

One Step Closer to the Finish Line



BRING IT HOME
Senior Josh Lopez (25)
runs for a touchdown
in the 77-45 State
Semifinal victory over
The Woodlands Christian
Academy.

The varsity football team will play in the TAPPS Division III State Championship this Saturday at 12 pm facing Lubbock Christian at Panther Stadium in Hewitt near Waco. The Eagles missed winning state last year by one point in the final seconds of the game, and now they are back!

WORDS | JACKSON YOUNG

On December 7, 2018 we fell short of a State Championship by one point. While there were many factors leading to this heartbreaking loss, in the end we could only blame ourselves. We were inches away (literally) from a State Championship. We couldn't help but think that if we had pushed a little more, tried a little harder, or practiced a little longer, maybe that would have made the one point difference. And that's what ran through our minds as we watched the seniors step off the field for the last time — without a win.

After such a long season and so much hard work it was truly devastating to come so close but not quite reach our goal, and even more devastating to know that the seniors wouldn't have another shot at it.

All last year, and the whole offseason before that, we were working towards a championship. Throughout the season, the graduating seniors led us both in practice and in games, not only in the way they played, but in the way they spoke, acted and treated us. The connection we all had with them, added to all of our own disappointment and frustration in losing, drove us to keep working.

On the Monday after our loss, we were back in the weight room. It didn't matter that our season had ended just three days before, it was time get back to work. We had a goal to win that state title.

Official, full team, offseason weightlifting started after Christmas break. We woke up early three times a week to go lift. As we welcomed in new freshmen and started to figure out our team's identity, we started to build confidence. Confidence in our talent. Confidence in our coaches. Confidence in our hard work. But most of all we knew that we had to get back to state, and we wouldn't let anything stop us.

Spring football came, then summer workouts, and before we knew it, it was August and we were back in pads. After a couple of scrimmages, it was time for a new season. As usual, our coaches scheduled some tough games at the beginning of the season: 5A schools, 6A schools, public schools, teams that would push us. We struggled as a team throughout this stretch. Some were blaming each other while others would not trust the coaches' plan, but ultimately our problem was that we were not a united team. And while it felt tough to go through those losses at the time, we were building our toughness and physicality.

The season started with a losing record of 1-4. Despite the rocky start our fans continued to show great support at both home and away games. The moms would make us goodie bags and decorate the

locker room with encouraging posters and quotes. The student section was always present, motivating us with their loud relentless cheering. And the cheerleaders were at every game, regardless of the weather, cheering us on and supporting us afterward.

Although we knew the schedule would get easier, we still had to get tougher physically and mentally. We started doing sand pit workouts after every lift (twice a week).

We went undefeated in district and advanced on to the playoffs. By this time we had gained back our confidence in each other, and we felt like a team bonded by brotherhood. We won all three playoff games, two of which were pretty tough: the second round game against Bay Area Christian (21-16) and the semi-final game against The Woodlands Christian Academy (77-45). The first half against The Woodlands was back-and-forth, but by halftime, we knew that our physicality and mental toughness had already won the game.

That moment the final buzzer went off, it finally hit us; we had made it. After a year of hard work and preparation, we are going to get a chance at redemption on the same exact field and on the same exact date — December 7. And we are ready to take on the challenge.



RETURNING TO STATE

After the 77-45 State Semifinal win, Senior Kade Nicholls (68) leads the cheer at the close of the game as the Eagles return to the State Championship game.