

Covid-19 ends West Perry's 2020 season

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As expected, the 2020 edition of the West Perry football team will likely go down as the craziest season in program history.

While the world continues to adjust to the new normal that is life during the Covid-19 global pandemic, football was played at high schools across the country, and seemed to provide a sense of relief from the outside world for those donning the green and white.

Still, the season was not without the ever-present Covid concerns that canceled countless games in the conference and ultimately resulted in the premature ending of the 2020 Mustang football schedule.

Before the season even started, the Mid-Penn Conference delayed the start of the season until Sept. 4, canceling or postponing three non-division games and pushing the scheduled league opener against Waynesboro to the first week of November.

Players were unable to use locker rooms before and during games, coaches and school personnel wore masks on the sidelines, games were suddenly streamed live by almost every home team and fan attendance was limited to - in best case scenarios - a few tickets for each player on the team.

"We went into the offseason knowing there was a chance of getting canceled, but we didn't care," junior defensive back Conner Wheeler said. "We still worked and when we got the chance to play this year, it was the best feeling."

The West Perry team faced its own set of issues, as Covid-related concerns forced the Mustangs to postpone its scheduled game against Greencastle by a day and forced three players to quarantine after the school's contact tracing policies indicated they were within close contact with the potentially positive student.

The Mustangs responded, defeating the Devils 27-20 when Wheeler's pass breakup on a late fourth-and-goal for Greencastle sealed the first win of the season.

Two weeks later, as a rising number of positive cases across the school district pushed West Perry to remote learning, the Mustangs were forced to scrap its scheduled game against a winless Trinity.

"We did everything that was asked of us including changing our activities outside of practice and school," senior linebacker Seth Rosenberry explained. "I will remember the frustration and uncertainty with the constantly changing rules for players and parents."

Then, on Nov. 18, West Perry School District Superintendent Dave Zula posted a message to the school's website explaining that, "...three members of our school community (HS and Blain) have been diagnosed with COVID-19....WPSD will remain closed for in-person instruction from Thursday, November 19-24th."

Furthermore, Zula wrote, "After discussion between WPSD and Newport Administration, the decision has been made to cancel the WP vs. Newport football game that was scheduled for Saturday, November 21st. The game will not be rescheduled."

Suddenly, the West Perry football season was over. Without many of the players even realizing it, the team had played its last game and held its final practice of the season. The most anticipated game of the season, a game against a county rival that had not been played since 1995 was once again canceled.

"I was extremely devastated to learn I had played my last games ever," senior captain Eli Puchalsky said.

"(It was) definitely disappointing," Rosenberry said. "We played every game knowing it could be our last but when that becomes a reality, it's a real let down."

The cancellations did, however, mean the Mustangs last game was a win - a monumental 24-18 win over Waynesboro that coach Bob Boden called, "...a quality win for our program. It's a huge win."

"There's always so much to remember about every season, but what I'll remember most is beating Waynesboro in our last game," Puchalsky explained. "I knew our team this year was special and although our record may not (have) shown that, that win showed everyone we could not only hang with any of our opponents, but also beat anyone we played."

Rosenberry added, "The team stayed together and fought through the adversity and hardships of the beginning of the season to win two of our last three (games) against good opponents."

Both Puchalsky and Wheeler said the 2020 season would have lasting impacts on the future for the players expected to contribute in 2021.

Puchalsky said, "I would tell (the underclassmen) to never take any play for granted. They're an amazing group of guys and will go on to accomplish so much more. As long as they always remember to give it their all, they will have nothing but success."

"I feel like we will push ourselves to the limit (in off-season workouts) because this season showed that the season can be taken away just like that," Wheeler said.

As expected, the players have continued to try to spread positivity, despite the abrupt and unexpected end to the season.

“We might have only gotten seven games, but we were grateful to just play one,” Wheeler noted.

“This season meant everything to not only me, but every player and coach,” Puchalsky said. “We knew at any time we could run into issues and not play. I worked as hard as I could this year because this game has given me so much.

“I made sure every snap counted because I knew at any time it could be my last.”