

BEST IN 2A



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Abbeville's players celebrate after getting the 2A state championship trophy from head coach Jamie Nickles.

Abbeville's line prevails in state championship

By CODY ESTREMERER
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COLUMBIA — Coming into Friday's 2A state championship game, Abbeville knew it had a huge test in front of it. Literally.

That test put into sight when the Panthers lined up against hulking Monroe Freeling, a 6-foot-7, 285 pound Georgia commit, and the rest of the Landsharks' offensive and defensive lines.

For four quarters, the Panthers went up against a bigger line, but time and again, the Panthers were the ones taking it to the larger line in front of them.

"That offensive and defensive line, you'd have to pay me some money to go up against those animals," Abbeville coach Jamie Nickles said. "When you look at the size differential, it was huge. It was hard to get to the quarterback."

The onslaught started from the jump and was featured around nose guard Jae Harris. The junior was a wrecking ball in the middle of the Panthers' defensive line, constantly disrupting the Landsharks offensive flow.

Overall, he finished with 10 total tackles, six of which were solos. More important, he made plays when Oceanside dropped back, dragging Edward Reidenbach to the turf twice for a loss of 12 yards on his two sacks. He also forced a fumble on a tackle for a loss.

Off the edge was Addison Nickles, who faced off against Freeling all night, finishing with six total tackles. He too put pressure on Reidenbach and was key in holding the Landsharks to less than 100 yards on the ground.

"I was on the Georgia commit all night long," Addison Nickles said. "It was really just try to suppress him. He kicked my butt a few plays but I got by him a couple of times. It was really a big part. Their big thing was him getting on the linebackers. I kept him off our linebackers all night long. It was just a hard fought battle for four quarters."

On the other side of the ball, the Panthers ran wild nearly eclipsing 300 yards on the ground. That success was because of the work that players such as center Jacob Ferguson, who faced off against Freeling most of the night.

"He was big, but I got up in there and handled him," Ferguson said. "I had four pancakes on him. ... Linemen don't get much credit for it but I think they deserve a little bit of credit for what they're doing. It kind of leads to the big runs."



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Abbeville's Damarcus Leach slings down Oceanside Collegiate running back Vaughn Blue.

Abbeville overcomes slow start, wins 8th state title under Nickles

By CAM ADAMS
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COLUMBIA — The Panthers were at a loss through their first two drives.

Against a stacked Oceanside Collegiate defensive front, Abbeville mustered just four yards on back-to-back three-and-outs.

Despite the slow start, the Panthers bought into the Kool-Aid they were drinking all season, and about two-and-a-half hours later — the taste was sweet.

The Panthers used explosive plays on offense and defense to jump out to a lead and run away with it in a 35-20 Class 2A state title win over Oceanside.

"It feels good to be here, man, senior year, state championship, it just feels awesome," Abbeville senior Antonio Harrison said.

Harrison, who had been out most of the season with a torn ACL, loomed large in his school's 12th all-time state championship.

The senior ran in a 9-yard score in the fourth and his third-quarter 20-yard catch set up a Zay Rayford 10-yard touchdown to put Abbeville up

by 21.

And he was just as effective on defense. Harrison was stellar in the Abbeville secondary with key pass breakups and a touchdown-saving tackle at the 2-yard-line right before half.

It was quite the night for a guy whose senior season was in question this spring.

"Just tremendous to see him come back and do what he did this year, it's almost a miracle from God, really," Nickles said. "Give him all the glory!"

Along with Harrison, the Panther secondary gave the offense grace in the first half, keeping the Landsharks scoreless with three fourth-down stops in Abbeville territory.

Meanwhile, Karson Norman ignited the spark for the Maroon and Gold.

The sophomore found running room and burst down the field on a 61-yard touchdown run, and the next two drives were just as explosive as the third.

After two turnovers on downs, the Panthers picked up right where they left off with a 23-yard Ty Cade run and a Jay Tinch 31-yard touchdown

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Seniors' Redemption Tour was uphill battle

By GREG K. DEAL
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COLUMBIA — "That won't happen again."

Those were the words of Abbeville quarterback Zay Rayford before the start of this football season, talking about the Panthers coming up short of reaching the state championship game in 2021.

Fast-forward to 2022. Rayford and the rest of the Abbeville seniors were standing at the center of Charles W. Johnson Stadium in Columbia on Friday, hoisting the Class 2A state championship trophy so the throng of Abbeville fans could see it.

It was their redemption tour.

These seniors captured a state title as sophomores in 2020, but fell short in a loss to Gray Collegiate in last year's Upper State title game. Their fingerprints were all

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Abbeville quarterback Zay Rayford, right, celebrates with fellow senior running back Jamal Marshall after scoring a 10-yard touchdown.