

SPORTS



George Cox
Sports editor

State champs! West Brunswick captures 2A crown, 14-6

Trojans first team to wear two crowns

West Brunswick is the first county high school since consolidation in 1972 to capture two state championships in the major sports. The 1975 Trojan basketballers won the state 3A title under the guidance of the late Gary Taylor after finishing runners-up the season before.

So this year's West Brunswick footballers with their first-ever state 2A title, after finishing runners-up last December, have earned the school a noteworthy distinction.

North Brunswick was the first consolidated county high school to win a state championship in 1979 when coach William Hargrove's girls softball team beat Bandys twice in one afternoon to capture the state 1A-2A title en route to an unbeaten season. Belinda Jacobs hurled the Scorpions to both wins that day.

And coach Paul Faulk's South Brunswick baseball team duplicated the North Brunswick girls' unbeaten season with one of its own in 1988 on the way to an unbelievable 29-0 campaign in the tough Waccamaw 2A Conference. The Cougar state 2A titleholders were ranked fifth nationally and had the most dominant team ever of any Brunswick County major sports contingent.

Faulk's club accomplished that feat without the help of a "stopper" moundsman. "It was the best-hitting club I've ever seen," remarked R. J. Powell, a 40-year veteran sports writer who covered many of New Hanover's teams for years. The Cougars batted around at least once and sometimes more during many of their 29 games.

Brunswick media journey to Chapel Hill

Three of my compatriots in the media business accompanied yours truly to Chapel Hill Friday night in preparation for West Brunswick's football championship performance on Saturday. Johnny Craig and his capable wife, Kerri, along with *Brunswick Beacon* sports editor Doug Rutter, talked sports for hours Friday night. It was one of those special times when sports stories were exchanged by the minute.

Everyone was confident that coach Jim Brett's Trojans were going to be "focused and ready" to meet another unbeaten team -- the Maiden Blue Devils -- in Kenan Stadium on the University of North Carolina campus.

The consensus was that this year's Trojan edition was not as strong as last season's club, but with coach Jim Brett's experience and brilliant football mind, gaps were closed and this edition had the intangibles that last year's club lacked.

West Brunswick's players, particularly fullback Aaron Butler and runningback Steve Holmes, emphasized just how "focused" the Trojans were on winning the game instead of just "being there". Butler was named the Trojans' best defensive player while Holmes, who scored two touchdowns and gained a team-high 76 yards rushing, collected team offensive honors.

No doubt, being in the state championship game a year ago was also a distinct advantage for the players who had hungered and thirsted for another chance to win the state championship after falling short for the second year in a row of winning the regular season Waccamaw 2A Conference championship.

The ability to have a team peak in the playoffs is the trademark of great coaches at any level. Brett's team at Tarboro made the playoffs practically every season. Look at Washington Redskins coach Joe Gibbs' December record in the pros as well (32-10).

Cougars, Wolfpack couldn't cut mustard

Neither East Bladen's Cougars nor Whiteville's Wolfpack, Waccamaw 2A Conference regular season winners for the past two seasons, could cut the mustard in the post-season playoffs, which means that starting slow and finishing fast is the primary objective -- if the team can qualify for post-season play.

West Brunswick (11-3) started 5-3 only to come on strong at the end of the regular season and throughout post-season play. It took first-year coach Brett, a veteran of North Carolina sideline wars at Tarboro, over half a season to get his unit clicking and they indeed peaked at playoff time on both sides of the ball.

Most observers felt the Trojans were the best club in the Waccamaw by the time eastern semifinals action came around. Whiteville beat Brett's team, 16-6, at Shallotte earlier in the year when the Trojans fumbled their

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By George Cox
Sports Editor

CHAPEL HILL -- The long and sometimes rocky road in West Brunswick's quest for its first-ever North Carolina 2A football title ended victoriously here in Kenan Stadium Saturday afternoon in a hard-fought, 14-6 triumph over Maiden, highlighted by a valiant, strong-willed defense and opportunistic offense.

Coach Jim Brett's team (11-3) defeated its third consecutive unbeaten opponent by taking advantage of a bad snap and a deflected punt to score on short scoring drives in the first and fourth quarters to put the icing on the cake of a two-year drive to the title which resulted in a state runnerup spot in 1991 and a 24-5 mark in 1991 and '92.

The Trojans also thwarted two long, time-consuming drives by Maiden in the first and third quarters of 21 and 18 plays -- a feat which took much of the heart out of the talented Blue Devil squad, possessor of the state's all-time leading prep rusher, Antoine Ikard.

While gaining 107 yards, Ikard was contained by a swarming West Brunswick defense which didn't allow him to get past the line of scrimmage out into the open field.

West Brunswick won the coin toss and deferred to the second half, allowing the Blue Devils to receive the opening kickoff. Maiden made one first down on its first possession but was forced to punt from its 38-yard line.

Blue Devil junior center Brad Boyette lifted the pigskin over his punter's head with West Brunswick recovering at the Maiden 11.

Trojan fullback Aaron Butler, voted the team's defensive player of the contest, then ran up the middle for four yards to the seven before runningback Steve Holmes, the team's offensive player of the game, scooted wide left for seven yards into the end zone with 8:38 left to play in the first quarter. Joe Hawes kicked the PAT and West Brunswick gained a lead it never relinquished.

Maiden then took the kickoff and ran 21 consecutive plays, beginning at its 29 and ending on the West Brunswick 13 where an incomplete pass on fourth and 13 gave the pigskin back to the Trojans with three seconds left to play in the first quarter.

West Brunswick ran only three plays in the opening period and could muster but seven in the third period when Maiden engineered a 21-play drive from its 33 to the West Brunswick 15, only to stall out again.

The game remained tight at 7-0 as the fourth quarter began with West Brunswick starting a drive from its 21. Brett said at that point he had decided not to attempt any trick plays because the Maiden defense had proved it was not going to be fooled.

West Brunswick punted after three plays and out (including an illegal procedure penalty) and Maiden had life at its 30 after a 45-yard punt by

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Antoine Ikard, Maiden's powerful running back who had gained 1,952 yards this season, gained only 107 more against West Brunswick in Chapel Hill on Saturday -- not enough, as the Trojans prevailed 14-6.

Photo by Jim Harper

'Defense' is last word in Trojans' title chase

By George Cox
Sports Editor

The first question this writer ever asked West Brunswick football coach Jim Brett in a post-game interview brought the following response:

"Defense wins championships."

Those prophetic words echoed in Kenan Stadium on the University of North Carolina campus Saturday afternoon as Brett's Trojans effectively shut down Maiden runningback Antoine Ikard, North Carolina's all-time leading rusher, en route to a 14-6 state 2A championship victory.

Ikard, who rushed for 2,208 yards this season and 6,690 yards during his prep career -- a North Carolina prep record -- managed to gain 107 yards against West Brunswick, but never could break loose for a momentum-changing gainer.

"Our objective was to stop Ikard before he got started," Brett noted in the post-game interview. The Trojan coaches had the defensive line and linebackers keying on Ikard with the hope that he never would get his strong legs into overdrive.

"We did a good job with that," Brett said, "and fortunately he never got loose in our secondary. We were trying to stack players around him before he got there."



BRETT

opportunities to score deep in Blue Devil territory. The Trojans took advantage to score touchdowns both times on short scoring drives.

Consequently, West Brunswick's defense had to stay on the field longer than usual. But, as Brett noted, the Trojan defense bent but did not break.

Maiden moved the pigskin on two long drives of 21 and 18 plays only to come away with nothing after losing possession on downs. That was the ultimate difference in the game, as indicated by veteran coach Tom Brown of Maiden.

Brown, whose 1978 Blue Devils captured the state championship over Jack Holley's Tabor City Red Devils, said not scoring on either of those long drives was the reason his team didn't take home the bacon.

"Can you imagine us being used to taking the ball all season, scoring on long drives and (today) coming away with nothing?" he elaborated. Brown said coming from behind was no problem -- not even with 4:04 left to play with his team behind, 14-0.

"We were down once this season 26-6 in the third quarter and we came back to win. There were a lot of 'ifs' of why we didn't win the game and why we lost."

So in the end, it was defense

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Road to the title

Opponent	Win-Lose	Score
Conway, S. C.	L	19-14
South Brunswick	W	35-0
Georgetown, S. C.	W	22-0
Whiteville	L	6-16
Fairmont	W	28-8
South Robeson	W	33-8
West Columbus	W	33-0
East Bladen	L	8-14
South Brunswick	W	22-0
South Columbus*	W	47-0
Clinton*	W	14-6
Farmville Central*	W	41-14
St. Pauls*	W	39-14
Maiden*	W	14-6

Statistics

West Brunswick	Maiden
5	16
37-134	50-138
0	73
0-3-1	5-10-1
134	211
4-39	2-29.3
2-1	3-1
6-70	4-35

West Brunswick 7-0-7-14
Maiden 0-0-0-6
*West Brunswick defeated Tarboro for 2nd place (1991)
*West Brunswick defeated Robeson for 2nd place (1992)
*Maiden defeated Brunswick for 2nd place in playoffs (1991)