



COURTESY PHOTOS

The Skallywags play nine-man football in the Salem area and recently defeated Grants Pass for the league title.

# SKALLYWAGS SCORE FIRST LEAGUE TITLE

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Residents of the Salem area have always been passionate over the sport of football as seen by the large crowds that attend high school and college games.

Flying under the radar has been a semipro team that quickly become one of the state's best squads.

The team came about when several local players were interested in being a part of the semipro tackle football

league after playing in a flag football league twice a year in the Salem area. They were hoping to become more competitive and get back into tackle football.

Together they founded the Salem Skallywags and began playing in the National Nineman Football League in 2015.

"Football in Salem has been going on for quite awhile and not many people know about it," Salem Skallywags coach and NNFL veteran Jason Haslebacher said. "The league has grown and has gotten bigger than just the Salem area and

connected the Western part of the state."

The league began in 2000 and grown in popularity as it's helped fill a void for players who've wanted to strap on the pads and continue their football careers.

Haslebacher got involved in the league in 2005 and has seen a steady growth in the skill level of the players and the development of the league.

"You have so many athletes and only so many positions to go around so you kind of get everyone to buy into the process to share time and play as one team," he said. "Any number of guys can play well enough to be a starter and play ever snap. You want your guys happy."

Two years ago, the league went through an ownership change with Chris Rudder eventually stepping into the ownership role.

"He's done a phenomenal job managing people and has made it a welcoming environment," Haslebacher said. "He wants you to come out and have a good time and he wanted it to be a family setting."

On May 14, the Skallywags defeated the Grants Pass Generals 34-24 to claim their first league championship.

Grants Pass had defeated them earlier in the season, but Salem changed their game plan and executed it to perfection. Phil DuPont (Championship Game MVP) threw for more than 350 yards and

tossed four touchdowns.

"We played them once already this season and the game plan was to hit them short with our passes, but they gang tackle very well and we lost to them that first meeting," DuPont said. "In this game our plan was to go out there and have fun, air the ball out and throw it down the field."

DuPont graduated from West Salem High and finished up his collegiate career playing at Western Oregon. The majority of the players are from the Salem area, including 40-year-old Cascade High graduate Andre Harris.

"It's pretty neat when guys are in their 40s and still playing," Haslebacher said. It's cool to see how much effort they put into staying in shape."

With their championship victory, the Skallywags will now set their sights on the champion from the Southern Plains Football League (Minnesota) and will battle that team for the Nineman National Football Championship.

The NNF Championship will be 2 p.m. on July 30 and the game will be played at South Albany High School.

"It's nice being able to compete and find that camaraderie with friends and family members," DuPont said. "I'm still having fun and so as long as I'm having fun and not getting hurt, I'll continue to play."



The Skallywags won their first league championship this season.