

OUT WITH A BANG



STAFF PHOTOS BY E.J. HARRIS

Hermiston's Jordan Ramirez celebrates as time runs out on the clock in the Bulldogs' 38-35 win against Churchill in the 5A state championship game Saturday in Hillsboro.

Bulldogs say goodbye to OSAA in style

By ERIC SINGER & ALEXIS MANSANAREZ
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HILLSBORO — Four years ago, Tyler Rohrman stood with his fellow Hermiston students in the south end of the bleachers at Hillsboro Stadium, watching the Hermiston Bulldogs win the first state football championship in school history.

He remembers the game well, sitting through cold and rainy weather, and he distinctly recalls rushing the field to celebrate with his classmates and thinking “I want that.”

Three years later, Rohrman and his 2017 Bulldog teammates got that feeling that they craved with a 38-35 victory over Churchill on Saturday night at that same stadium to clinch the Class 5A state championship.

“It’s indescribable,” Rohrman said on the field, smiling and proudly wearing a state champion medal around his neck. “I can’t put it into words right now. It hasn’t hit me yet and I can’t wait for when it does.”

Senior Joey Gutierrez, who was one of the players responsible for setting up Hermiston’s first scoring drive, shared similar feelings.

“It doesn’t feel real,” he said, “to think that we ended out on top, just a bunch of guys just playing ball and end up right here, it’s just crazy.”

And to make the championship win even sweeter, Hermiston’s OSAA Farewell Tour ends with the Bulldogs on top.

They have talked the talk since pre-season about how they wanted to end their membership in the OSAA as champions. And after a slow start to the season, the Bulldogs backed up their talk with 10 straight wins to bring home the trophy.

“Ever since January we’ve been talking about winning the state championship, and it hasn’t been out of arrogance but out of confidence for each other,” Rohrman added. “We always talked that we were going to get to state, we wanted to practice on Thanksgiving and no matter what adversity happened we had faith that we were going to do what it took to get the job done and we did it.”

That job Saturday night, however, was a little tougher than Hermiston’s previous post season victories. Instead of getting off to a quick start like the Bulldogs have in each of the past two weeks, their run game took a while to develop with workhorse Jonathan Hinkle in the backfield, and the first time quarterback Andrew James tried to get the ball out, it fell incomplete.

But the iffy start lasted only a few minutes as James quickly made up for that incompleteness by connecting with Gutierrez



Hermiston quarterback Andrew James splits Churchill defenders Jax Arnold (12) and Kannon Ruano in the Bulldogs' 38-35 win against the Lancers in the 5A state championship game.



Hermiston's Dayshawn Neal goes up for the ball covered by Churchill's Lucas Schwin in the 5A state championship game.

on a wheel route on third-and-8 to set up Hermiston’s first scoring drive.

Churchill answered like a then-undefeated team should and scored in 10 plays to take a 7-6 lead.

“Churchill’s a tough team,” James said. “You have to give it to them, they didn’t back down once. But it’s that drive, it’s that drive we’ve had since day one, all of the guys, every single one of them, none of them gave up and it showed.”

The Bulldogs answered the Lancers score with a fundamentally sound defense that forced two four-and-outs and two interceptions, all while James led the offense in adding 19 unanswered points to the board.

In the scoring span that gave Hermiston its lead back, the Bulldogs ran in two touchdowns and James connected with Neal on a quick three-yard slant route.

The pass to Neal wasn’t the most exciting of the game and certainly wasn’t the biggest play the junior-senior duo would come away with but it showcased something Bulldog fans have witnessed all year: the unwavering trust between a quarterback and his receiver.

“It’s a trust thing,” head coach David



Hermiston's Jonathan Hinkle breaks free from the grasps of Churchill's Evan Powell and Aidan Fox (7) Saturday in Hillsboro.

Faeteete said. “It’s a long time coming for those guys. You know, last year was Andrew’s first year at the helm and he’s trying to find trust with his guys.”

The trust extends beyond the line of scrimmage, as Faeteete said the wide out called the play that aided in Hermiston re-gaining a lead it would never again relinquish before halftime.

“He looked at me and said, ‘we’re going to run 92 (route) and we’ll catch this touchdown,’” Faeteete recalls.

The trust in Neal’s ability to finish plays extended late into the fourth quarter during the seven-play, 54-yard drive that ended with the game-clinching touchdown with 2:52 left.

Prior to the scoring play, Hermiston called timeout after seeing a mismatch with Neal to set up a new play. Neal came out and lined up as a tight end on the right end of the line, broke out of his three-point stance 10 yards up the field before breaking off to the right where James hit the wide-open receiver for the score.

“We saw their adjustment,” Faeteete said. “They were adjusting to where Dayshawn was and we put him away

from everybody and got him matched up with another corner, someone who hasn’t guarded him all night. So anytime (there’s) a one-on-one matchup that tight in the box within four or five yards, Mr. Neal should win.”

James ended the night 11-of-15 for 162 yards and two touchdowns, and relied heavily on one of his favorite targets, as Neal was good for 80 yards and two touchdowns off five catches in his final game as a Bulldog.

Neal’s best catch of the night came in the first quarter, when he climbed the ladder to snag a high throw from James on fourth-and-14 from the Lancers 32 for a first down conversion, which set up Hermiston’s second touchdown.

“This is something else,” he said, “it’s crazy, man, to go out on top. I love it.”

Hermiston’s run game was not as effective as it was in the first three rounds, but was still effective enough. Hinkle topped 100 rushing yards yet again on Saturday, finishing with 115 yards on 22 carries with two scores.

He did cough up a fumble on the Bulldogs’ own 25 late in the third quarter with Hermiston clinging to a 31-28 lead, making for nervous moments among Bulldog fans.

However Hermiston’s defense picked up its running back and forced Churchill into a 42-yard field goal attempt, which Trevor Groves pushed wide left, proving to be the difference in the game.

Churchill scored its final touchdown with 33 seconds left, but an onside kick attempt bounced into the arms of Gutierrez and Hermiston’s ‘hands team’, sealing the win for Hermiston.

“That’s why they are out there, they nicknamed that team AllState so we’re in good hands with all-state, right?” Faeteete joked. “It’s one of those things we rehearse on Thursday mornings. We rehearse those plays, those moments, those opportunities and that kid grabbed it on a good bounce, covered it up and then we hit victory twice and ended the game.”

Seventeen Bulldog seniors suited up for the final time in purple and black uniforms, each leaving their own mark in their own way in a program that has made it to the playoffs every year since joining Class 5A in 2006.

The goal was always a state title, but the Bulldogs also wanted to leave a lasting footprint on their way out of Oregon this year before heading to compete in the WIAA — they wanted to end with a bang.

“I think we left with a pretty big one, yeah?,” Faeteete said. “You know, these guys before last week the one memory they remember is sitting in the stands and rushing the field after Chase Knutz’s group won it and for them to end their senior career the way that they saw fit.

“Leaving Oregon with a bang?,” Faeteete asked. “Bang!”

| | CHS | 7 | 7 | 14 | 7 | — | 35 |
|-------------|---|----|---|----|---|----|----|
| HHS | 6 | 19 | 6 | 7 | — | 38 | |
| PASSING | — (CHS) J. Blackburn 14-29, 204, 3TD, 2INT. (HHS) A. James 11-15, 162, 2TD. | | | | | | |
| RUSHING | — (CHS 38-180) D. McDaniel 23-130; T. Bennion 8-37; 1TD; L. Schwin 2-10; J. Blackburn 5-(5). (HHS, 48-221) J. Hinkle 22-116, 3TD; A. James 17-51; K. Mikami 2-13, TD; P. Earl 3-7; D. Neal 1-4; J. Gutierrez 1-0. | | | | | | |
| RECEIVING | — (CHS) L. Schwin 7-88, TD; J. Arnold 4-41, TD; M. Tucker 2-60, TD; D. McDaniel 1-15. (HHS) D. Neal 5-80, 2TD; J. Gutierrez 2-36; J. Ramirez 2-33; K. Mikami 1-11; L. Walchli 1-2. | | | | | | |
| TOTAL YARDS | — CHS 376; HHS 343. TURNOVERS CHS 3, HHS 2. | | | | | | |