

## 2021 NORTH FOOTBALL BANQUET TALK#

This is the 14th time in 16 years I have had the genuine pleasure of addressing the North Huskies football banquet with a season recap. For those of you who are familiar with my website [www.nhsrecords.com] know that I can take a long time to tell a story—but I am hopeful that you also enjoy the long tales I tell.

There are many ways in which you can measure a football program. Championships and elite performers are two of the most common ways. I will suggest to you that the best measure of a program is consistency. Good programs can sometimes have great seasons but will likewise also have not-so-great seasons. I believe the best indication of the health of a program is whether or not it can develop the ability to consistently produce good seasons.

As we look back at the 2021 season, perhaps it's best to take stock of a couple important items as we begin. For one thing, look at the sheer numbers of players that the Huskies continue to dress out at all levels. Our youth football program is producing record numbers of players who want to play for the Green and White in the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades.

The excellent quantity of players that those feeder teams produce results in top quality performers who are ready to contribute at the varsity level earlier in their careers. As evidence of this, pay attention to the number of sophomores and even freshmen who are honored tonight with varsity letters. That is NOT emblematic of a small senior class—we had a near record number of seniors on the roster this season. It IS representative of having a better trained and ready-to-play group of young men who can compete at the varsity level as a result of the program providing support, coaching, equipment, AND motivation to participate sooner in their careers rather than later.

Nowhere was the presence of young players more apparent than “up front” on BOTH sides of the football in 2021. **Freshman “Big” Ben Brasher** won a starting job at left offensive guard and repeatedly made his presence felt throughout the season. Ben played with the savvy and technique of a young man much older than he is. Not only that, for a guy that big, he has some ‘wheels’. I remember watching video the night after his first start against Memorial. The Huskies had the ball second-and-goal at the Tiger seven and “Big” Ben pulled from his guard slot and took off down the line and with a full head of steam blocked BOTH the end AND the linebacker. **T.J. Hankins** had a chance to dance into the endzone had he wanted to (being T.J., however, he chose to run over someone). I knew then and there, this was not your ‘ordinary’ freshman. Over the course of the season, he demonstrated great technique as a run blocker and provided all sorts of promise for seasons to come.

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He wasn't the only underclassman to win a starting job, though. You had no fewer than four sophomores who had outstanding seasons *in the trenches* for North.

At nose tackle, Delshan Davis proved to be a run-stuffer in the middle of the defense. He recorded 34 tackles with 8 of those for losses during the season. He was at his best down the stretch for the Huskies—against our archrival the Central Bears he recorded five tackles, including two for loss and a quarterback sack. In the Sectional game at Bloomington, he had NINE tackles—two of which were for loss. Opponent centers should be very worried about #59 lining up nose-to-nose with him in 2022.

Sophomore Timothy Dixon has now been a starter both of his varsity seasons in the offensive line. For a big guy, he has amazingly fast feet. In every game, the Huskies made use of his quick feet on the text book trap play they run. Dixon's man is typically the defender who gets trapped and it falls to Tim to slide out into the secondary to block the interior pursuit. Now, Timmy tips the scales around 300 and those linebackers and safeties are all pretty nimble and definitely use their speed to avoid being blocked by someone that size. Think back about how many times this season you saw a running back turning the corner outside the left end and turning up field *with just one man to beat*. THAT view, that lonely defender trying to tackle either T.J. or Angelo St. Louis all by himself was pretty much thanks to **Tim Dixon** having walled off the interior pursuit by *knocking-the-spot* out of the closest linebacker or safety (*or sometimes both*) that he could find. He was recognized as an **All-City** team selection this week by the Downtown Quarterback Club.

Of course, the fact that the running back was out there in space by himself usually occurred due to another of the sophomore contributors, Kaleb Harris. A gifted receiver with size and great hands, it typically fell to him to come sliding down the line to trap block the end and spring the running back outside. Besides leading the Huskies in receptions this season with 29 catches for 260 yards, I do not believe I ever saw **Kaleb** miss his trap block once all season long.

The other sophomore lineman who made a tremendous impact was Jayden Hazelwood. Opponent quarterbacks learned his number early in the season and he ended up with a team leading 6 quarter back sacks to go with 14 tackles for loss and 44 total tackles. He, too, is surprisingly quick for someone his size and if his career stays on track could end up the leader in career quarterback sacks by the time he graduates.

There were many more sophomores who contributed, players like Cainen Northington and Keonta Barton started in the defensive backfield, Sam McKinney started multiple games at quarterback, and Brady Martin saw significant time at wide receiver.

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The junior class sported real difference makers as well with several players starting varsity for their second season! The class of 2023 includes the Huskies leading defender by points in **Cale Johnson** at outside linebacker, **Deshaun Horne** recorded 45 tackles at middle linebacker, **Angelo St. Louis** rushed for over 300 yards, **Jaylonn Mitchell** hauled in 27 passes for nearly 300 yards (*and already ranks #7 in career receptions*), **Ethan King** anchored the secondary from his free safety spot with **Jordan Hunt** beside him at cornerback and **Jeremiah Thomas** joining the ensemble, **Landon Caswell** started at center on the offensive line, **Sean Bennett** worked into the linebacker rotation down the stretch, and **Mitchell Renfro** finished his junior season *ranked #5* in kicker scoring for a career.

*I believe I am painting a picture of an organization that is stocked with multiple years of talented players who can sustain a run of good seasons.*

**That doesn't happen without EVERYONE in this room providing their combined time and talents to create an atmosphere that players want to be a part of.**

And you can see the results in the victory totals. It had been 20 years since the Huskies won as many as five games three years in a row and it had been since 1977 before that. *Even The fabled '95 team that went to State couldn't sustain their victory totals.*

**Only a healthy program can maintain the numbers of players it takes to sustain operational excellence.**

To that end, in 2021, we had a senior class that represented the fulfillment of a program rebuild. These were the guys who bought into **Coach Paridaen's** ideas and became their embodiment. They joined a program that had lost 39 of its last 51 games and had seen the roster depleted of depth.

When they were freshmen, they witnessed a season with few seniors and even fewer wins. In historical terms, *it was a season-to-forget*. In practical terms, however, it was a great success. It was a season in which North re-built a coaching staff and established a new set of standards for physical preparation and mental toughness. The weight room became a priority, conditioning standards were established, and a renewed sense of purpose was created. By their sophomore season, *in just Coach Paridaen's second season*, they began to see the results. They participated and witnessed historic wins on the road at Castle and a comeback win against Reitz.

Simultaneously, Reitz was having trouble fielding a freshman team because their turnout numbers were so low. I ask you to take a look at the comparative results between OUR program over the

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last three seasons and what has happened at what has traditionally been Evansville's strongest program. Evansville North football is a program ON THE RISE thanks not only to the vision and teachings of Coach Paridaen's staff but also to the real labor of nearly everyone assembled here tonight.

The real fruit of these combined efforts has been this senior class. This group is special in the way that it has become a tightly knit team who leads by example. They have enjoyed success and taught the younger players how to win—and what it takes to enjoy repeated success. Let's recognize some of them together.

Sometimes a player comes along who appears to savor every second he's on the football field. **K.J. Bell** is one of those players. Whether averaging 20 yards per kickoff return (including a 50 yarder against Vincennes Lincoln), or recording 10 tackles on kickoffs and punt returns, or diving on a game opening on-side kick to serve notice to Jasper that the Huskies had come to town with their 'A' game, KJ gave it his all.

A two-year starter at wide receiver and defensive back, **Jewellz Hailey** is a multi-talented, multi-sport threat. He racked up 36 catches in his career and that number matches the number of tackles he made from the cornerback position as a varsity player. If last week's basketball scrimmage against Boonville is any indicator (he tossed in 14 points), **Jewellz'** senior year will be filled with sporting success.

For the last couple seasons, he was joined on both the turf and the hardwood by **Cameron Gelhausen** and they have witnessed unapparelled success in each of those programs. As he completes his football career, **Cameron** goes out ranked in the Top 20 in both career yardage and touchdown receptions having AVERAGED over 18 yards per reception. The 6'5" receiver had a "thing" for big scores—his 61 yard touchdown reception as a junior against Memorial and his 53 yarder this year were each the longest reception of the last two seasons.

Earlier, I spoke about all the underclassmen who contributed '*in the trenches*'. That's not to say there were no members of the senior class who made a name for themselves. I'm pretty sure if you ask the Reitz Panthers' staff this year which North lineman made the biggest difference, they would reply with some version of, "*#52 whupped us*". **Zane Hatt** started multiple seasons on both sides of the ball, but the Reitz game was certainly a highlight reel. A fixture at right guard on offense, he helped blow open holes that **both** our quarterbacks took advantage of throughout the game to score touchdowns. On defense he recovered fumbles and sacked runners for loss.

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For most of the last two seasons, he's had a familiar face next to him in **Garrett Mooney**. **Garrett** is the latest member of the Mooney family to contribute to *Husky lore*: **Ben Mooney** was named "Player of the Decade" for North in the 1980's and **Max Mooney** was named quarterback on the North "All Decade Team" for the 2010's. **Garrett** did the family name proud. From making a big quarterback sack at a critical moment in 2020's victory over Castle to a tackle for loss and a fumble recovery against Bosse that same season to his incredible 10 tackle performance (with 7 solos) and THREE tackles for loss against Mater Dei, the big senior was a huge contributor on both sides of the ball.

Another *family-name* continued to add to *North Lore* in 2021. For five seasons, the SALES name has been synonymous with Husky *line-strength*. Completing his career as a three-year starter in the offensive line for North, **Gunnar Sales** has been a key member of lines that have produced over 2,000 **RUSHING** yards.

Do the math.

During **Gunnar's** varsity career, North runners have **AVERAGED** over 215 yards rushing per game. No matter who lined up in the backfield, they could count on a line led by a member of the **Sales** family to open the holes that led them to daylight. **Gunnar** had the privilege of playing next to his brother **Gage** for his first two seasons and the pair made the life of opposing defensive lines difficult at best. Many was the time during his career that he teamed with his brother to remove defensive tackles, ends, and linebackers to somewhere far, far away from the action.

Ask any coach and they will tell you *the key to continued offensive success* starts with a strong running game. **Gunnar Sales** was a key ingredient for years in enabling North's offensive success.

Sometimes there are players who become more conspicuous by their absence. During the middle of the season, **Angus Davis** enjoyed a four-game run in which he recorded a key quarterback sack against Harrison, notched 6 tackles against Reitz, recovered a fumble and had two tackles for loss against Bosse, and nabbed another runner for loss against Mater Dei. Then an ailment took him out of the lineup for a couple games. His steady play at outside linebacker was immediately missed, especially on the road at Jasper. When he returned against Central, it was **Angus** who picked off a pass at the North one-yard line when the Bears attempted to 'get back in the game' just before halftime. In the sectional, he blocked an extra-point kick that kept the Huskies in position-to-win on the final drive. He finished his career with 16 pass receptions, a touchdown, over 30 tackles, an interception, a pair of blocked kicks, and a reputation as an opportunistic, hard-nosed competitor on the grid iron.

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Speaking of hard-nosed competitors, there are no players on this team who were more often exactly where their teammates needed him to be on defense exactly when he needed to be there than **Mitchell Happe**. He finishes his career with 126 tackles, 12 tackles for loss, 7 quarterback sacks, and a pair of fumble recoveries after starting two years at linebacker. His 41 yard '*scoop and score*' broke open the Bosse game and set the Bulldogs on a downhill spiral. Against Bloomington North he was all over the field recording a North-season-high 13 tackles. **Mitchell's** steadiness in the center of the defense making sure the young linemen in front of him were aligned in the proper gaps and positions will be missed.

Another senior who steadied a young group was **Achilles Johnson**. Playing cornerback on defense has been compared to standing out on an island with everyone watching. The responsibility to cover a receiver and make certain he doesn't get past you has to be balanced against knowing when the play has transitioned to a run takes a keen recognition of what's occurring in front of you. **Achilles** excelled in knowing when '*that moment*' had arrived. His value in '*run support*' to help contain the end and prevent short gains from becoming long ones was instrumental in North's defensive success. In the Memorial and Reitz games he accumulated tackle numbers that were more representative of a linebacker than a defensive back and he finished the season with 31 tackles—25 of which were solo one-on-ones out on the perimeter with no one else to help out if a tackle is missed—and was chosen as a member of the **All-City team** earlier this week.

That really brings me to the two young men who were the heart-and-soul of this year's edition of the North Huskies. To begin the 2019 and 2020 seasons, North had entered the campaign knowing it could count on a pair of "*lightning bolt*" runners to carry the load on offense. Following in the footsteps of **Dylan McKinney** and **Capelton Presswood** would be a huge set of expectations for anyone.

"*Lightning Bolt*" is not the term you would normally apply to a runner like **T.J. Hankins**, so the load he was expected to carry might have seemed, at first, as something too heavy to carry. It took a couple games, but **T.J.** transformed that expectation from "*lightning bolt*" to "*thunder clap*". He went on a five game 'binge' that generated 12 touchdowns and nearly 900 yards of total offense. It became a common sight to see him bash through the center of the line and then unleash a deadly stiff arm to the sternum of a defender as he dashed up field for a huge gain.

Defenders fell backwards in their efforts to bring the big senior down. Whistles blew plays dead **not because** **T.J.** was on the ground, but because enough defenders had piled up in front of him to stop his forward progress. A fierce competitor, **Hankins** was no stranger to yellow flags, but...

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*in a sense...* T.J. brought an end to the commonly held perception across city stadiums that you could expect a North team to back down when they were pushed on. Nobody got to 'push' T.J. and stand up after they had done so. North's reputation was transformed this season to a team that would give as good as the got.

And just when **Hankins** had replaced the "*lightning bolt*" expectation with the "*rolling ball of butcher knives*" reputation, he surprised *everyone but himself*. In the season's final two games he had multiple touchdown runs longer than 50 yards—in fact he had a pair of 80 yard scores in the Sectional (but one was called back by a questionable penalty flag). His patented shoulder shed followed by a foot stomp as he ran across the face of one defender took some of the fight out of the remaining defenders.

He finished the season with one of the great seasons in North history by a running back: 1,323 yards rushing and 18 touchdowns both rank in the Top 6 such seasons in the record book. He was easily the top running back in the S.I.A.C. and selected to the **All-City** team earlier this week.

If there is one player who represents the best of what the Joey Paridaen era has come to represent at North High School, it is **Ethan Brawdy**. While I have just detailed many members of this senior class who have contributed to North Lore, it is **Brawdy** who was thrown into the fire as a freshman at halftime of the Reitz game when the Huskies trailed 49-0. If there was a low-point in the last couple decades of North football, that had to be the moment—and trust me, I have followed the Huskies for at least that long.

That was the moment when things began to turn around and it began with the young redhead lining up in the shotgun formation trailing by seven touchdowns in Reitz Bowl in front of a crowd that was howling for more blood. No, North did not come back to win that game (that particular bit of 'pay back' would come the following season), but **Brawdy** began to move the ball against the Panthers. Three times in that half the freshman led the Huskies on long drives that resulted in touchdowns. He took a beating in an offense that lacked a big play threat (**Dylan McKinney** had gone out with a season ending injury the week before) and carried the ball eleven times while gaining 50 yards. In the end, if you just measure that half of play, North won the half 21-14 and served notice that help was on the way.

During **Ethan's** sophomore season he meshed perfectly with **Dylan McKinney** as the Huskies broke decade long losing streaks to Castle and Reitz with breath-taking last second victories. His junior season witnessed North's first five game winning streak in over a dozen years—a streak that ended

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with him missing games due to illness—and the Huskies added Memorial to the list of schools that they beat for the first time in a decade.

But if ever there was a season in which a player demonstrated a will to win no matter what the odds, no matter what the barriers, it was **Brawdy's** senior season for North high school. A lot of folks have the desire and the ability to win when they are 100%. The players who rise to that level when they are far from 100% are rare.

**Ethan** is that rare form of athlete.

Despite breaking multiple bones in his hand against Memorial, he remained in the game and very nearly led North to a come from behind victory. With his hand in a heavy cast and his team trailing entering the fourth quarter on the road at Reitz Bowl, **Brawdy** came off the bench to direct the Huskies to not one, but two EIGHTY yard drives in which he scored both touchdowns. After missing another game to let his hand heal, he returned to the lineup—still bearing the heavy cast—and led the Huskies down field in the fourth quarter to an improbable score and very nearly upset the State Final bound Wildcats. When the Huskies went on the road to play undefeated Jasper, the newspaper had North as three touchdown underdogs. **Ethan** refused to accept that role as generated 215 yards of total offense, scored twice, and was leading North to a game tying score when a Jasper player made a sensational play to thwart the effort.

And in perhaps the greatest game of his storied career, he refused to lose in a rain storm on the road at Bloomington North. With just 2:30 left on the clock, 85 yards separated **Brawdy** from victory. He drove the team steadily downfield using his one good arm and both strong legs to churn up yards. On the game's final play, he faced a wall of four players in the five-yard space between him and the end zone. The Cougars needed more players than that as Brawdy sailed backwards up, over, and through them on his way to the game winning score. Still photos and video both showed that touchdown should have counted, but he was ruled out of bounds on the one-yard line. Irrespective of the result, **Ethan Brawdy** leaves the program as its all-time leading passer with 3,862 yards and 30 touchdowns, 1,546 yards rushing and an additional 21 touchdowns, a dozen victories as a starting quarterback, and North's first **All-City** selection at quarterback in 15 years.

His greatest impact is that he will be remembered as the player who most represented the turnaround in North football due to the vision of the man at the top. It gives me great pleasure to present that man to you.

My Coach, your Coach, our Coach, Joey Paridaen to present the Varsity Awards.