

team takes second consecutive state title against Wichita Northwest

After a 9-2 season, the football team won their second consecutive state title Saturday, Nov. 28, beating Wichita Northwest 49-35 at Pittsburg State. Senior quarterback Cooper Marsh led the team with a six-score effort, and key defensive plays included three forced fumbles and four fourth-down stops.

To prepare for the state game, Marsh explained that the team focused heavily on watching Northwest's film and stayed constant at practice.

"We talked about what kind of coverages [Wichita Northwest] ran, who their stronger players were and some of the weak spots in their defense. Then, we tried to get [senior wide receiver] Jacob Hartman on good matchups because we knew he could win the route," Marsh said. "That's really all we looked at during film; we really didn't change too much of our game plan."

After the win against Aquinas at substate Friday, Nov. 20, senior middle linebacker Dalton Harvey acknowledged that the season felt far from over and they could not slack off then.

"I just thought our work isn't done yet and we've got to go out there and win, or else the win against Aquinas didn't really mean anything," Harvey said.

Marsh believed the team had more confidence because they had played and won against Northwest at state the previous year.

"I knew we would have to play a little better than we did last year, but I felt way more comfortable going into this year. We had Aquinas, and our offense was finally starting to get going," Marsh said. "I felt like we had a lot of experience; we knew if the game was tight that we had been in that situation before and that we would overcome it and pull out the win."

One key play, a touchdown pass caught one-handed in the end zone, had special significance to senior running back Quinten Wittenauer. A similar but less successful play for the Monticello Trails Middle School team in eighth grade had always bothered Wittenauer. At the state game, he not only completed the play, but he also caught the ball one handed.

"In eighth grade I had a similar play, except I dropped the ball and we lost to Mill Creek Middle School," Wittenauer said. "It has haunted me until I made up for it at the state game."

Even when Northwest tied up the game 30 seconds into the second half, Harvey felt reassured in the team and had faith that they would win.

"I was confident in our offense and defense the whole time," Harvey said. "When they tied it, I knew that we had prepared for moments like those, so it really didn't faze any of us."

Marsh felt prepared to put up a fight on the field, despite the skill of their opponents.

"I thought it was going to be a dogfight. After the first couple of drives I was like, 'alright, we've really got to change something up,'" Marsh said. "We have to have a big play, which [senior wide receiver] Ty Reishus had; that just got us going."

The Jags were one of the only teams in the state to play a full season without quarantines, and Wittenauer said the ending was perfect.

"I always knew there was no way we would walk off that field without our ring. It's all we've talked about since we were young. All around good vibes, until I turned my jersey in the last time," Wittenauer said. "That was rather bitter sweet."