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
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[Tuesday Top 10](#)

Seniors share their emotions as their high school football experience ends with Friday's playoff loss

2020 season was filled with surprise, frustration, victory and camaraderie. The Class of 2021 was not ready for it to be over, but it was thankful to have had a season at all.



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Senior lineman Charlie Pecina kneels, taking in his last few moments on the field at House Park as a McCallum football player. Pecina said the team was optimistic heading into Friday's bi-district playoff game. "Going into the game I knew we had to win or else it would be my last game in a McCallum jersey, but I felt confident because the coaches and the team felt like we had a good week of practice." The game was a tough one as the Knights lost several players to injury or penalties. Despite the attrition, Pecina said

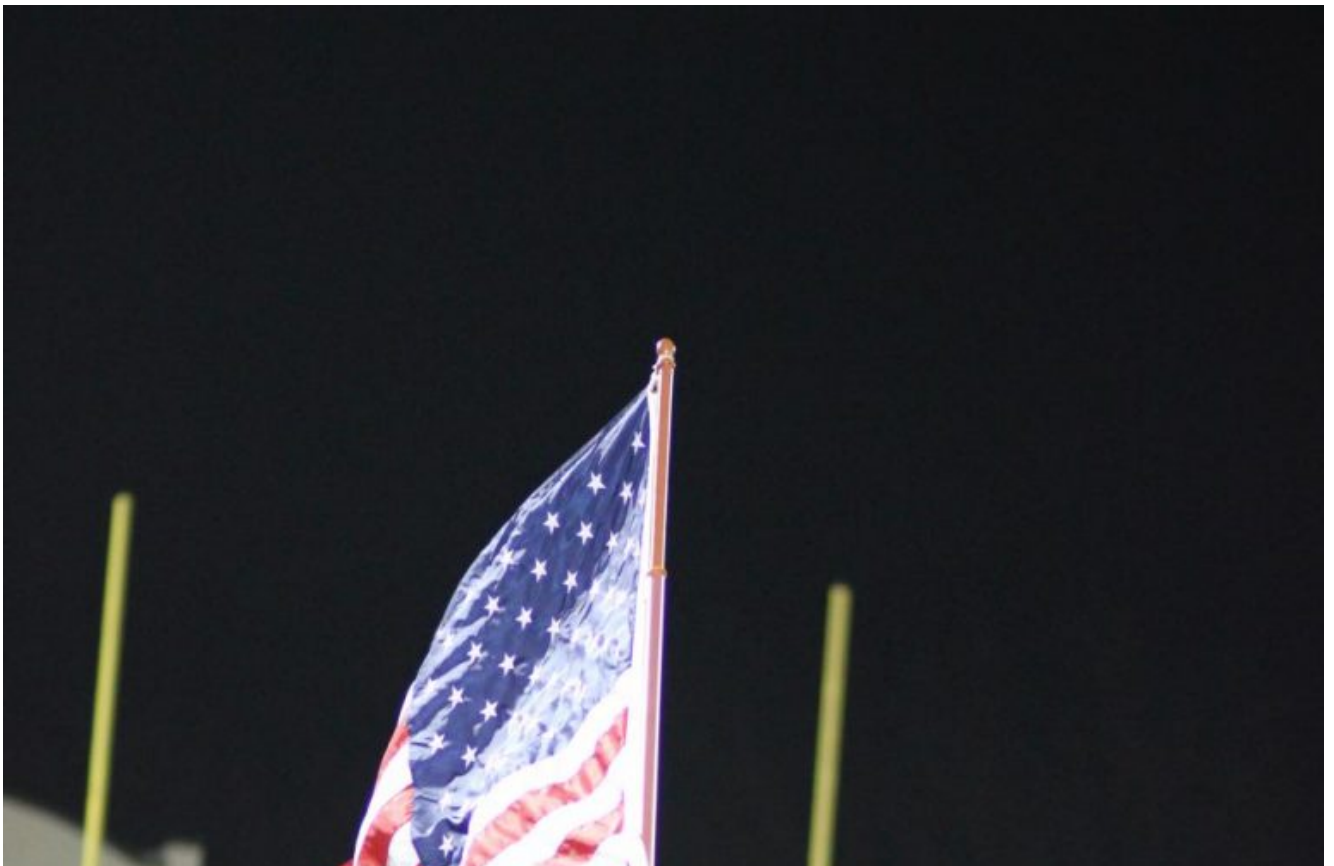
he and his teammates left all they had on the field. Pecina made one of the game's best plays for the home team, a first-quarter interception that extinguished a Patriot scoring threat. "Things didn't go our way with calls and injuries, but that doesn't matter. We still played our game and still put the most effort we could into the game." Although the game was a loss, Pecina focused on the progress he, and his teammates have made. "Even though we lost I was proud of how far we came from only winning one game our freshman year to having a winning season and making the playoffs."

[Caleb Melville](#), staff photographer

December 15, 2020

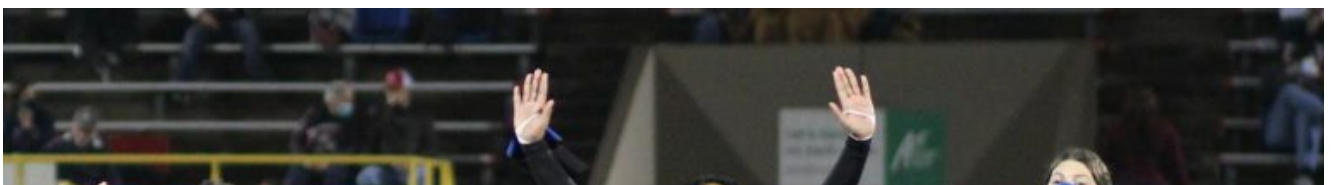
I've covered varsity football for Mac for three years now, and I've seen almost every outcome possible from a game. I've seen players at their best, and at their worst and I've gotten to experience the thrill of a win, and the dejection of a loss. I've been on the field for almost every football game the past three years, and I've gotten to know our team, especially the seniors, quite well. This past season has had several asterisks hanging over it, but these seniors fought hard for this season, building a four-game win streak and a second-place finish in their district. They have come a long way from their freshman year (the year Mac made it all the way to the 5A-2 semifinals). After the final game this season, I talked to several seniors, football players but also cheerleaders, Blue Brigade dancers and trainers, who have participated in the 2020 football season and got their feelings about this last game and the ends of their high school football experience.

I am proud to present these images of them and their remarks about what high school football meant to them as this week's Tuesday Top 10.





Senior Linebacker Xavier Hudson carries the flag onto the field for Friday's game against the East View Patriots. Hudson has played a critical role on the Knight defense this season, and he felt good going into the game. "I felt confident knowing we had two practices that week," Hudson said. "Our coaches had done all they could to prepare us." The Knights were slightly crippled as the game progressed and key players were lost. "After losing two players to injury and an unjust ejection, we were forced to put players in positions they had not practiced that week. That diminished our strong defense and our confidence going forward," Hudson said. As for many other seniors, the end of the game came with mixed emotions for Hudson. "I was very sad that I had just played my last football game ever, but looking back to where I was my freshman year and my journey to becoming a leader of the defense my senior year put a big smile on my face." Photo by Dave Winter.





Friday's game proved also to be the last for the four senior McCallum cheerleaders. Pictured here are seniors Veronica Christ (left) and Vivian Odom (center) and sophomore Addy Merritt (right). Christ said she was eager for the game to start. "Going into Friday's game I was pumped and excited!" Christ said. "I was reminded of all the games I have been to and all the memories I've made." Christ was not too bummed at the result as she said "After the game I honestly felt happy since I finally got to close that chapter of my life and move on with other things." Odom, however, said she felt a little more sadness after the game. "I was a bit upset that we didn't win especially since it was my last football game at McCallum, but I was happy that we still got some points in before the game was over. It's usually a lot easier to keep the energy up when the band is there, but I think Blue Brigade did a good job lending cheer some of their energy, too." Photo by Dave Winter.





Senior trainer Parker DeLuane walks the sidelines alongside fellow trainer junior Ceder Herring before his last football game as a McCallum student. As a trainer for three years, Parker has become a staple at McCallum games. “Going into the game, I knew this could be our last game but I knew that whatever happened, it would be worth it because the team put in so much effort this year with everything going on.” DeLuane realized as the game went on that the season was going to end. “I felt sad that my last football season was over, but at the same time I felt thankful that I was able to help the team over these past three years, [and thankful for] the times I spent with them, and even [just for] being a trainer in a global pandemic.” Photo by Dave Winter.





After receiving a short pass from junior quarterback Jaxon Rosales, senior running back Andres Rodriguez carries the ball downfield for a big gain during the first quarter of the Knights' final game of the season on Friday at House Park. Rodriguez has been a leading rusher for the Knights this season. Coming into the game he said "I felt confident and ready to go; however, I also felt some pressure because it was a playoff game and even though I was prepared, I was scared of losing." Although his fears were confirmed, he did end the game on a good note, scoring the Knights' final touchdown of the season. "It was emotional, and I felt happy that we could score one more time," he said. "Also it was a great way to end my high school football career." Photo by Caleb Melville.





Veteran photojournalist, yearbook co-editor in chief and Lady Knights goalie Lindsey Plotkin gets ready to shoot pictures of the football game early in the second quarter of Friday's game. She came to the stadium straight from the varsity soccer team's 4-2 scrimmage win over Weiss, the start of which was moved before the junior varsity game, so the varsity soccer seniors could catch most of the football game. Junior trainer Ceder Herring cuts off the wrist tape that Plotkin wore to tend goal against the Wolves. "I was super excited, especially coming off a win," Plotkin said. "I was just trying to make it from Pflugerville as fast as I could." Despite her role as a journalist covering the game, Plotkin said she was emotional as she headed to the sideline to shoot. "I was nervous because I knew it could be my last high school football game ever." As the end of the game plodded closer and the verdict became clear, her mood shifted. "It was really sad because I wasn't ready for the season to be over," Plotkin said. "It was hard for me to see all the boys so sad because they worked so hard this season and wanted to have a deep playoff run." Photo by Dave Winter.





Senior Blue Brigade co-captain Matthew Vargas leaps during Friday night's halftime show, a field pom dance to "Edge of Glory." The game turned out to be the end of the Knights' season, and the last time the Blue Brigade seniors would perform at halftime of a high school football game. "I was really excited and optimistic," Vargas said of his feelings before Friday's game. "The sunset was so pretty and it just set the mood and I was happy." By halftime, the Knights' trailed by 21 points and the future looked bleak for the season, but Blue Brigade was still excited for its performance. "I knew it would be the last performance, so I just wanted to give it my all, and honestly I have never felt so happy during a performance. Hitting that ending pose gave me the chills, and I had such a big smile under my mask." Photo by Caleb Melville.



Senior Caleb Green has been a defensive star for the Knights all season. He leads the team in sacks and is an effective pass rusher on almost every play. He also prefers actions to words, and got right to the point when asked how he felt about Friday's game. Before the game started, Green said he was "confident and ready." After the game, he said he was disappointed. "I felt like I failed ... because I couldn't lead us out of the first round." Photo by Caleb Melville.





Senior lineman Charlie Pecina kneels, taking in his last few moments on the field at House Park as a McCallum football player. Pecina said the team was optimistic heading into Friday's bi-district playoff game. "Going into the game I knew we had to win or else it would be my last game in a McCallum jersey, but I felt confident because the coaches and the team felt like we had a good week of practice." The game was a tough one as the Knights lost several players to injury or penalties. Despite the attrition, Pecina said he and his teammates left all they had on the field. Pecina made one of the game's best plays for the home team, a first-quarter interception the extinguished a Patriot scoring threat. "Things didn't go our way with calls and injuries, but that doesn't matter. We still played our game and still put the most effort we could into the game." Although the game was a loss, Pecina focused on the progress he, and his teammates have made. "Even though we lost I was proud of how far we came from only winning one game our freshman year to having a winning season and making the playoffs." Photo by Caleb Melville.





The Knights gather to hear Coach G's last post-game remarks of the 2020 season. For the team's seniors, it was their last Coach G post-game speech they would hear as his players. Coach G told them how proud he was of how they carried themselves and conducted their business during a most unusual football season. The Knights fought hard throughout the game and gained some traction in the fourth quarter. In the end, however, it wasn't enough as the Georgetown's East View Patriots prevailed, 49-14. Photo by Caleb Melville.





Knights senior linebacker Xavier Hudson and running back Daniel Dueñas-Lujan embrace after Friday's game. The Knights' starting lineup included many seniors, for whom this was their last game. Like many seniors I talked to, Dueñas said he was energized in the moments before kickoff. "I felt really excited and pumped going into the game," he said. "I knew it could be my last time, and I was just ready to leave everything I had on the field." As the reality that this was his last high school football game sank in, he was overcome. "It just felt unreal really," Dueñas-Lujan said, "like my whole football career flashed before my eyes when that clock hit zero. I was super sad and I still am right now. I've been playing tackle football for seven years now, and for it to be over in a heartbeat is just insane." Photo by Dave Winter.

-special thanks to Lindsey Plotkin for her help reporting this story.

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