

# Calhoun Warriors played with all heart against St. Teresa in football playoff semifinals

by John Hough, Sports Writer  
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**HARDIN** - Some people you come across in life learn a lot of lessons, but few never learned the art of quitting. The **Calhoun Warriors football team** is one of them. On Saturday afternoon against a fast, athletic **St. Teresa** squad, they refused to give up until the final whistle even when they ran out of time. The Warriors took a 34-20 loss against the Bulldogs in the IHSA Class 1A semifinals.

St. Teresa moves on to play the Forreston Cardinals in the state championship at Memorial Stadium at the University of Illinois.

“They’re all heart, that’s for sure,” **Calhoun head coach Aaron Elmore** said of his team. “They refused to lose. We gave them our best shot, but we had our chances and didn’t capitalize. I couldn’t be prouder of my kids for their effort.”

After coming off a shocking 28-27 victory over the No. 1 seeded Tuscola Warriors, No. 12 Calhoun matched up with the No. 3 Bulldogs, whose only loss of the season was to Tuscola, and they knew what the Warriors were capable of, especially at home.

The Bulldogs offense, led by sophomore running back **Jacardia Wright**, who is a top 100 recruit for his class and already has an offer from Iowa, was living up to his reputation early on and so did the St. Teresa offense.

“Early on they got us. I don’t think we were ready for their speed,” Elmore said. “It took us awhile to catch up, and it wasn’t just the speed of their backs, but the speed of their linemen.”

The first possession took four plays and 64 seconds for Wright to score on a 5-yard run.

“We came out pretty strong, and we played our game,” Wright said.

The sophomore completed his day with 153 yards on 25 carries with three touchdowns. It was the first time in six games that the super sophomore finished with under 200 yards rushing in a game.





Wright found the end zone on St. Teresa's next possession and quarterback Ryan Fyke did so afterward to give the Bulldogs 21-0 lead in the second quarter. That's where most everyone thought the game was over, but the Warriors had other ideas.

"For the last few weeks there's been a no quit attitude with these guys, and they were going to give it their best," Elmore said. "We got down early there, and it's hard to climb back, but we're not going to change how we approach the game."

After their first offensive drive, Calhoun put together a couple of good series' but couldn't find the end zone until Ty Bick connected with Easton Clark on a 13-yard pass with just under a minute to play before halftime.

Bick ended with 85 passing yards with two touchdowns.

“We were taking what they were giving us,” Elmore said. “It’s part of our repertoire, but we just don’t throw very often because we haven’t had to lately.”

As the second half emerged, the momentum was on the Warriors side with a huge home town crowd with well over one-thousand strong in the stadium at Calhoun High School.

“Once we got our feet sawed in the ground, we started making plays at the line of scrimmage and things started to change.”

On another pass play, Bick found a wide open Wes Klocke, the Warriors best athlete, in stride and he galloped for a 50-yard scored, and Cole Lammy completed the two-point conversion to put Calhoun within a touchdown at 21-14. However, the Bulldogs responded in the person of Jacardia Wright. He broke a tackle at the line of scrimmage and jetted to the end zone for a 43-yard touchdown on a three-play drive to give his team a 28-14 cushion.

Calhoun used up a lot of time on the ensuing drive as they made it inside the end zone, but it was all for naught as the Warriors turned the ball over on downs. It seemed like Calhoun would falter right there, but the defense once again made a stand. They forced the Bulldogs to go three-and-out and then partially blocked a punt that went straight up in the air, took a Calhoun bounce and ended up going one yard back of the original line of scrimmage.

That’s where the Warriors took advantage as Ty Bick pushed his way into the end zone for a 1-yard touchdown run to cap a seven play drive just over two minutes to play at 28-20. After the play, the officials flagged St. Teresa for an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty and the ball was placed at the Bulldogs 30-yard line. Jacob Watters onside-kicked the ball, and after a Bulldog had failed to fall on the ball, the Warriors recovered.

However, Calhoun failed to get a first down and even went backward as they turned the ball over on downs with under a minute and a half to go in the game. That was game over, but it wasn’t.

On the first play of St. Teresa’s ensuing drive, Fyke, and Wright misconnected on their handoff exchange and fumbled the ball and the Warriors fell on it, and the place was up for grabs.

As for the nerve levels on the St. Teresa side, it was very close to a breaking point.

“You don’t even know. It was bad,” Wright said. We’ve been good with turnovers this season, but that came down to nerves.”

Again, Calhoun had to make something happen through the air and St. Teresa was ready for whatever the Warriors threw out them. On a fourth and long, the Bick threw a screen pass, but it was batted up and intercepted by Stanley Rodgers, who took it all the way to house for a 65-yard pick-six, which proved to be the final nail in the Warriors coffin.

“Yeah, it was crazy,” Elmore said with a laugh. “They sniffed out what we had going on, and we couldn’t make a play.”

St. Teresa had seen some strong defenses this season with the likes of Tuscola and Athens, but Wright rates Calhoun right up with them, if not better.

“It was a really good game,” Wright said. “ was one of the best defenses we’ve seen so far. They’re a really good team.”

This was the farthest the Warriors had gotten in the playoffs since they won the state championship in 1993 when Elmore and other members of the coaching staff were on that team. Now Calhoun has to say goodbye to 17 seniors that were freshman during Elmore’s first season at the helm. Everyone has come so far since.

“They’re the group that I started with (2013), and we’ve built this thing together,” Elmore said. “It’s going to be tough losing them, but their leadership this year has been spectacular, but I think we can build on it for the future because of what they accomplished.”







[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)