelly lined up against three-time all-conference tight end Terry O'Shea, a 6-4, 230-pounder from California (Pa.) University who now plays for the Pittsburgh Steelers.

"He was so highly rated, I think I kind of got to him the first couple of plays," Kelly said. "He was shell shocked."

Because of his size, Kelly says opposing players often relax more than they would against a larger player, "and that puts the game in my hands. If they relax 20 percent of the time, I'm going to get them, because I always play 100 percent."

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BY GARRY TRUDEAU



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