

Successful Panthers football season a testament to players' hard work

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
October 29 2018 5:34 AM





JERSEYVILLE – When Ric Johns was hired as head football coach of Jersey Community High School, his resume and record clearly stood out.

Going into the 2018 season, Johns’ record stood at 187-110. He coached at Hardin Calhoun for 15 seasons, winning back-to-back Class 1A state championships in 1992 and 1993 along with a runner-up spot in 1987. He also coached at Carlinville, Beleville West and Trenton Wesclin, helping to turn those programs around before coming to Jersey.

And Johns and the Panthers enjoyed a very successful 2018 campaign, coming back from a 1-4 start to win their final four games to finish 5-4 and qualify for the iHSA playoffs for the first time since 2014.

The season ended for Jersey over the weekend, as the Panthers lost at Country Club Hills Hillcrest 47-0 in the Class 4A first round. The loss doesn’t take away from their great season.

“It was fitting and a testament to these kids’ work ethic,” Johns said in a phone interview. “We lost some tough games, and we had our backs to the wall. The kids just concentrated on getting ready for the next game, and myself and the entire coaching staff are really proud of the kids.”

The Panthers defeated in order Waterloo, Triad, Civic Memorial and Columbia in order to earn the playoff berth, Johns felt two of the team's season highlights were winning their homecoming game against the Knights, and then going on the road to defeat a very good Columbia team to clinch the spot.

"It was such a memorable year," Johns said. "I think one of the really great highlights was winning our homecoming game over Triad, which meant that the next week, we had a chance to even our record at CM. It was a huge win for us."

And the win over a then 7-1 Columbia team on the road to clinch the playoff spot was also another big highlight for the Panthers.

"Our playoff points were strong," Johns said. "When the clock hit zeros, we pretty much knew we were in, and that was quite exciting,"

Jersey found their success with a very good rushing attack, led by quarterback Matthew Jackson, who ran for 550 yards and seven touchdowns while going 42 of 86 passing for 447 yards and a touchdown. Running back Brian McDonald ran for 409 yards and seven touchdowns, Kurt Hall had 361 yards and six touchdowns, Zeke Waltz contributed 120 yards and a touchdown, while Nate Goldacker chipped in with 112 yards and three touchdowns.

Will Medford was the Panthers' leading receiver with 11 catches for 101 yards and Jersey's only touchdown reception of the season, while David Rogers was next with seven catches for 49 yards. Hall had five catches for 95 yards, and McDonald had three balls for 51 yards.

Johns also gave credit to his coaching staff as well.

"It was a great testament to our staff," Johns said. "They never gave up or gave in. They just kept going and working hard."

And all the players, especially the seniors, enjoyed their success.

"All of our kids really enjoyed the season," Johns said, "and our seniors enjoyed it the most. Not many people gave us a chance of becoming a playoff team."

And the success of the 2018 team is something the Panthers can build on going forward.

"That's the plan," Johns said. "We want to believe that the 2018 team laid the foundation that we can build on."

And as mentioned, Johns and his entire coaching staff are very proud of their players for their hard work and dedication and are already looking forward to the 2019 season.

“I think it’s a pretty safe bet,” Johns said, “and the coaches are already looking forward to getting back to work as well.”