

Lifelong TEAM

Team misses playoffs, but friendships outweigh the negatives

Ever since the seniors on the football team were little kids, head coach Brian Woodley had been in their lives. Due to his son, Lute, being in the same grade, Woodley coached most, if not all, of the seniors at some point in their lives. "I spent many hours coaching for other sports with seniors on the team," Woodley said.

Growing up, students such as senior Tanner Rowland were with Woodley all the time. "He was my baseball coach on the Sun Devils, my basketball coach on the Dragons, and helped out with the All-Star JYF team," Rowland said.

Now grown up, the boys became the leaders of the Dragons. This football season, the team had a tenacious defense that was arguably the best unit in the state. However, the offense was oftentimes inconsistent leading to some riffs. Players attempted to stop this from happening. "The defense just had to do their job and it's all they could do," senior Cal Killian said. "You can't control what the other side of the ball does and that is what it is."

Still, there were high points. Junior Caleb Helgeson intercepted the ball on the first play of the year in a dominating win over Urbandale. The team hung tough with Waukee until an egregious call halted all momentum. Yet not making the playoffs for the first time in 13 years was a crushing blow to the seniors. Woodley hoped this was not what the kids remembered this season, and for some their football careers.

"A wise man once told me to cherish each and every day as these kids will be gone before you know it," Woodley said. "Senior night is when it really hit me that it is near the end with not only my son but all the seniors! I look back on it now and it was wonderful to see each kid mature and become not only good football players but more importantly good people that I hope learned more than football while playing at Johnston. My hope is that they carry on valuable life skills that will help them in the real world. To be honest this team will always be special. It will be something that he and I will always have to talk about for the rest of our lives."



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Turning the corner vs DSM East is sophomore Noah Storts. The starting QB for the Dragons, Storts played through a nagging shoulder injury all year to throw for 589 yards, 8 TDs, and completing 47 of his 98 attempts. Storts also ran for 336 yards on 72 carries for 2 TDs. Photo by: Jordyn Cimmiyotti



Senior Jake Thilges finishes a tackle while senior Nick Geller comes in to help. Thilges was the middle linebacker, helping lead one of the best defenses in the state with 81 tackles, 13 TFLs, 2 sacks, and 2 fumble recovery. Geller, a two varsity starter, was a linebacker alongside Thilges and had career statistics of 139 tackles, 16 TFLs, 4 sacks, 2 fumble recoveries, and 1 interception. Photo by: Cameron DeRoos



Senior Quincy Hale breaks up a pass on the first play of the season. Urbandale threw a deep shot on the first play of the first game, in which Hale broke it up, the ball ricocheted off his foot into the arms of junior safety Caleb Helgeson for an interception. Photo by: Jordyn Cimmiyotti

Junior Cael Neisheim runs to celebrate with the student section after catching a touchdown in the season opening 27-6 win vs Urbandale. Neisheim, who created the now school wide "Horns Up" movement, finished the year with 21 receptions for 257 yards and a team-leading five receiving touchdowns. Photo by: Jordyn Cimmiyotti



Taking a Dowling Catholic player to the ground is junior Cade Kuennen. Starting at 3-tech, Kuennen wreaked havoc in opposing backfields all year with 52 tackles, 10 TFLs, one fumble recovery and a team leading five sacks. Photo by: Jordyn Cimmiyotti



Junior Aidan Moore lunges at a DSM East ballcarrier. In his first year starting at linebacker, Moore was everywhere, leading the team in 89 tackles, tied with fellow linebacker Jake Thilges with 13 TFLs, and had two fumble recoveries both returned for touchdowns. Photo by: Tate Larsen

Senior Cal Killian brings down DSM East quarterback Sean Head. Killian was a key player for the team the past three years, starting at safety the past two. He accumulated a career total of 87 tackles, 8 TFLs, 2 sacks and 3 interceptions. Photo by: Cameron DeRoos

RECORD BLOCK

vs Urbandale W 27-6
 @ Ankeny L 7-20
 @ Dowling Catholic L 7-17
 vs Muscatine W 14-0
 vs DSM East W 35-0
 @ Ottumwa W 45-7
 @ Indianola L 7-17
 vs Mason City W 40-6
 vs Waukee L 17-40

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