

STATE CHAMPIONSHIP: Pilot Point vs. Kirbyville

For the first time all year we allowed ourselves to celebrate a win for more than a few hours. We really got to enjoy the weekend and soak in that we had made it to the state championship game. Monday morning however; that was over. Making the state championship game was not our goal. Winning the state championship game was our goal. That was the mentality we showed up with Monday morning. I think that something that made our group special was our ability to put everything aside and just focus on football. We approached that week like we did on the first day of two-a-days. Business like. If an outsider were to come in our field house, there would have been no way to tell that we were playing for the state championship in 6 days. The focus was entirely on the opponent and what our jobs were to be Saturday afternoon.

Kirbyville was the first team we were going to match-up against that had more big game experience than we did. Kirbyville had made the state championship in 2008 and lost to the Muleshoe Mules just like we did. A tough loss for them, but the experience they gained could potentially be an edge for them. Kirbyville entered the state championship with a record of 12-2 but their 2 losses weren't just normal losses. Kirbyville did something similar to us and loaded their schedule with 3A teams to test themselves early. Their losses were both close, and came to West Orange Stark and Jasper, both of which were 3A powers. Kirbyville ran a triple option style offense like Brady and Gunter ran, but Kirbyville's offense was anchored by a different kind of athlete. All-state running back La'Fredrick Ford was a 6'2" 200+ was committed to Stephen F. Austin University. He was explosive and would be the fastest guy on the field whenever he was on it. He was a 3-year varsity starter and finished his high school career with just under 5,000 career rushing yards and 64 TD's. We knew he would be their work horse.

We were met with a happy surprise when we entered the fieldhouse Monday afternoon for practice. We were told we would not be wearing pads this week. Shorts, sweaters, and helmets. That made us think we were in for another light work week physically where we would spend most of our time mentally preparing. Monday practice was at Massey stadium. The very beginning of practice was the only time all week my mind wandered, and I allowed myself to soak in that this would be my last time to step on Massey Stadiums natural grass as a football player. Coach Feldt was on edge that day. He was very high energy

and he didn't just expect perfection that day. He demanded it. One of the things he was super focused on was our counter run play call "Cisco". Depending on which way the ball was going the opposite Guard and Tackle would pull. The guard would kick-out the end and the Tackle would lead through the hole. This was a play we ran every week and the play that Jarman used to run all over Boyd. Coach Feldt told us this play would be huge for us this week, but the pulling Guard would have to take a sharper angle than we had ever had to take before. He said Kirbyville's defensive ends do a great job of crashing down and if we want any chance of successfully kicking them out, we would have to come at what seemed like an impossible angle. Both Cody Sutton (the left Guard) and I (the right Guard) had trouble adjusting to the new angle because it seemed almost impossible for it to have to be as sharp as he wanted. Tuesday was a day I didn't think we were going to make it through. We bussed over to Prosper to practice in their indoor practice facility because of the cold weather, and it was our long practice day and it got dark too early to practice at home with no lights. I think coach caught all of us off guard how hard he was on us that day. He said we were practicing like crap and he'd never seen a team practice like crap and turn around and play good on game day. At one point he even kicked his son Boone Feldt (our starting left Tackle) off of the 1st team line and made him play scout team for a while before returning him to his spot. This was one of the longest practices and I remember we were basically having a full contact practice in the trenches with no pads on. We finally made it through, and the last two days were much easier. It was script day and walk through day. I talked to coach Feldt about those couple days of practice and he said we were practicing really well. He didn't quite remember being as hard on us as we all did, but he did admit "that does sound like something I'd do." I think he was just trying to really emphasize the importance of the preparation that week. It was, after all, the biggest game of our lives. Friday afternoon was really cool. We had another light walk through and after it was through coach Feldt called us all into the weight room and told us to take a seat. We all sat around him and he just talked. He was really calm, and he told us that he was proud of us and win or lose, we had done something to be proud of. He talked for a little while and ended it by saying that there was no doubt in his mind that we were the best 2A team in the state and tomorrow at Texas State University we were going to kick Kirbyville's ass!

As a team we refused to travel by charter bus so we took 5 yellow school busses to San Marcos so we could all ride comfortably. The lineman had an entire bus to ourselves. We were rolling like 4 seats to a person. When we got to San

Marcos there was a bit of mist in the air, but no rain. It would be like this all afternoon and really made for good football weather. For a D-II college football facility the road locker room was awful. There were a few high schools we played at with a better locker room than they gave us. It was fine for me though because for a few hours before the game I just sat on a chair outside the locker room and looked at the empty field envisioning what we were going to accomplish that day. A little over an hour before game time 3 of the hogs (o-lineman) from the '08 team came down to the locker room and gave me a hug and told us to go get them today. I told them we would make them proud. After that it was time to go in and get dressed for warm-ups.

It was finally game time and we were set to receive the opening kick. After a short return we took the field and we were ready to go, but out of all of us, none more so than Jarman Johnson. He was in the zone from the get-go. During our first drive we had gained a first down and after a few small plays we were forced with a 3rd and 8. Seth Tilley took the snap and rolled right and hit an open Gareth Gengenbach who toe tapped both feet in for 17-yards and a 1st down. We had it 1st and 10 from the Kirbyville 43 when coach Feldt called "Cisco" Pro. It's the counter play we had worked on all week and we were running it to the right side. At the snap Cody Sutton took the angle we had practiced all week and made the perfect kick-out block. Boone Feldt followed him through the hole and put his hat on a defender and Jarman did the rest. 43 yards to the house for our 1st TD of the game. It was such a good feeling to open the state championship game with a long TD run like that. It got us off to a fast start and we were ready for more. The coaches decided to follow that TD up with a surprise onside kick. Kirbyville fumbled around with it but ultimately recovered it. So, what could they do with the field position? I don't know if it was nerves or what, but the full back fumbled the handoff on the first play and Safety Justin Chambers jumped on the ball. Re-watching the film, you could see the intensity we had about us. Our defense was running off the field in celebration and our offense was running on the field ready for more, and more we got. During the second drive we tried to run a flea flicker, but it broke down. As it broke down Seth Tilley took matters into his own hands and scrambled around the left side for a 15-yard gain. We didn't look back. A few plays later we called "Cisco" Q Con (QB Counter run left). It would be my first time to run down the angle we practiced all week. I was still skeptical if it needed to be so sharp, but I went at the angle we practiced and lone-and-behold the defensive end was crashing as hard as he could. I kicked him out and Cam Feldt followed me and got his man and Seth Tilley walked into the

endzone for a 4-yard TD run. Less than 6 minutes into the state championship game we were up 14-0. Kirbyville's experience helped them respond. They had a great return on the ensuing kick-off, and they followed that up with a 1 play 42-yard TD run by La'Fredrick Ford. Once he got around the edge, he outran everyone down the sideline. Kirbyville tried a fake on their PAT, and we sniffed it out for a huge loss and now with 6:33 left in the 1st quarter it was PP 14 Kirbyville 6.

We couldn't mount anything on the next drive, and we had to punt. It turned out to not be a very good punt and rolled out just across the 50-yardline. Kirbyville had a chance to answer back, but once again, the full back couldn't handle the ball and he laid it on the turf again. We jumped on it for the second turnover of the game. We needed to do something with it. Early in the drive we called another counter run and Jarman hit it big again. Coach Feldt was right about "Cisco" being a good play for us this week. We eventually were faced with a 4th and short around Kirbyville's 30-yardline and we couldn't convert. Kirbyville again had a chance to tie it up. La'Fredrick Ford took a handoff around the left side and hit the hole and looked to be gone, but AGAIN, out of nowhere just like against Godley, Tyler McNairy chased Ford down from behind coming from the back side and prevented a big TD play. Unfortunately, we couldn't keep them out of the endzone on that drive. Kirbyville lined up to go for 2 to tie the game, but we stuffed that run. 8:08 remaining in the 2nd quarter PP 14 Kirbyville 12. We knew we needed to respond, and we did so with a classic Pilot Point drive. We took the ball down the field small chunks at a time until we had the ball 1st and goal. Kirbyville bowed their necks and forced us into a 4th and goal from the 1-yardline. Instead of running the dive right up the middle we ran a jet sweep around the right side and Jarman punched the ball in the endzone. Ruben was automatic on his extra point and with 1:50 remaining in the half, we extended our lead to Pilot Point 21 Kirbyville 12. Kirbyville needed to answer before half, and they moved the ball quickly down the field after a should be tackle for loss ended in a long run by Kirbyville. Unhappy with what he was seeing from the defensive line, coach Feldt yelled for Cam to enter the game on defense. The first play Cam was in Kirbyville ran it around the right side. In pursuit of the ball a Kirbyville offensive lineman chased Cam down from behind and in a total cheap shot move came around from the side and dove directly at Cam's knee. Luckily for Cam's knee he was wearing a knee brace. That however; turned out to be very unlucky for Cam's ankle and the cheap shot broke Cam's ankle. I don't know if anyone saw the cheap shot live because it was behind the play, but it is clearly a disgusting act

when you look at it back on film. While Cam was down, we all saw the inflatable cast being pulled out and we knew it was a broken bone. That was my brother on the line and the guy I had been playing next to since the 8th grade. It was awful to see, but there was no time to mope. I immediately found Cam's backup. Riley Howard was a junior offensive lineman. Riley Started 2 games earlier in the year filling in for Cody Sutton who was injured against S&S and Valley View. Other than that, he had only played in mop-up duty to that point in the year. He was our 6th offensive lineman and coach Allen had preached to him all year that adversity could strike at any moment and he needed to be prepared to contribute at any of the positions across the offensive line. Riley was very involved in meetings during the week and in-between series every week to make sure he was in-tune with everything that was going on during every game. That being said, this wasn't S&S and Valley View. This wasn't a 4th quarter blow out. This was the 2nd quarter of the state championship game. I got off my knee and started calling his name. He immediately popped up and ran over to me. I could see the realization of the moment in his eyes. I think there was an "Oh shit" moment going through his head at that moment, but I put my arm around him and told him that he could do this. He knew everything he needed to know. He knew exactly what his responsibilities were on every play. As long as he gave it everything he had, we would be ok. I could see at that point the "Oh shit" look was gone, and he had an intense focus on his face. After they helped Cam off the field the defense had their backs to the wall. The momentum going into halftime was on the line and we needed it after what just happened. The first play after the injury Kirbyville fumbled the ball for the 3rd time in the 1st half. We jumped on the ball and Kirbyville's threat was over. We took a knee and went into half leading Pilot Point 21 Kirbyville 12.

Halftime was a bit weird. The coaches took a while to get into the locker room and it was kind of quiet. A few seniors sensed the situation and spoke up at half time. It was just a reassuring message that we were in great shape and we were 2 quarters away from our teams' goal. When coach Feldt came in he was fired up. He was very intense. So intense that I remember looking at the guy next to me and asking, "We're up right now, right?" Quickly after that the other coaches came in and we got our halftime adjustments. It was clear what our offensive game plan was for the 2nd half. That would be to ride Jarman Johnson to a championship.

Kirbyville got the ball to start the second half. They came out desperate and caught a big play early in the drive that set them up in good position. They

capitalized on that good position with a 3-yard TD run by La'Fredrick Ford. Ford was everything he was cracked up to be. They missed the extra point and with 8:08 left in the 3rd quarter the score was Pilot Point 21 Kirbyville 18. We tried to answer their TD with one of our own, but we were faced with a 4th and 7 just past mid-field. Coach Feldt chose to play the field position game with a punt and Mason Guthrie came through. He got the punt off and it rolled down to the 6-yardline before our punt team downed it. Kirbyville mounted a drive, but the defense mounted a stop and forced a Kirbyville punt. We got the ball back and we were just going to force our will. We knew we were giving the ball to Jarman. They knew we were giving the ball to Jarman. It was just a matter of stopping him, and he was in the zone. One of the weirder things I saw was Jarman had a 15-yard run around the left side and eventually ran into a gang of defenders. One guy picked him up and suplexed him down. When I got to the pile Jarman was laying there with his eyes closed like he was asleep. Then out of nowhere his eyes popped open real wide and he just sprung up. It didn't slow him down though because a few plays later he walked into the endzone for a 3-yard TD run. His 3rd of the game. The kick was good and with 2:23 left in the 3rd quarter the score was Pilot Point 28 Kirbyville 18. The rest of the game our defense just was too physical for Kirbyville. After another Kirbyville punt, Jarman took his 4th TD to the house on another "Cisco" and he scored from 20-yards out. The kick was good, and the score now stood at Pilot Point 35 Kirbyville 18 with 6:54 left in the game. Kirbyville gave one last push and was forced with a 4th and goal from the 1-yardline and our defense stood tall again. With about a minute and a half left it had become apparent that we had won this game. We were just running the clock out when we handed the ball to Jarman on a sweep to the left. I think this was the greatest run of Jarman's career. He ran it around the left side and took it down the sideline when he saw a lane diagonally across the field. He changed directions on a dime making a defender miss. I remember watching and hearing his name tag flapping in the wind because it was half tore off from defenders trying their best to tackle him. It went for a 77-yard TD and it would have been a fitting way to end his career at Pilot Point. It would have put him over 3,000 yards rushing on the year and 322 yards and 5 TD's in the state championship game. It was called back due to a bogus holding call on the left side of our line. I believe it was only called to try and keep the game at a respectable score. We ended up turning the ball over on downs a few plays later with 4 seconds left. Kirbyville ran 1 play and time had expired. We had completed our mission. PILOT POINT 35 KIRBYVILLE 18 FINAL.

I didn't let myself bask in the fact that we had won until we came off the field with 4 seconds left. I remember all the coaches from the press box were already down on the sideline. The players on the sideline were starting to celebrate. Everyone was smiling and jumping up and down and hugging. I just took my helmet off and squatted down and put my face down in my hands. It was so surreal. I didn't know whether to cry, or start jumping up and down or what? It was the thing we had worked so hard for. It is what we all sacrificed so much for. A lot of teams do that and fall short. We saw it through though and it actually happened for us. We made it happen together. The clock hit 0:00 and all the players ran out to the field. I remember hanging back a little because I was still in shock. As I started walking on the field I looked back and standing all by himself, looking exhausted was Jarman. He had carried us in this game. In the state championship #37 Jarman Johnson went for 245 yards on 37 carries and 4 touchdowns. I went over to him and gave him a big hug and thanked him for what he did for us. Jarman knew he was good and what he had done, but he was always so humble about it. He never took the credit. He would always dish it right back and tell me it was all us. I've had a lot of people over the years tell me *"anyone could have run for 1,000 yards behind y'all line"*. I don't know if that is true or not, but Jarman didn't run for just 1,000. He was 1 holding call way from 3,000 yards and that doesn't even count the numerous games he didn't play the 4th quarter. After the handshake line with Kirbyville we headed down to the visitors endzone. It was pure pandemonium down there. So many people were down there and the celebration was on. I found my mom and gave her a huge hug and there were so many former players and people from the town and guys from teams we played that were down there waiting for us. I think we stayed on the field for an hour after the game with the trophy and medal presentation and all the people wanting to congratulate us. It was an unbelievable feeling. We had just won the STATE CHAMPIONSHIP.

It wasn't until recently I looked at our path to the state championship. We won a district in which the 2nd place team went to the 2A Div II state semi-final game and the 3rd place team went to the 2A Div II state quarter-final. Our playoff match-ups looked like

Bi-District: District Champion

Area: undefeated district champion (11-0)

Regional final: undefeated district champion (12-0)

State Semi-final: undefeated district champion (13-0)

State final: district champion who's only losses came to powerhouse 3A programs.

There were no cupcakes on our playoff schedule, and we had a very talented district. We averaged 40 PPG for and 14 PPG against. We had the single season rushing record holder. We had the most TD passes in a single season by any quarterback to that point. We completed the most passes in a season to that point. We had the most total offensive yards in any season ever. This was no fluke. We didn't have an easy schedule and we only played 1 game under 10 points all year. We had worked for this since pee-wee and we finally had reached the ultimate goal. 2009 2A Div I State Champions.

The 2009 team was so talented across the board, but none as special as Jarman Johnson. He was the star of our football team. He wasn't a vocal "rah rah" type of leader, but he was a leader by how he carried himself on and off the field. Jarman was there at all the toughest times and you could always count on him for a smile. Jarman was the heart of our football team. We went as Jarman went. Jarman took that same sort of star personality into adulthood. I was always amazed to see how Jarman would go out of his way to be friends with everyone. I could go months without seeing Jarman and when I would see him, he would get that big smile on his face and say "Honeybear" and extend his arms and come in for a hug. That was our thing, but Jarman had that thing with everyone he knew. When Jarman and Chance left us on October 2nd, 2018 it left a hole in our team that nobody could ever fill. Jarman ended his career at Pilot Point with

The most Rushing Yards in one season in Pilot Point history: 2,985 yards

The most Rushing Yards in one game in Pilot Point history: 383 yards

The Most Rushing Yards in a Career in Pilot Point history: 4,890 yards

83 total TD's over 3 years

Jarman put us on his back in that Kirbyville game en route to Pilot Point's 3rd state championship. I think Pilot Point should Retire #37 for Jarman Johnson to celebrate the life Jarman Johnson lived on and off the field.

RIP Jarman Johnson. (October 22nd, 1991 – October 2nd, 2018)



THE GAME AT A GLANCE

Pilot Point 35, Kirbyville 18

Pilot Point	14	7	7	7	—	35
Kirbyville	6	6	6	0	—	18

First Quarter

PP — Jarman Johnson 43 run (Ruben Martinez kick), 8:52

PP — Seth Tilley 4 run (Martinez kick), 6:52

K — LeFrederick Ford 42 run (run failed), 6:33

Second Quarter

K — Ford 14 run (run failed), 8:08

PP — Johnson 1 run (Martinez kick), 1:50

Third Quarter

K — Ford 3 run (kick failed), 10:45

PP — Johnson 3 run (Martinez kick), 2:23

Fourth Quarter

PP — Johnson 20 run (Martinez kick), 6:54

THE YARDSTICK

	Pilot Point	Kirbyville
First Downs	20	14
Rushes-Yds.	50-306	41-353
Passing Yds.	103	61
Comp-Att-Int	7-16-0	4-13-1
Punts	3-29.3	1-43
Fumbles-lost	0-0	3-3
Penalties-Yds.	5-35	6-42

Individual Statistics

Rushing — Pilot Point, Johnson 37-245, Tilley 11-47, Colin Noe 1-14, Jeremy Jackson 1-0. Kirbyville, Ford 33-281, Burman Ervine 3-56, Kael Jones 1-8, JaMichael Ervine 3-5, Caleb Cucancic 1-3.

Passing — Pilot Point, Tilley 7-16-0 103. Kirbyville, Jones 4-13-1 61.

Receiving — Pilot Point, Tyler McNairy 3-51, J.P. Price 2-24, Gareth Gengenbach 1-17, Aaron Buckingham 1-11. Kirbyville, Ford 2-47, Cucancic 2-14.