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“Win the Day”

Hampden-Sydney Tigers Look Back at the 2020-2021 Football Season

Just like college athletics across the country Hampden-Sydney’s season was a couple positive tests away from being over, “We were 50/50 if we would even get to play in the spring,” said Head Coach Marty Favret. In his Twenty-Firstst year as the Head Football Coach at Hampden-Sydney, while being the second most winning coach in the program’s history Favret knows what each season has to offer to his players and their fans. Having the unknown of even playing a season is a difficult spot to be in for a team, for coaches and leaders on the team they worked to spread the message to put their emphasis on buying in and working hard in practice every day. “As a captain you can’t let others see your disappointment... (all I could do) is put my head down and get to work,” said co-senior captain Dillon Costello. The pandemic didn’t just take their fall season, it also took away the summer months the team usually has to form bonds and chemistry that inevitably relays to on field performance. This left it up to the players individually to continue to work and get better without having the motivation of coaches and teammates. At a meeting near the beginning of the season with coaches and leaders of the team present the group made a plan, and as Costello put it, the plan was “win the day.”

Being a Senior Captain and the Student Body President of Hampden-Sydney, your voice is going to carry weight. That being said, just like many of his teammates, when Phil Pullen first found out the season was canceled he thought his football career was over, “The sport I had been playing my entire life has been taken away from me and there’s nothing I can do about it.” This left Phil, as well as his teammates a choice, they could either assume they were done playing the game or hold on to hope that they would get another chance to play. For Pullen and his

teammates, the choice was obvious, “It gave me six months to get better,” as Pullen put it. For captains and leaders on the team Dillon and Phil’s decision was echoed from top to bottom, “Everyone drank the juice.”

For seniors on the team, the fact this was their last outing might be enough alone to come out swinging. Although for younger guys on the team, who might not play in a game either way, it’s easy to see how their decision to buy in on a season filled with potential illness and mystery could be difficult. Dealt a hand he had no say in, Coach Favret was left with a potential hefty task. Looking these young members of his team in the eyes, Favret gutted out “Instead of three weeks to get ready you now have six months.” This left the underlining message with these members of the team that their expectation was that they need to be more prepared and developed after this season. Which Favret looks back on as being one of the teams’ main building points going into the fall.

With all the difficulties going into the spring season, it seemed like one of the last things on people’s mind was how good is the team even going to be. Upon the arrival of the first game, the team had hope and confidence with what they had been doing in the months leading up to it, but having it displayed on the field and score is where a team’s legacy is defined. The team responded by not only winning, but posting a shutout in their first two games. For fans of Hampden-Sydney you would have to go back to 1989 to find a two-game stretch shutout. Favret is a coach known for having confidence in his teams, even when the rest of the world might not. To say he was expecting this would be an overstatement, “Truthfully, it was let’s find a way to win the first one (coming into the season).” However, Favret and his team had taken a lackluster situation and made their own of it. From outside viewers there were little expectations for this

team at the beginning of the season, but with a grin on his face Favret told the team “lets continue this revenger tour.”

That revenger tour would be put to a test early in the team’s fourth and final regular season game of the year. Coming into “The Game” records and external factors can be put aside when Hampden-Sydney and Randolph-Macon have their annual contest. The context of each of these two teams’ season is often defined by this game, being that Randolph- Macon has dominated the rivalry of recent, Hampden-Sydney’s team and community was eager to cap this season off with a win.

However, the truth of the matter is that it doesn’t matter how well you have been playing that year when it comes to rivalry games, it matters who wants it more that day. While coming in to this game it had seemed as if Hampden- Sydney’s team had been following some sort of a script, it all fell apart in the 125 rendition of “The Game”. The team couldn’t find a response for one of the more high-powered offenses they had seen this season, while never really finding a rhythm of their own on offense.

With seniors on the team thinking they had seen the end of their football career disappointment set in that their last game did not go as planned. However, with help for opponents’ outcomes and success early in the season, Hampden-Sydney had found themselves in the third-place game for the ODAC conference. Looking to put a shaky performance from last week behind them, the team was eager to respond. Coming out hot, the team lead at half 28-0. Although just like everything else this season entailed this game would not just come to them, Ferrum would respond by scoring 21 points in the second half and put the Tigers on their toes coming down to the wire. With a strong defensive performance, Hampden-Sydney would go on

to win the game and with all the hardships that the season brought the Tigers they would claim sole ownership of third place in their conference.

Going forward, the Tigers will look to build off what a short but impactful season the people on and around this team went through. For underclassman they have seen what senior leadership looks like even when the world seems against you, while for the outgoing seniors they carry lessons and memories from this season that wouldn't have existed without the opportunity to play, to put it in Favret's terms, "it's all gravy from here."