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Jamari Hubbard, E.C. Glass' 'good luck charm,' showcases undeniable passion for football

Emily Brown

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Jamari Hubbard and his dad, Marty Hubbard, pose for a portrait as the Hilltoppers prepare to battle Amherst on Oc Lee Luther Jr., For The News & Advance

If he could put on pads and take a spot behind the line of scrimmage, you better believe Jamari Hubbard would do it.

“I just wanna go out there and suit up,” Jamari, the 14-year-old E.C. Glass freshman, said. “I wanna go out there and hit somebody.”

There’s nothing but sincerity in Jamari’s words. If he could, he would be lined up next to 10 other guys on the gridiron, in royal blue and white as the Hilltoppers stared down an opponent.

“Corner,” Jamari said when asked what position he’d play. “Or safety. I like defense.”

But “like” isn’t quite the appropriate word for his feelings about football. Love is more like it.

That much is blaringly obvious when you listen to Jamari talk about the sport. He can break down a play, a defensive scheme or the techniques of individual players without hesitation.

He does it at home when analyzing past Glass contests or talking about future matchups, or when watching college or NFL teams take over his TV. And Jamari’s understanding of the game and love for football oozes out onto the turf at City Stadium on Friday nights, too.

Jamari won’t get the chance to strap on those pads and a helmet; he won’t get the shot at recording a tackle, but he is undoubtedly a piece of the Hilltoppers program this year.

“Just because you can’t be out there physically,” Jamari’s dad, Marty Hubbard, said of the message he’s given his son over the years, “doesn’t mean you can’t be part of the game.”

Jamari, who has cerebral palsy, is faithfully there when the lights come on on Friday evenings, taking in every play from the sideline.

“That’s what I like about him” Marty Hubbard said. Jamari, despite needing some extra assistance from a wheelchair and being built a little differently from the high schoolers who take the field, hasn’t let the things that make him unique stand in the

way of his passion for football.

Jamari takes pleasure in a wide range of sports.

Thanks to his electronic devices, he spends plenty of time watching sports movies. Among his top five, currently at least, are “The Sandlot” and “The Mighty Ducks.”

Lately, he added, he’s been getting more into hockey and has picked a favorite NHL team: the Arizona Coyotes.

Basketball also is one of his favorites to watch. The NBA’s Splash Brothers, as Golden State’s Steph Curry and Klay Thompson are known, are among players he’s impressed by.

The Hubbards have made a trip to see LeBron James play, too.

But Jamari has another sports-related destination on his bucket list. He wants to see an NFL game. A trip to Dallas would be ideal, given his fervent love for the Cowboys — in spite of his dad’s devotion to the Philadelphia Eagles.

Such a visit to the Lone Star State would give him a chance to wear, perhaps, some of the Cowboys attire (maybe even the socks) he owns.

For a Dallas fan like Jamari, though, attire is hardly the only sign of his fandom. His room is decked out in a Dallas theme, from the blue and silver stripes painted on his walls to the cover he has on his bed.

It makes sense, then, that Sundays (and Saturdays, for college games) are reserved for watching football.

“My mom hates it,” Jamari said, wearing that constant smile.

But at this point, there’s certainly no changing the football-loving ways of Jamari and his dad.

Marty Hubbard grew up playing football and remembers playing in the same stadium he and Jamari frequent on Fridays this year. These days, the two talk often about the times Marty wore the Hilltoppers uniform.

“He told me one story of how ... the ref cheated his team,” Jamari said of his dad, who played at Glass through his senior season in 2007.

There were days when Marty wished he could see his son play, too. “Me growing up playing football, a father always wants their son, especially if you played sports, to be able to coach or train or whatever,” he said.

But when hopes shifted when Jamari was diagnosed with cerebral palsy as a baby, Marty didn’t give up on the opportunity to find common ground in the sport.

You can credit Marty — who aims to one day write a book about his and Jamari’s sports journey — for the foundation on which Jamari’s love for football began to be built.

Marty remembers those fall days a decade ago when he’d turn on a game and watch from the couch beside Jamari. Though Jamari didn’t have much mobility, “he would sit on the sofa and kick his way to excitement,” Marty said of his then-5-year-old.

“I knew then,” Marty added, “that football was something that he would’ve excelled at.”

And while “excelling” might not look the same for Jamari as for many of the kids who suit up for Glass — no stats to show, for example, or game-winning play to chronicle — he certainly still showcases football excellence.

“I believe he watches Hudl probably more than some of the football players,” Marty Hubbard said recently of his son’s after-school habits.

While Jamari makes time for homework, of course, and certainly for enjoying sports movies and games regularly, other free time often is spent reviewing film or highlights through the online service.

Coaches implore their athletes to spend time watching such footage from past games or of future opponents so they can improve. Jamari hasn't received such a mandate; instead, he does it because the practice is a part of him now.

He enjoys watching the area's best athletes and teams as well as some of the nation's best players.

Couple that exercise with his game-day experiences and you've got an intense knowledge of the game.

"That's what's cool about him," Glass coach Jeff Woody said of Jamari, who has attended both high school and middle school games faithfully before this season, too.

Marty Hubbard said he and his son have been at games in "the pouring rain" in the past. So there's almost nothing that will keep Jamari from enjoying football on a Friday night.

Woody welcomed Jamari and Marty Hubbard to the Glass sideline this year — a first, according to Jamari — and the father-son duo have been at both home and away games.

The two were in Danville — Jamari's favorite road venue, because of the atmosphere of the George Washington stadium, including the band — when the Hilltoppers came from behind to win. He was at City Stadium when Glass nearly pulled off the comeback in the Jug Bowl after trailing 35-14 at halftime.

Weeks after that game against Heritage, Jamari still remembers his team's struggles.

"Our DBs are getting burned a whole lot," he said of the defensive backs. "That's what happened at the Heritage game."

Another example, an analysis of quarterback George White: “What I saw during the Heritage game: his release is way too long.”

The chances of getting something on the gridiron past Jamari are slim.

“It’s ‘good job,’ or ‘you should’ve,’” Woody said of the messages he receives from Jamari during the game. But the coach loves the accountability. “If we have a bad play, I avoid him,” he added, jokingly. “If we have a good play, I shake his hand.”

Glass players similarly appreciate Jamari’s investment in the team.

White said Jamari, whom he talks with after warm-ups on game days, brings a “positive energy” to the sideline, and serves as a bit of inspiration when he and teammates step onto the field.

“He can hear everything. He can see everything. You want to perform for your school, but you also want to perform for a guy like him,” White said.

Running back and defensive lineman Ma’quwan Farmer called Jamari the Hilltoppers’ “good luck charm.”

“He could be doing anything else, but he’s here supporting us and rooting us on to lead us to a victory,” Farmer said.

Jamari, of course, is hoping to see his team continue its winning ways. The Hilltoppers have put together a 7-1 record, rolling over four district opponents since the Sept. 18 loss to Heritage.

The way they’re playing now would seem to indicate they’ll be a tough outcome at playoff time. Jamari has a similar thought, though his prediction came before the season began: “State champs.”

Glass looked less than impressive ahead of the season; they were coming off a lackluster 1-3 showing in the abbreviated spring campaign. But Jamari, based on his knowledge of the group of Hilltoppers that was set to fill out this season’s roster, was

confident this team would go far.

Whether Jamari's bold prediction rings true in December remains to be seen. But there's no doubt that as they continue their march toward that goal, Jamari will be there on the sideline analyzing and dissecting every game, putting his love for football on display.

https://newsadvance.com/sports/high-school/kristen-and-kate-hardie-look-to-lead-rustburg-volleyball-to-first-state-title-since-1992/article_c9188156-a3dd-11eb-a011-a733507326bc.html

CLASS 3 STATE VOLLEYBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Kristen and Kate Hardie look to lead Rustburg volleyball to first state title since 1992

Emily Brown

Apr 22, 2021



Rustburg celebrates winning the Region 3C championship Saturday against Rockbridge. From left is Tinsley Abbott, Lee Luther Jr., For The News & Advance

RUSTBURG — It's been nearly three decades since Rustburg volleyball captured a state title. In the years between the raising of the 1992 banner in the Rustburg High School gym and the current season, the sport has changed significantly.

Back then, there was no rally scoring, and matches were best-of-three, each set played to 15 points.

Kristen Hardie remembers those days and those games. They're immortalized in the VHS tape that's floating around her house or the home of her parents somewhere, and in the scrapbook that contains newspaper clippings and photos — the book of memories Hardie revisited this week.

"I did pull out my scrapbook and was looking through some things. I did it for myself, then she came down and was looking and making fun of our hair," Kristen Hardie said of her daughter, Kate, a 17-year-old junior at RHS.

The elder Hardie has allowed herself some time this week to reflect on her playing days at Rustburg, a career that included that 1992 championship. More than 28 years later, she'll try for her second ring, this time as coach.

And her family, on Friday, aims to make it two generations hoisting championship trophies — with Kate Hardie helping the current Red Devils to an undefeated season so far.

"We want more," Kate Hardie said of her team's hopes for that 16th win. "We want to win this thing."

The Hardies and their team — more like a "family" thanks to the group's experience together that stretches back at least six years, before they became varsity players, according to senior Anna Maddox — will take on New Kent for the title at 6 p.m. Friday at home.

The Red Devils, after falling in the state tournament the previous two years, “finally made it,” Maddox said, to the title game.

Maddox (131 kills) and Kate Hardie (253 kills), both outside hitters, have led the charge this year.

For Hardie, Friday’s game has been years in the making, and for much of her desire to reach the pinnacle of her sport, she has her mom to thank.

The drive for the younger Hardie began before she’d really begun focusing on volleyball. Growing up, multiple other activities, in addition to volleyball, filled her time. But volleyball was the first sport she started to learn, thanks to her mom, and the one she fell in love with.

Kate, in her car seat as an infant, was in the stands as her mom coached. Then, from those same stands, she watched as a child during practices.

“I always had to come to the stuff,” Kate said of the after-school arrangements her family had.

Kate remembers seeing Michelle Heath, a standout for the Red Devils (who went on to play at William & Mary) a decade ago, and wanting to be like her.

Kate mimicked the motions of those high school girls before joining developmental teams. Her rapid rise — and a career that includes beach and travel and indoor volleyball at Rustburg — followed.

Kristen never pushed her daughter to take up the sport she played at RHS but said she, like other parents, “always [hoped] that your passion becomes your kids’ passion.”

That it did, with Kate constantly asking, even on days when organized practices or games weren’t scheduled, “Mom, let’s go to the gym,” or “Let’s go out in the yard,” Kristen said.

That work and experience, combined with Kate's knowledge of the game, her mom explained, have combined to form the tallest task for all of Rustburg's opponents this year: stopping Kate.

So far, no team has been particularly successful.

Hidden Valley, the Red Devils' latest foe, countered with Cam Davenport, who tallied 33 kills. The Titans pushed RHS to four sets and had Rustburg on the ropes in the fourth set before the Red Devils' comeback.

But Kate tallied 39 kills — the most in a match since 2012 and fifth-most all-time in the state, according to the Virginia High School League record book, which does not yet include stats from this season — as part of the Red Devils' win.

The victory secured the first and only other state championship berth for RHS since her mom's appearance in that game.

As a player back in the '90s and in that championship season, Kristen never thought she might be coaching at her alma mater. But 17 years after she began with her then-infant daughter Kate in tow, she's still in the RHS gym.

And she and Kate, along with the rest of the group, have a chance to secure title rings.

Kristen Hardie showed off hers in a group message between the team this week as motivation.

"Here was mine. Now it's time for y'all to get yours," Maddox said of her coach's caption with the photo.

If the Red Devils can continue playing as they have been — with contributions from Maddox and Hardie, along with tough serving from the likes of Meah Coles (who also sets up her big hitters), Eden Bigham and Parker Goldstein, and the defensive presence of Tinsley Abbott, they're confident in their chances.

“I think we need to come out on the court tomorrow and do our thing,” Kate said.

“And if we do that, we’ll be just fine.”

https://newsadvance.com/sports/high-school/watch-now-heritage-edges-glass-in-jug-bowl-with-pair-of-big-late-game-plays/article_f38800d0-18ed-11ec-8ea7-13c1ee2eb902.html

Watch now: Heritage edges Glass in Jug Bowl with pair of big, late-game plays

Emily Brown

Sep 18, 2021



Heritage football coach Brad Bradley — flanked by Kenai Booker-Felder (left) and Donovan Jones — celebrates with Bowl, 49-42, in September at City Stadium.

Lee Luther Jr., For The News & Advance

“This,” Heritage coach Brad Bradley said, “is what the Jug Bowl’s all about.”

The words from the Pioneers' leader were a neat little package wrapping up all that had transpired in the 48 minutes just before. There were plenty of big plays for both teams to dissect, plenty of players to praise for their contributions, but for a moment, Bradley's words were the perfect way to sum up the pandemonium of the second half.

E.C. Glass mounted a furious comeback. The Hilltoppers tied the game on a massive trick play with less than two minutes left. Then Heritage responded. And one huge passing play and one defensive stop later, the Pioneers erupted on the sideline at City Stadium — that unassuming brown jug would remain in their possession for another year.

The Pioneers came out on top of the Saturday battle at City Stadium between the Lynchburg schools, 49-42.

"We just outlasted them," Bradley said of his squad, which, 19 seconds after Glass tied the game at 42, answered with Kameron Burns lofting a 79-yard pass to a wide-open Darius Brown for the game-winning touchdown.

The play went down as Brown's only offense of the game. But those yards couldn't have been any more important.

"Once I seen that [the defender] made the move and I was wide open, we had perfect blocking up front, Kam threw a perfect ball, and it was just running," Brown said.

A play needed to be made to put Heritage (3-1) back on top and quell the rapidly rising sense of confidence on the Glass sideline, Burns said, "and I made that play."

When the Hilltoppers got the ball back, junior QB George White — who previously finished three second-half drives with passing touchdowns — found Taeon Mosby for a long gain up the middle. Given the scoring ability of Mosby, on display on Glass' previous drive, Heritage fans were right to be worried; but Donovan Jones made the play of his career next, causing and jumping on a fumble to secure the win.

"I just reached for it. Saw the ball on the [ground] and I jumped on it," Jones said.

On the Hilltoppers' sideline, coach Jeff Woody dropped to a knee and let his head sink for a moment. Their hopes of snapping a three-game skid in the Jug Bowl series with Heritage ended so suddenly, only 30 seconds after Glass (3-1) reached the pinnacle of excitement Saturday.

Mosby was the reason the players and fans clad in royal blue had been so amped up just before. The junior running back — with help from White, Lyvarius Gilbert and blockers — provided the game-tying score a 98-yard run off a hook-and-lateral.

Woody reached into his bag of tricks for the play call, and his offense executed it to perfection.

White took the snap and got the ball to Gilbert, who lateraled to Mosby. Then Mosby was off to the races.

He found room down the right sideline and shook would-be tacklers on his way to the end zone for Glass' longest run of the day, by far.

“It felt like a movie, I ain't gonna lie,” Mosby said. “Down the sideline, especially when I almost got tackled and I stayed up, it just felt good.”

The play came on second-and-10 from the Glass 2-yard line and was set up by Christopher Walker-Wells, who picked off Burns' pass as Heritage faced fourth-and-9 from the Glass 17. It was the only Heritage turnover of the day.

“We had to do something,” Woody said of the call that followed Walker-Wells' interception, when his team was down 42-35. “... Not very smart to run the hook-and-lateral when you're at the 2-yard line, but that joker worked.”

White even admitted he was unsure about the likelihood of success — “To be honest, I didn't think it would work,” he said — but Woody was confident in his players' ability to rise to the challenge and especially in playmakers like White.

White pulled Glass back into the game with his arm. The Hilltoppers were down 35-14 at the half, but two straight passing touchdowns in the third quarter cut the Heritage lead to one score.

“George is a wizard,” Woody said. “He’s very intelligent. He’s got good chemistry with all of his receivers.”

He found Jamarion Kittrell for 7 yards first, then Eli Wood for 30 yards. The throw to Wood provided a wave of momentum, because Glass was in a dire situation facing fourth-and-9.

“We just made that play up,” White, who finished with 360 yards on 25-of-40 passing and one interception, said. “I told him to just run down there and I’ll throw it to you.”

White made a similar play in the fourth quarter, when he recorded his fourth TD pass of the day and second to Kittrell. The 37-yard pass came on third-and-8.

“I was just running around trying to make plays, give them a chance, and they made the most of it,” White said.

Gilbert also had a receiving touchdown (35 yards) and was White’s favorite target on the day, pulling down five catches for 89 yards. Wood finished with 81 yards on six receptions, and Kittrell and Mosby had 65 and 60 yards receiving, respectively. Mike Thomas scored Glass’ first TD on a 2-yard run.

For Heritage, Burns had the winning TD toss to Brown and a long rushing touchdown. Zach Steele, who was averaging 9 yards per tote entering Saturday, carried the ball a whopping 30 times and had a game-high 152 yards rushing (5.1 per carry).

Steele recorded touchdown runs of 2, 6 and 2 yards, one of which came just two plays after a Glass turnover in the second quarter. Rajan Booker had one rushing touchdown and picked up fumble in the second period, returning it 16 yards to the end zone to account for Heritage’s other scoring.

Players on both sides described the end of Saturday's game as "crazy." Woody called it an instant classic. "Both [teams giving it everything they had; both coaching staffs giving it everything they had," he said.

"We put on a show."

Heritage 49, E.C. Glass 42

Heritage 49, E.C. Glass 42

Heritage;7;28;0;14;—;49

E.C. Glass;7;7;14;14;—;42

H —Rajan Booker 9 run (Karson Adcock kick)

ECG — Mike Thomas 2 run (Aidan Palys kick)

H — Zach Steele 2 run (Adcock kick)

H — Steele 6 run (Adcock kick)

H — Kameron Burns 43 run (Adcock kick)

H — Booker 16 fumble return (Adcock kick)

ECG — Lyvarius Gilbert 35 pass from George White (Palys kick)

ECG — Jamarion Kittrell 7 pass from White (Palys kick)

ECG — Eli Wood 30 pass from White (Palys kick)

H — Steele 2 run (Adcock kick)

ECG — Kittrell 37 pass from White (Palys kick)

ECG — Taeon Mosby 98 run (Palys kick)

H — Darius Brown 79 pass from Burns (Adcock kick)

;H;ECG

First Downs;22;23

Rushes-Yards;42-245;23-130

Passing Yards;209;360

Passing;7-11-1;25-40-1

Total Offense;454;490

Penalties-Yards;10-100;8-60

Fumbles-Lost;0-0;3-2

Individual Statistics

RUSHING — Heritage: Steele 30-152, Booker 6-25, Burns 6-68. E.C. Glass: Thomas 4-(minus-4), Q Foster 3-13, Mosby 3-103, Kittrell 1-(minus-2), Markevus Graves 3-(minus-5), Gilbert 3-31, White 6-(minus-6).

PASSING — Heritage: Burns 7-10-1 (209). E.C. Glass: White 26-41-1 (458).

RECEIVING — Heritage: Keshawn Hubbard 3-75, Crawford 1-39, Booker 1-1, Steele 1-15, Darius Brown 1-79. E.C. Glass: Mosby 4-60, Kittrell 6-65, Wood 6-81, Graves 4-34, Christopher Walker-Wells 1-31, Gilbert 5-89.

Records: Heritage 3-1. E.C. Glass 3-1.