

Cavaliers passed multiple tests in championship victory

Dave Lawrence
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SALEM, Va. — Opponents begin to congratulate each other on a game well played as time runs out in King William's 48-21 victory over Graham in the VHSL Class 2 football championship game at Salem City Stadium on Saturday, Dec. 11, 2021.

Dave Lawrence/The Local

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SALEM — King William had a great team last year, but possible COVID-19 exposures, not any opponents, knocked them out of the playoffs. The 2020-21 team never got the chance to see how far it could go.

This year, the Cavaliers had a normal season. No COVID cancellations. They had a tough schedule and were tested and retested by adversity on the field. Many, if not most, of the team's key players play both ways, and they have never been shy about taking or giving out hits.

King William dominates Graham to win VHSL Class 2 title

Saturday, in the Virginia High School League Class 2 state championship game, the toll of a long season was showing. The team's studs were tired. They were sore. Sometimes they needed the attention of their trainer and to be helped off the field. A lot of the time, they limped off and limped back onto the field under their own power.

The opposing G-Men from Graham High School were probably feeling much the same way.

The kids pulled no punches. There were hard hits, flaring tempers, emotions flying high only to auger hard into the ground.

But there were also clear moments of grace, such as when King William's Demond Claiborne — who led everyone with 29 carries for 244 yards and three touchdowns and three receptions for 105 yards and another score — went down with a cramp late in the game. One of his teammates and one of the opposing players both went to him to help relieve the cramp. There were friendly conversations walking back to the line of scrimmage between players who had just spent the previous few seconds pounding away at each other.

And, in the final seconds, rather than scramble for a few more meaningless points, the Graham coach had his team take a knee and let the clock run out.

A lot is possible in football, but scoring 27 points in less than a minute is not.

When it was over, these tired, battered, walking wounded from King William High School had fought their way to a well-deserved state championship. These kids were both mentally and physically tough. No matter how sore they were, no matter how exhausted they were, when their number was called, they did what needed to be done.

Was it worth it?

After the trophy presentation, team members were running all over the place greeting family and friends. Someone caught up with Claiborne, who spent much of the second half looking worn out — when he wasn't breaking big plays.

"Hey! Hey Demond! Having fun yet?" the person asked.

"Yeah," Claiborne answered with a big smile.

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