

NO DOUBT



Freedom celebrates its Class 6 state title win Dec. 10 at Old Dominion University.

DOUG STROUD | FOR INSIDENOVA

Freedom finishes what it started in winning Class 6 state title

» BY DAVID FAWCETT
dfawcett@insidenova.com

NORFOLK — By winning the first state title in the school's history, Freedom-Woodbridge stayed on script.

As they have done all season, the Eagles relied on their playmakers to produce points and their defense to stifle opponents in defeating Madison 48-14 in the Class 6 football championship game on Saturday at Old Dominion University.

In other words, there was nothing different or out of the ordinary in how Freedom (15-0) reached the pinnacle of high school football. No matter the opponent. No matter whether the game occurred during the regular season or the postseason. They led from the start. Extended their lead

throughout. And left the outcome never in doubt.

In doing so, Freedom, which opened in 2004, became the first state football champion from Prince William County since Battlefield won the Group AAA, Division 6 state title in 2010. Freedom is also the first football team from Prince William to go undefeated since Osbourn went 14-0 in 2006 to win the Group AAA, Division 6 state title.

And with most of the team returning, including all of its key skill players, Freedom is in position to repeat next season.

Sophomore running back Jeffrey Overton Jr. ran for 212 yards on 23 carries and three touchdowns, while junior quarterback Tristan Evans, the state-record holder for single-season touchdown passes, increased his total to 61 by throwing two Saturday.

Evans also increased his single-season touchdown responsibility (rushing-receiving-runbacks) to 72, which is second all-time in the state, four behind Ronald Curry. He finished the game 14 of 20 for 155 yards and one interception.

Overton's rushing total gives him 2,599 yards on the season, the most in Prince William high school history. Tyquan Brown, who graduated from Freedom in 2019, held the old mark of 2,584 over 15 games when Freedom last reached the state final in 2018.

Overton is also now the third mem-

STATE FOOTBALL CHAMPIONS FROM PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY

Freedom was the eighth team from Prince William County to win a state football championship and the first since Battlefield accomplished the feat in 2010. Here's a complete list of Prince William's state champions and the score of their championship game.

2022

» Freedom-Woodbridge 48, Madison 14 (Class 6)

2010

» Battlefield 26, Hermitage 7 (Group AAA, Division 6)

2006

» Osbourn 42, Chantilly 20 (Group AAA, Division 6)

2004

» Manassas Park 20, Powell Valley 13 (Group A, Division 2)

2002

» Hylton 6, Oakton 0 (Group AAA, Division 6)

1999

» Hylton 28, Varina 27 (Group AAA, Division 6)

1998

» Hylton 21, Varina 13 (Group AAA, Division 6)

1990

» Gar-Field 13, Hampton 12 (Group AAA, Division 6)



Freedom assistant coach Jeff Overton kisses the championship trophy.
DOUG STROUD | FOR INSIDENOVA

ber of his family to win a state football title as a player. Jeffrey's uncle, Freedom head coach Darryl Overton, won one in 1998 with Hylton, and Jeffrey's father, Jeff Sr.,

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Chucky joins the party

» BY DAVID FAWCETT
dfawcett@insidenova.com

TJ Bush celebrated Freedom's state title by carrying around a Chucky doll.

A first-year player at the Woodbridge high school after transferring from Bishop Ireton, Bush said he bought the doll as a good luck charm right before visiting Coastal Carolina over the summer.

The Class 6 Region B and Cardinal District Defensive Player of the Year has brought the doll to every game in honor of his late grandmother, Donna, who passed away in 2020. Bush said Donna was a big horror movie fan and in particular liked the Chucky franchise.

Bush always holds the doll when the team runs onto the field prior to kickoff.

The lineman anchored a defense that allowed 9.9 points a game this season and posted six shutouts. He finished with five tackles, one sack and three tackles for loss Saturday against Madison.

Bush will sign with a college when the early-signing period begins Dec. 21, but it may not be Coastal Carolina. Head coach Jamey Chadwell left the Chanticleers to take the same job at Liberty. Liberty announced Chadwell's hire Dec. 4.

Coastal Carolina is still honoring Bush's scholarship offer, but Bush and his family took an unofficial visit Sunday to Liberty.

EVANS PRESSES ON

Tristan Evans played through several injuries this season to become the state's all-time single-season touchdown pass leader.

He popped a blood vessel on the tip of his right index finger in the state semifinals against Western Branch, Freedom head coach Darryl Overton said. The team kept Evans out of hands-on drills during practice the Monday and Tuesday before the state final.

Evans also suffered bruised ribs in the region final against Patriot. Earlier in the season during a practice, the junior quarterback suffered a fracture on his right throwing hand, and he has been dealing with an enlarged spleen since the summer.

Evans said the injuries were not a distraction as he finished the season with 61 touchdown passes along with 3,614 passing yards and six interceptions. He also ran for 11 touchdowns, making him second all-time in state history for single-season touchdown responsibility with 72. The leader is Ronald Curry with 76.

"I feel good; I feel happy," Evans said. "We finished the job. It's time to turn to next season."

OVERTON AVOIDS A FULL BATH

Darryl Overton wasn't taking any chances. The last time someone dumped

a Gatorade bucket of water on him, in the region final win Nov. 26 over Patriot, he developed an ear infection.

On a cold Saturday evening inside S.B. Ballard Stadium at Old Dominion University with his team on the verge of capturing the Class 6 state title, Overton first asked one of the managers to dump the water out of the Gatorade bucket.

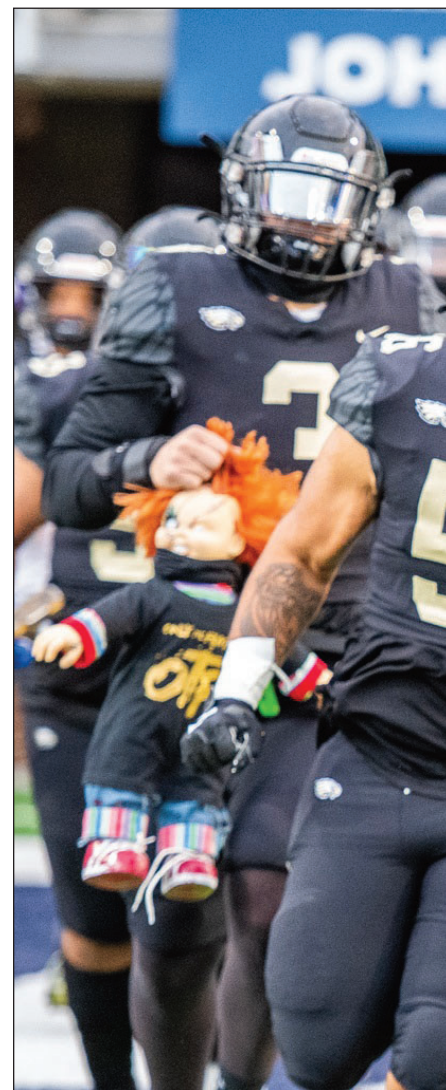
But the manager refused. Then he asked one of his players to do the same. But again, his request remained unfilled.

With the clock winding down to just under two minutes left in the game, Overton moved down the sideline away from his players. At that point, assistant coach Chris Cousins ran toward Overton with the bucket. Overton saw Cousins out of the corner of his eye and sidestepped Cousins enough so only his windbreaker got partially wet.

Overton eventually took the windbreaker off before celebrating his team's state title.

FEW DEPARTURES

Freedom is in good shape to repeat as state champions. The Eagles graduate only seven seniors: Bush, defensive back Kendall Bannister, linemen Armand Tubbs, Mark Errina and Adrian Crespin, nose tackle Nasir Ethrington and kicker James McKay.



Freedom's TJ Bush carries his Chucky doll onto the field before the start of the Class 6 state final. DOUG STROUD | FOR INSIDENOVA

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claimed a state title in 2002 with Hylton. Jeff is currently Freedom's defensive coordinator.

The defense, often overshadowed by an offense that set a state single-season record for most points with 952, got in on the act as well when first-year starter Isaiah Harper returned an interception 68 yards for a touchdown. It was Freedom's 21st touchdown for a return this season and sixth off an interception.

With multiple options to score points, Freedom outgained Madison 453 yards to 235. Those options, Overton said, make it tough for opponents to stop Freedom. And Madison was no exception.

"We can simulate Madison's offense and its personnel better than they can do ours," Darryl Overton said. "And I felt like that gave us a big edge."

Freedom scored on its first three possessions of the game to take a 21-6 lead. Jeffrey Overton Jr. got things started on a 7-yard run, followed by a 17-yard pass from Evans to Elijah Reid. James McKay converted both extra points as Freedom took a 14-0 first-quarter lead.

In the second quarter, Madison got within eight on quarterback MacPherson Lewis' 1-yard run on fourth-and-goal with 9:02 left in the half. The extra-point attempt failed.

Freedom closed out the first-half scoring on a 9-yard touchdown pass from Evans to Kam Courtney.

Overton Jr. added two more rushing



A rare sight, Freedom head coach Darryl Overton smiles while congratulating Aaron Duncan (11). DOUG STROUD | FOR INSIDENOVA

touchdowns in the third quarter on runs of 63 and 1 yards. Overton's 63-yard run showed his speed and toughness as he broke a number of tackles in running up the middle and then sprinting outside to the left before fending off one final defender just before the goal line to score.

Freedom backup quarterback Caleb Tucker closed out the scoring when he hit Reid with a 42-yard touchdown pass with 32 seconds remaining.

The victory was particularly gratifying

A SEASON TO REMEMBER

Freedom's prolific season elevated the team and two individuals into the top 10 of numerous categories in the Virginia High School League record book:

TEAM

Category: Most points in a season

Record: 952

Place in the record book: First

Category: Most points in one game for one team

Record: Freedom scored 112 against Colgan, Oct. 7

Place in the record book: Fifth

INDIVIDUAL

Category: Touchdown responsibility in a season (rushing-receiving-runbacks)

Record: 72 (61 passing, 11 rushing) by Tristan Evans in 15 games

Place in the record book: Second

Category: Touchdown responsibility in a game

Record: 9 by Tristan Evans against John

Champe Nov. 18 (seven passing, two rushing)

Place in the record book: Tied for first

Category: Passing touchdowns in a season

Record: 61 by Tristan Evans in 15 games

Place in the record book: First

Category: Passing touchdowns in a game

Record: 7 by Tristan Evans twice – Oct. 14

against Woodbridge and Nov. 18 against John Champe

Place in the record book: Tied for third

Category: Passing yardage in a season

Record: 3,614 yards by Tristan Evans in 15 games

Place in the record book: Sixth

Category: Pass receiving touchdowns in a season

Record: 21 by JuJu Preston in 15 games

Place in the record book: Fourth

for Darryl Overton.

"Just proud of their resilience and our resilience," Overton said. "Football is football, but it's a lot that we go through at Freedom and being part of this program that other people don't have to go through."

Overton said he's been investigated 17 times, primarily by the Prince William

school system, during his eight years at the helm.

"Accused of everything from colleague theft to you think of it, it's happened," Overton said when asked to elaborate. "Even this playoff run, they suspended one of my coaches for posting on Facebook a song ... It's a lot. But again I love my guys. I love my school."

Picture perfect

Woodbridge's Freedom High School completed its perfect season Dec. 10 with a 48-14 victory over Madison in the Class 6 state football final at Old Dominion University in Norfolk.

Sophomore running back Jeffrey Overton Jr. led the Eagles' offense with 212 rushing yards and three touchdowns. Freedom led 21-6 at halftime.

For the season, the Eagles averaged 63.5 points a game and outscored their 15 opponents by a total of 952-148.

Photos by Doug Stroud | For InsideNoVa

 For more pictures, visit [INSIDENOVA.COM](https://www.insidenova.com)



Sophomore running back Jeffrey Overton Jr. finished the season with 34 rushing TDs.



Freedom fans hold up signs in support of their team.



Freedom's Kendall Bannister (20) and EJ Reid (4) in the final minutes of the state championship game.



Freedom's Tristan Evans (12) threw two touchdown passes against Madison.



Freedom head coach Darryl Overton now has two state titles. He earned his first as a player at Hylton.

HOLDING COURT

Keith Honore leaves a rich legacy at Potomac

» BY DAVID FAWCETT
dfawcett@insidenova.com

Keith Honore experienced a strange feeling March 16 when he turned in his letter of resignation.

"I'm no longer the coach at Potomac," Honore said. "I've spent my entire adult life as a coach at Potomac. If I wasn't a coach, I was a player. My ties run deep to this place."

Honore's reality check was understandable for someone associated with the same program for over 30 years in some capacity. Even his longtime assistants felt it.

"I don't know if it caught them off guard, but it was like, 'Wow he did it, that's it,'" Honore said of his decision to step down.

For 16 seasons, Honore led the boys basketball team to non-stop success in posting a 305-81 career record.

Under Honore, the Panthers won 5A state championships in 2014 and 2016 and were the 2021 Class 6 state runner-up. Potomac also won six regional titles, 12 district/conference regular-season titles and 11 district/conference tournament titles, while reaching states eight times.

Before taking the head job in the 2006-07 season, Honore served as an assistant under his coaching mentor, Kendall Hayes, beginning with the 1994-95 season. Honore also played under Hayes and graduated from Potomac in 1992.

In 21 seasons, Hayes went 423-116 with one state title and nine state tournament appearances.

Combined, Hayes and Honore made Potomac home to Prince William County's most celebrated high school boys basketball team. Potomac has not had a losing season since going 6-15 in 1984-85.

It was no secret that Honore might make this season his last at the Potomac helm.

His son, Kyle, graduates in June from Potomac and will play college basketball at a location too far away for Honore to see Kyle play and still coach the Panthers.

Honore pulled double duty when another son, Keijon, competed closer at Virginia Wesleyan in Norfolk. But even though that was in-state, it stretched him.

Kyle, is considering two Division II programs: St. Thomas Aquinas in New York and Wingate in North Carolina, as well as NAIA St. Thomas University in Miami. As of now, only the two St. Thomas programs have offered Kyle a scholarship.

But in addition to the consideration of his son's college destination, Honore said overall it was time to move on.

"Like everything, it runs its course," Honore said. "The last few years there have been changes at Potomac. But the major factor was supporting Kyle."

Honore emphasized that his replacement must be connected to the Potomac basketball program and be someone who can personally relate to and be fully invested in the Panthers' tradition and devoted fan "Blue Blood" fan base to maintain continuity.

"They have to get this right," Honore said. "It has to be a Potomac guy who understands the dynamics



Potomac coach Keith Honore exults as the team begins to celebrate its win over Henrico in the Boys 5A State Championship March 14, 2014. JEFF MANKIE/FOR INSIDENOVA

KEITH HONORE'S YEAR-BY-YEAR RECORD AT POTOMAC

Season	Overall record	How Potomac finished
2021-22	14-7	Class 6, Region B semifinals
2020-21	13-1	Class 6 state runner-up
2019-20	23-4	Class 6 state quarterfinalist
2018-19	18-8	Class 5 state quarterfinalist
2017-18	18-8	5A, Region D second round
2016-17	23-3	5A state quarterfinals
2015-16	27-2	5A state champion
2014-15	22-4	5A state semifinalist
2013-14	28-1	5A state champion
2012-13	18-7	Group AAA Northwest Region quarterfinalist
2011-12	17-7	Group AAA Northwest Region quarterfinalist
2010-11	23-3	Group AAA state quarterfinalist
2009-10	17-3	Group AAA Northwest Region first round
2008-09	14-10	Cardinal District Tournament semifinalist
2007-08	14-8	Group AAA Northwest Region semifinalist
2006-07	16-5	Cardinal District Tournament semifinalist

Overall record in 16 seasons: 305-81

of this place. Potomac basketball is its own community ... I'm not saying that someone from the outside can't have success here, but I would like it to go to a Potomac guy."

Former Potomac standout and assistant coach Sherman Rivers said he will not apply for the job. Instead, he will remain Patriot's head coach. In six seasons, Rivers has led the Patriots to a 108-35 overall record. Patriot went 26-1 this season and

reached the Class 6 state semifinals.

"If we had been losing up here and were under .500 every season, that would be another conversation," Rivers said. "But I love where I'm at and I love what we've built here."

Still, as soon as InsideNoVa.com ran the story March 16 about Honore stepping down at Poto-

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Baltimore calls it quits at Brentsville

» BY DAVID FAWCETT
dfawcett@insidenova.com

Eugene Baltimore's days as a high school basketball head coach are over after stepping down at Brentsville. In his second stint at the girls helm, he led the Tigers to three state quarterfinal appearances in five seasons, including this season when the Tigers went 17-5 overall.

Previously, Baltimore served as Brentsville's head girls basketball coach for eight seasons before resigning his position after the 2007-08 season.

Baltimore thought he'd stick around through next season once this junior class graduated. All five starters are underclassmen, led by three-time all-state junior guard and Siena commitment Alden Yergey.

"I was worn out," Baltimore said. "It had nothing to do with these girls. I could not ask for a better team to go out with. I prayed about it. It's time. I've got nothing left in the tank. It's a good time to go."

The news caught his team off guard, but he assured them he was still around to help.

"They know I'm here," Baltimore said.

He said some of his assistants plan to apply for the job and he hopes one of them gets it because they are familiar with the program. Baltimore said if he coaches again, it will only be as an assistant.

OTHER OPENINGS

James West announced March 18 he has stepped down as Freedom-Woodbridge's head boys basketball coach. West led the Eagles for 14 seasons.

West said he made the decision at the start of this season. He wants to spend more time with his daughter, who enters high school next fall.

West went 109-194 at Freedom. He reached regionals twice and the 5A state semifinals in 2015.

Meanwhile, at Osbourn Park, Jeremy Coleman is no longer the head boys basketball coach. Coleman said the school wanted to go in a different direction "than where I was taking the program."

In four seasons, Coleman went 32-50. In his first season, Coleman led the Yellow Jackets to their first regional berth since 2008. This past season, Osbourn Park finished 11-13 overall and lost in the Class 6, Region B quarterfinals.

Coleman has since joined the Highland School's boys basketball team as an assistant coach.

Unity Reed is looking for a new girls head basketball coach after deciding to not bring back Anthony Diggs. Lions' activities director Kevin Turner said the school chose to go in a different direction.



Brentsville High School's Eugene Baltimore led the girls basketball team to three state tournament appearances in the last five seasons.
BILL KAMENJAR|FOR INSIDENOVA

Diggs went 53-52 in five seasons. His best season was in 2018-19 when the Lions were 20-7 overall and tied Osbourn Park for the Cedar Run District regular-season title.

KELLY HONORED

Osbourn Park's Chrissy Kelly was chosen as the Virginia High School League's Class 6 girls basketball coach of the year.

With only one returning starter and nine players overall, Kelly led the Yellow Jackets to a program-record 26 wins and a return trip to the state final, where they lost to Madison for the second straight season.

Osbourn Park's Hailey Kellogg and Woodbridge's Amani Melendez made the first team, while Osbourn Park's Alana Powell and Forest Park's Angel Jones were second-team selections.

YERGEY ALL-STATE AGAIN

For the second time, Brentsville's Alden Yergey earned a spot on the Virginia High School League's Class 3 all-state girls basketball first team.

The junior also made the first team as a freshman, a first in the program's history. The VHSL did not select all-state teams in the 2020-21 school year because some schools did not have athletic seasons due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

But Yergey was named to the Virginia High School Coaches Association Class 3 all-state girls basketball team as a sophomore.

Manassas Park's Payton Simmons was selected to the VHSL all-Class 3 boys basketball second team.

SETTLE SIGNS WITH BILLS

Stonewall Jackson High School graduate Tim Settle has signed a two-year contract with the Buffalo Bills.

Settle's deal includes a \$4.05 million signing bonus and is worth as much as \$9 million with incentives.

"I feel like when it came down to picking, the decision, it was really easy," Settle said at his introductory news conference March 17. "Just seeing what this team does every year and who they have and what they're capable of, I feel like adding a penguin step in there. I feel like we can make something shake."

Settle spent the past four seasons with the Washington Commanders as a reserve defensive tackle. Washington selected Settle out of Virginia Tech in the fifth round of the 2018 NFL Draft.



TIM SETTLE

As an unrestricted free agent, Settle was available to sign with another NFL team during the free agency period that began last week.

In four seasons with Washington, Settle recorded 52 total tackles and seven sacks. Five of those sacks came in 2020. He saw limited playing time with the Commanders competing behind a loaded interior line.

NICHOLS CLAIMS GOLD

Haymarket resident and Battlefield High School senior Evan Nichols won a gold medal as a member of the 2022 U.S. Sled Hockey Team. The Americans won their fourth straight gold medal at the Paralympic Winter Games in Beijing March 4-14.

Nichols was the youngest member of the U.S. Team.

FIELD MAKES HISTORY

Emory & Henry College freshman wrestler Levi Field (Colgan) is the program's first All-American after claiming seventh in the 157-pound weight class at the NCWA National Championships.

Field opened the tournament with a win by fall in just 28 seconds over Ryan Buquicchio of University of Rhode Island. He advanced to the quarterfinals with a 7-4 decision against Marc Kleyman of Rutgers. In the quarters, Field battled Ohio State's Yury Pozdneev through 2½ periods before losing by fall (6:11).

In the fifth consolation round, Field beat Liberty's Connor McCann 19-9 for a major decision. He lost a major decision to Zachary Snyder of Toledo (13-5) before rebounding to claim a seventh-place finish and All-America honors with a win over Nathan Egbalic of the University of Nevada-Las Vegas in 3:37.



LEVI FIELD

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mac, Rivers' phone lighted up with text messages from people wondering whether he would go to the Dumfries-area school.

"I felt like a pro or college coach," Rivers said. "I had to put a statement out on Twitter saying I plan to retire at Patriot."

Anthony Mills is another name that popped up as a possible replacement for Honore. Mills graduated from Potomac in 2005 and just finished his fourth season as Colonial Forge's head boys basketball coach.

Before Colonial Forge, Mills spent one season as King George High School's boys basketball coach. He previously led the Battlefield High School girls basketball team for four seasons before stepping down in May 2017.

Under Mills, the Bobcats qualified for their first state tournament and won a school-record 22 games in the 2015-16 season. Mills finished with a 77-26 record at Battlefield.

Mills said he'd consider the Potomac opening but would like to talk to Honore more about it. "It's something I need to sit down and think about."

Honore will stay connected with Potomac. His son, Kameron, is an incoming freshman who considers baseball his primary sport. Honore said he also is not retiring from coaching.

"If the right opportunity comes, I would consider it," Honore said. "I've accomplished a lot in 16 years. If for some reason God saw fit for me not to coach again, I'm at peace with that."



Keith Honore won two state titles as Potomac's head boys basketball coach.

DOUG STROUD|FOR INSIDENOVA

Thank you, Hoops Fest team

It's a wrap. After 25 Hoops Fests, I'm officially retiring as the event coordinator. While it is a popular and worthwhile endeavor, it's time for me to step back.



DAVID FAWCETT

Hard to imagine I've done this almost half my life. That being said, I wanted to take a moment and thank all those who have allowed Hoops Fest

to go on this long and become a staple in Prince William County.

First, for the schools themselves who have hosted this over the years. Without them, there is no Hoops Fest. They assume much of the responsibility, but have done so cheerfully. So many do so much behind the scenes to make this happen and they are all fully invested.

In particular, I want to single out Gar-Field, Hylton and Potomac. These schools kept this event going especially at the end and did not turn me away when I came knocking to ask if they would host yet again. They ran the event with class and professionalism and with no selfish agenda.

The event involves a lot of work and last-minute adjustments. But when you experience what occurred March 16 at Gar-Field you remember why you do this. The kids always come to play and never disappoint. They cheer each other on with passion and respect.

I mentioned to Osbourn boys basketball coach Rocky Carter they are almost like one big team. Rocky corrected me: "They *are* a team. The camaraderie is very obvious." They are the main reason people pay to come and watch this event, and they deliver every time.

In putting together the "25 Hoops Fests, 25 Fun Stories," which ran in the March 10 paper, I was amazed how many great memories this event has generated over the years. A future NBA point guard (Kendall Marshall) helping Evangel win the two-ball title as a sixth-grader. Hylton's Tommy Adams throwing the ball off the wall behind the basket and then in one motion dunking it effortlessly. Potomac's Donald Vaughn sporting ski goggles one year and a cape the next to win back-to-back dunk titles. The list goes on, the creativity and energy non-stop.

I also want to thank the charity recipients over the years who have allowed us to use this event to raise awareness for their oftentimes painful and heartbreaking situations. I was touched beyond touched to have former Hoops Fest charity recipients serve as dunk judges for our final edition at Gar-Field.

Woodbridge graduate Lee Thompson Jr. was our first charity recipient – proceeds went to help pay for his prosthetic legs after he came down with spinal meningitis. Hylton graduate Josh Himan



All the Hoops Fest logos through the years.

EMILY FAWCETT|FOR INSIDENOVA

was the Hoops Fest 16 recipient. Himan, a Marine corporal, was paralyzed from the waist down in September 2009 after being wounded in Afghanistan. Proceeds went to help build an accessible addition to the family home. And Brandon and Shannon Nuzum, who lost their young son, Trevor, to cancer in Aug. 2013. Money from Hoops Fest 17 helped with Trevor's medical costs.

Their presence was a reminder why we do this event.

So was Gabe Harris' speech. If you didn't hear it at last week's event, please listen to it or talk to someone who was there and have them tell you what Harris shared. It was emotionally powerful and straight to the heart.

I want to thank all those on my team who have helped me over the years. Hugh Rist, my faithful free-lancer, has written the event story for me for many years. He and photographer Bill Kamenjar, another wonderful asset, provide the words and the images that capture this event's essence.

Jeremy Whitham, of course, as the voice of Hoops Fest. He's done a great job over the years. There's no way I could do this without any of them. I can count on them to do their jobs and do them well. And they don't just do this as a job – they enthusiastically enjoy watching the kids participate.

Finally to my wife, Emily, for running around at the beginning to ensure every player is accounted for so when the event begins we're ready to go. Her steady hand keeps everything moving along. Fortunately, she's still talking to me at the end



The Ryland Strong Foundation was the recipient for proceeds raised from this year's Hoops Fest sponsored for the final time by InsideNoVa and held at Gar-Field High School on March 16. Pictured left to right: Gabe Harris (Ryland's father), Emily Haugen (Ryland's girlfriend), Micki Haugen and Lars Haugen.
BILL KAMENJAR|INSIDENOVA.COM

despite all the hoops (excuse the pun) I ask her to jump through.

To the InsideNoVa staff led by Bruce Potter and our advertising director, Connie Fields, along with Rick Bockes who make the time to come to these events with their help and support. And a special shout-out to Nicky Marshok. Of anyone on the staff, we've worked together on this event the longest and, as is her nature, she always keeps me calm anytime I start panicking, which is usually always.

I'm grateful to all of you and those who have attended the event over the years to raise over \$180,000 to families in need. Giving back to others should always be the end game no matter the circumstances.

I constantly sweated out Hoops Fest, trying to make sure everything was ready. Sometimes it was, other times not. So you adjust even when you notice after the fact one of your logos has six fingers on one of the player's hands instead of five. Or, like March 16, as the kids are coming onto the court, you realize you have the correct amount of two-ball spots but not all the correct numbers.

Despite the challenges at times, I never lost faith in Hoops Fest's ability to bless others and this community.

What an honor to steward this event. David Fawcett is the sports editor for InsideNoVa/Prince William. Reach him at dfawcett@insidenova.com.

Fantastic Finish

The final Hoops Fest sponsored by InsideNoVa raised \$7,090 for the Ryland Strong Foundation. The money will go to help combat brain cancer. Ryland Harris, a 17-year-old Brentsville High School student, died from the disease Sept. 15.

Held March 16 at Gar-Field High School for an event record seventh time, Hoops Fest 25 brought together the best boys and girls high school basketball players from Prince William County, the city of Manassas and Manassas Park to compete in skills competitions.

The Hoops Fest winners were:

- Boys' 3-point shootout: Tey Barbour, Osbourn
- Girls' 3-point shootout: Hailey Kellogg, Osbourn Park
- Two-ball: Bryce Hammersley and Reese Burch, Battlefield
- Slam dunk: Rodney Johnson, Hylton

Hoops Fest raised more than \$180,000 during its 25-event history.

PHOTOS BY BILL KAMENJAR | FOR INSIDENOVA

 For more coverage of Hoops Fest 25 and to see over 50 additional photos, visit [INSIDENOVA.COM](https://www.insidenova.com)



Osbourn's Tey Barbour won the boys 3-point title.



Three-point shootout champion Hailey Kellogg of Osbourn Park poses for a trophy photo following her Hoops Fest 25 victory.



The dunk of the night by eventual champion Rodney Johnson from Hylton, who skies high over a friend.



The dunk judges (left to right, Shannon Nuzum, Brandon Nuzum, Lee Thompson Jr. and Josh Himan) give the Hoops Fest crowd something to cheer about.



Battlefield's Reese Burch gets congratulated for her win with Bryce Hammersley (24) in the two-ball.



Since its inception in 1996, Hoops Fest has raised over \$180,000 for families in need.



ANYTHING BUT LAX

Unity Reed High School senior lacrosse players Alex Hincy (right) and TJ McMahon.

DAVID FAWCETT/INSIDENOVA

No team, but Unity Reed players make do

» BY DAVID FAWCETT
dfawcett@insidenova.com

Near the end of the first week of the spring sports season, Unity Reed activities director Kevin Turner e-mailed first-year boys lacrosse head coach Jacob Williams for a status report.

In particular that morning, Turner wanted to know whether the Lions had enough players to field a varsity team because tryouts were now over. Out of fairness to other schools, Turner needed the update right then. If Unity Reed didn't have enough players, those schools needed time to adjust their regular-season schedules and find another opponent.

Williams wished he had a better answer because this hit home. A 2010 graduate of the school, then known as Stonewall Jackson, and a three-year lacrosse player, Williams was the only candidate to apply for the head coaching position after Sean McMahon took the similar job at first-year Gainesville High School.

Williams interviewed for the Unity

Reed position in February, hoping for a full roster. But with only six players at practice and no expected additions to fill out the minimum 10 players needed to play a game, Williams accepted the reality of the situation and told Turner the truth: It appeared Unity Reed would not have a varsity team.

Then came the hard part. Later that afternoon when Williams arrived for practice, he gathered Unity Reed's boys lacrosse players into the weight room to deliver the unpleasant news.

As expected, the players were shocked and disappointed about not having a varsity season. But once they got over the initial blow, they refused to walk away. Instead, they focused on one viable option: They could compete against each other even if they practiced using only one goal and on one half of the field. This was better than the alternative.

"It was, 'OK, we will make the most of it,'" Williams said. "We're not going to go home and do nothing."

The decision affected the team's two seniors the most because this would be their

SPRING SPORTS OVERVIEW

Here's a list of which varsity and junior varsity teams each high school is fielding for the spring sports season. Spring sports are boys and girls soccer, boys and girls lacrosse, boys and girls tennis, boys and girls track and baseball and softball. Track and tennis are varsity only.

CARDINAL DISTRICT

- » **Colgan:** Has a team in each sport for varsity and junior varsity
- » **Forest Park:** Has a team in each varsity sport; does not have junior varsity girls lacrosse or girls soccer
- » **Freedom-Woodbridge:** Has no varsity girls lacrosse, baseball or softball; only has junior varsity softball and boys soccer
- » **Gar-Field:** Has a team in each varsity sport; no junior varsity boys and girls lacrosse or softball
- » **Hylton:** Has a team in each varsity sport; no junior varsity baseball or softball
- » **Potomac:** Has a team in each varsity sport; no junior varsity baseball, girls soccer, girls lacrosse
- » **Woodbridge:** Has a team in each sport for varsity and junior varsity

CEDAR RUN DISTRICT

- » **Battlefield:** Has a team in each sport for varsity and junior varsity
- » **Gainesville:** Has a team in each varsity sport; only has junior varsity baseball
- » **Osborn:** Has a team in each varsity sport; has no junior varsity softball, baseball and girls soccer
- » **Osborn Park:** Has a team in each varsity sport; has no junior varsity softball and girls lacrosse
- » **Patriot:** Has a team in each varsity sport; has no junior varsity softball
- » **Unity Reed:** Has no varsity boys lacrosse, softball and girls soccer; only has junior varsity boys soccer and softball

OTHERS

- » **Brentsville:** Has a team in each varsity sport; no junior varsity softball
- » **Manassas Park:** No varsity softball; no junior varsity baseball, softball and girls soccer

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Battlefield's Trinity Gaither tied the game 5-5 with a home run that pinged the scoreboard. DOUG STROUD|FOR INSIDENOVA

Battlefield's Aiko Conaway (center) is congratulated by teammates Madison Johnson (left) and Trinity Gaither (10) after defeating Osbourn Park. DOUG STROUD|FOR INSIDENOVA

Battlefield tops Osbourn Park in extra innings

STAFF REPORTS

Battlefield's softball team scored four runs in the top of the eighth inning to defeat Osbourn Park 11-9 Tuesday in a battle of unbeatens.

Trinity Gaither led the Bobcats (2-0 in Cedar Run District, 5-0 overall) with three RBI, including a homer. Aiko Conaway added two RBI and was 3 of 5 from the

 For more than 50 additional photos from Tuesday's game, visit [INSIDENOVA.COM](https://www.insidenova.com)

plate with two runs scored, a double and a triple. Madison Johnson was 3 for 4 with an RBI and three runs scored.

Conaway was the winning pitcher. She

struck out 13 and allowed nine runs, two walks and 11 hits in eight innings.

For Osbourn Park (1-1, 3-1), Shelby Presgrave and Cordia Hirschy each hit home runs. Presgrave's was a grand slam in the bottom of the third for her lone hit of the night. Hirschy hit her two-run homer in the bottom of the eighth and finished the game 2 for 4 with two runs scored and two RBI.

Darrah Nickens went 4 for 5 with two RBI and two runs scored.

Alena Hillyard took the loss. She gave up 10 hits, eight earned runs and five walks and recorded nine strikeouts in eight innings.

Battlefield took a 3-0 lead through the first two innings before Osbourn Park scored four runs in the bottom of the third off Presgrave's homer.

UNITY REED » FROM PAGE 19

Unity Reed grapples with new reality

» BY DAVID FAWCETT
dfawcett@insidenova.com

last high school season. Three-year varsity members TJ McMahon and Alex Hincy lost their sophomore season when the pandemic wiped out the spring schedule and then competed in a shortened season in 2021.

At the start of this school year, McMahon knew the Lions faced a sizable challenge in finding enough lacrosse players. He walked the hallways trying to recruit prospective candidates.

In 2021, Unity Reed went 5-4 with a senior-dominated 25-player roster. But when those 17 seniors graduated, there wasn't much left in reserve.

In January, with interest at a standstill and the threat of no season creeping closer, McMahon said he contacted the Virginia High School League to see whether he could still attend Unity Reed as a student, but play for neighboring Osbourn Park as an athlete. The VHSL said he could not.

After exhausting all his options, McMahon sought ways to build the program back up by conducting clinics for middle-schoolers and continuing to look for new players.

McMahon, who plans to play club lacrosse at Longwood University, received one taker in senior Malaki Childs. Childs hadn't played any sports at Unity Reed but decided to give it a shot. He struggled early but quickly improved.

Since the announcement of no varsity season, the Lions have added three underclassmen, giving them nine.

McMahon and Hincy hope it's a sign of things to come.

"We have a tradition of good success here," Hincy said. "We want to continue that. The hope is for the future so that teams will be there if we put in the work now."

Last spring as high schools dealt with reduced numbers and a limited schedule due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Unity Reed was still able to field varsity teams in all its sports.

This spring, however, is a different story. Unity Reed has no varsity teams in three sports: boys lacrosse, softball and girls soccer.

Of the 15 public high schools in Prince William County and the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park, only Freedom-Woodbridge is without the same number of varsity sports as Unity Reed. Schools typically field 10 varsity spring sports (boys and girls soccer, tennis, track and lacrosse along with baseball and softball).

Every other school has a full slate of varsity spring sports except for Manassas Park, which does not have varsity softball. Unity Reed felt the impact at the junior varsity level as well. The Lions are only fielding junior varsity softball and boys soccer teams.

Unity Reed activities director Kevin Turner attributes Unity Reed's drop-off in interest primarily to demographics. Certain sports, especially ones with American roots, are less appealing at a school with a diverse student body of 2,300 students representing 61 countries with the majority of the population being Hispanic (64.2%).

Soccer, traditionally popular among Hispanics, drew the most interest of any sport this spring at Unity Reed, where the boys program had to cut 30 players.

To a lesser extent, Turner also said boundary changes caused by the opening of nearby Gainesville this fall affected Unity Reed's turnout.

At the end of the 2020-21 school year, Unity Reed had

UNITY REED'S SPRING SPORTS LINEUP

- » **Baseball:** Varsity only
- » **Softball:** Junior varsity only
- » **Boys Soccer:** Varsity and junior varsity
- » **Girls Soccer:** No teams
- » **Boys Lacrosse:** No teams
- » **Girls Lacrosse:** Varsity only
- » **Boys and Girls Tennis:** Varsity
- » **Boys and Girls Outdoor Track:** Varsity

Note: There is typically no junior varsity for tennis or track



2,599 students. That number fell to 2,352 at the start of this school year. In addition, Turner said the school is still dealing with a residue effect from COVID.

"It's a perfect storm," Turner said of the three main factors behind Unity Reed's decreasing athletic numbers.

The trend has been felt in other sports at Unity Reed, in particular football, where the Lions have had only enough players to field a varsity team for the past two seasons. Overall, Turner said 272 students participate in athletics at Unity Reed.

The shift has forced Unity Reed to re-evaluate how it's promoting its sports programs to increase turnout. Turner encourages kids to try other sports if their primary one is unavailable. They can also provide support by serving as a team manager.

Turner realizes it's a hard sell at times persuading kids to switch to an unfamiliar sport.

In addition, he wants to provide more free camps, especially for middle-schoolers who will attend Unity Reed. "We need to engage the kids we have," Turner said.

Going, Going, Gone

Colgan's Westley explodes out of the gate from the plate

» BY DAVID FAWCETT
dfawcett@insidenova.com

One day earlier this March, Mike Colangelo challenged Matthew Westley to see who had better grip strength.

Each took a turn firmly holding a measuring device called the dynamometer as hard as he could for at least five seconds. The device tests physical power in the forearms as a way to improve a player's swing. Westley went first, followed by Colangelo.

A former Major League Baseball player, Colangelo usually beat Westley in these impromptu battles of strength. But this time, Westley won.

Colangelo jokingly claimed he lost due to a sore elbow, but the Colgan head baseball coach knew the truth.

Westley's offseason regimen had done wonders and here was the proof. And Westley's hitting performance to start the high school season has only reinforced that point.

Through Colgan's first six games, the 6-foot, 195-pound Westley has collected 20 RBIs and four home runs, including two grand-slams.

Westley opened the season March 18 against Battlefield going 2 for 4 with four RBI. He blasted his first grand slam 380 feet to right center in the second inning of Colgan's 10-2 victory.

He followed up the next day by hitting for the cycle. Westley was 4 for 4 with six RBI in a 15-1 win at Centreville. Westley recorded a double in the second inning, a triple in the third, a 390-foot homer to centerfield in the fifth and a single in the sixth.

Then on March 22, the junior right-hander added his second grand slam, a fifth-inning 385-foot shot to left center, and finished with seven RBI after going 2 for 4 in a 24-0 Cardinal District victory at Hylton.

Colangelo did not expect Westley to produce the way he has to start the season. But he expected to see better results than a year ago.

Westley displayed an encouraging sign of things to come when he went 3 for 3 with two RBI in Colgan's final scrimmage, a 12-1 win over Bishop O'Connell on March

11. Both RBI came off a double against Virginia signee Jack O'Connor.

By Colgan's fourth game, opposing pitchers started throwing away from him with breaking balls and outside fastballs. Westley stayed disciplined, walking three times with no strikeouts in Colgan's next two games before hitting his fourth homer Tuesday at Gar-Field.

"[Westley] really worked his butt off," Colangelo said. "He's a strong kid who is now explosive. He's physically the strongest kid on the team."

After struggling at the plate during Colgan's run to the Class 6 state championship a year ago, Westley decided to focus more on increasing his power. In 2021, he hit .242 with only six RBI and no homers in 14 games.

As a team, Colgan hit only six homers total in 16 games, led by senior CJ Faulkenberry with three.

"Last year, I did not hit that well," Westley said. "I wanted to get stronger and emphasize getting the ball in the air."

By working primarily with professional baseball player Kevin Lachance at the Athlete's Addiction training facility in Manassas, Westley experienced a breakthrough during his time in the batting cage and while competing with his Stars travel team over the summer.

"He greatly improved my strength and hitting mechanics," Westley said of Lachance. "We worked on staying down in my legs and my swing path. It helps me stay directional and use all parts of the field and staying in my legs gives me a lot more power."

A Virginia Tech commitment primarily recruited by the Hokies as a pitcher, Westley bolsters an already loaded Colgan lineup. The 6-0 Sharks have outscored their opponents 73-4 through Tuesday.

Westley started the season batting sixth behind Brandon Cassidy, Evan Blanchard, Brett Renfrow, Ryan Kennedy and Jaedan Carter. The first five hitters give the Sharks flexibility along with a mix of power and speed.

Once they were on base, it was Wesley's job to, in Colangelo's words, "clean it all up."

"It puts me in a position to succeed and drive them in," Westley said. "We keep passing the stick down the lineup."

Another incentive for Westley to step up is having his first full season of high school baseball after the COVID-19 pandemic canceled the 2020 campaign and



Colgan's Matthew Westley recorded 17 RBI in his first three games. BILL KAMENJAR|FOR INSIDENOVA

ON A TEAR

Matthew Westley's game-by-game plate performances (through Tuesday, March 29):



Opponent	Hitting Statistics
Battlefield	2 for 4 with one homer, 4 RBI
Centreville	4 for 4 with one homer, 6 RBI
Hylton	2 for 4 with with one homer, 7 RBI
Mt. View	1 for 1 with two walks
Alexandria City	0 for 1, 1 RBI, one walk
Gar-Field	1 for 2, two RBIs, one homer

shortened the 2021 season.

In addition, he's playing with teammates Kennedy, Connor Knox, Blanchard, Carter, John Stansbury, Christian Abney, Caden Colangelo and Renfrow, all of whom he's known since at least middle school when they all played a part in leading Benton to three straight Prince William County championships and three straight undefeated seasons.

"It feels good to have this with all my boys," Westley said.

HIGH SCHOOL STANDINGS

(through Tuesday, March 29)

BASEBALL			SOFTBALL			BOYS SOCCER			GIRLS SOCCER		
CARDINAL DISTRICT			CARDINAL DISTRICT			CARDINAL DISTRICT			CARDINAL DISTRICT		
Team	District	Overall	Team	District	Overall	Team	District	Overall	Team	District	Overall
Potomac	2-0	3-0	Woodbridge	2-0	2-0	Colgan	1-0-1	2-1-1	Woodbridge	1-0-0	1-1-0
Colgan	2-0	6-0	Colgan	2-0	3-2	Forest Park	1-0-1	1-1-1	Hylton	1-0-0	1-1-0
Forest Park	1-0	2-2	Potomac	1-1	1-3	Freedom-WB	1-1-0	1-1-0	Colgan	1-0-0	3-1-0
Woodbridge	0-1	0-2	Forest Park	1-1	1-3	Woodbridge	0-0-0	1-0-0	Forest Park	1-1-0	1-2-0
Gar-Field	0-1	2-2	Gar-Field	0-1	1-3	Hylton	0-1-0	0-1-0	Gar-Field	1-1-0	2-2-0
Hylton	0-3	0-6	Hylton	0-3	0-4	Gar-Field	1-1-0	2-1-0	Freedom-WB	1-1-0	1-2-0
CEDAR RUN DISTRICT			CEDAR RUN DISTRICT			CEDAR RUN DISTRICT			CEDAR RUN DISTRICT		
Gainesville	3-0	3-0	John Champe	2-0	2-0	Osborn	3-0-0	5-0-0	Battlefield	2-0-0	3-1-0
Battlefield	3-0	4-1	Battlefield	2-0	6-0	Battlefield	2-0-1	4-0-1	John Champe	1-0-0	1-0-0
Freedom-SR	2-1	2-1	Patriot	1-0	2-2	Osborn Park	1-0-1	3-0-1	Osborn Park	1-0-0	1-2-0
Patriot	1-1	1-1	Osborn Park	1-1	3-1	Patriot	1-0-1	2-1-1	Patriot	0-0-1	2-1-1
Osborn	1-2	2-3	Freedom-SR	1-2	1-2	John Champe	2-1-0	2-1-0	Freedom-SR	1-1-1	1-2-1
Osborn Park	0-2	1-2	Gainesville	1-2	3-2	Freedom-SR	0-2-1	0-2-1	Osborn	1-3-0	4-3-0
Unity Reed	0-2	1-2	Osborn	0-3	2-3	Unity Reed	0-3-0	0-3-0	Gainesville	0-2-0	1-3-0
John Champe	0-2	0-2	OTHERS			Gainesville	0-3-0	0-4-0	OTHERS		
OTHERS			Brentsville	0-0	3-2	OTHERS			Brentsville	0-0-0	3-0-0
Brentsville	0-0	3-2	OTHERS			Brentsville	0-0	0-2-1			