

2022 NORTH FOOTBALL BANQUET REMARKS BY TIM GRIMM

Good evening. For those of you who are new to this event, my name is Tim Grimm and I have been the statistician for North football and basketball since before any of the players in this room were born. This is the 17th time I have had the privilege to address this group with a season recap toasting the accomplishments of North's varsity senior class. If you want to find out anything about the history of North football or basketball, please visit my website at www.nhsrecords.com.

You could say that the 2022 season was fifteen years in the making... since it had been that long since North won as many as six games in a season. From 1992 to 2007, winning 21 games in four seasons was pretty much expected of the North Huskies—at a minimum. This was a program that was accustomed to winning Sectionals and competing head up with the area's best teams.

For a decade, however, the program slid into decline. Winning even three games became a questionable expectation. Building a new facility when the school re-opened out on Hwy 41 was expected to change things substantially... but it didn't.

It took two monumental events to re-build the North football program. The first of those was the creation of the North Youth Football League. The creation of that organization provided a feeder system that rivaled any other school in the conference. The dedication and engagement of the parents in that system created a culture that was ripe for the development of a successful program.

The second event was the arrival of our head coach **Joey Paridaen**. He developed a staff of assistants that could take that collection of youth athletes and turn them into complete players over time. There is perhaps no better example of that successful process than this year's senior class.

This is the group that has "grown up" with a full level youth program competing at North High School on our own fields and with the engagement of North's staff. The results have shown that combination to be a success—these young men have come to expect success and expect the resources to be available to them to facilitate and celebrate that success. Strength and conditioning programs utilizing quality equipment, the ability to attend camps, and an expectation that the community support a successful program requires will be immediately available to them are considered common place today.

And this season, fifteen years in the making, stands as evidence that the process has worked.

We watched these seniors take the field as sophomores to participate in ground breaking, losing streak busting wins over Castle, Memorial, and Reitz. We watched them as juniors assume their significant roles in repeating a five-win season with another order-rearranging victory over Reitz, a streak breaking win over

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Central, and a heart wrenching (*shoulda beena win*) outcome on the road at Bloomington North in the rain in the Sectional.

This season they continued that march up the ladder, no longer simply sustaining success, but taking it to a level that North had not seen in 15 long years—*trust me, I've been there for all of them*—with a winning record and a Sectional playoff victory.

I feel joy for seniors like **Dylan Haynes** and **Jeremiah Thomas**. Defensive players who have filled gaps when they emerged and made the most of their minutes with starter level quality. They, along with seniors like **Kylen Hazelwood** and **Cade Edmondson**—*who saw their senior seasons shortened by injury*—got to visit the heights of victory as part of a team reaping the success that years of preparation had produced. Others had standout moments in the shining spot light of a successful season. Take, for instance, **Brodie Varner**, whose insertion at H-Back in the Memorial game, potentially changed the trajectory of a season. He played a key role in producing holes that enabled others to run for scores that gave North a 14-0 upset. That type of preparation didn't happen in a week of practice, that was the result of a player in a system who knew his role and stepped in to fulfill it when the opportunity arose.

When **Edmondson** went down with an injury in the third game of the season, **Deshaun Horne**—who had heretofore been utilized as a middle linebacker (and a good one at that with 45 tackles and 9 tackles for loss as a junior)—stepped into '*put a knuckle down*' and play in the interior line in his place. The results were what you would expect from a player who was well prepared to excel as he produced 27 tackles and a pair of tackles for loss from the defensive tackle spot.

This was a team loaded with underclassmen, but these remarks are usually reserved for the seniors. I will note that many of our juniors on defense were awarded post-season accolades by the SIAC coaches, the Downtown QB Club, and the Courier & Press. **Kaleb Harris**, **Jayden Hazelwood**, **Timothy Dixon**, and **Kasey Hospelhorn** have all be recognized for their various contributions to the season's success and we will enjoy watching them along with many others in 2023. There were other seniors who, while not recognized with post-season awards, who certainly contributed GREATLY to the success of this season.

After three seasons of watching **Jordan Hunt** "grow up" under fire in the cornerback slot, it will be hard to imagine someone else coming up in run support to force a ball carrier out of bounds or batting a ball away before a receiver can haul it in. He ends his career with 37 solo tackles out there in the part of the field where there is no one to help you—it's one-on-one or the runner goes for a big gain.

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There are linebackers who excel at defending the running game and then there are linebackers who act like a fifth defensive back. There are very few who can perform both roles. **Sean Bennett** has been that rare breed of linebacker who can simply make whatever play needs to be made wherever it needs to be made on the field. His great speed and agility afforded him the ability to slip past blockers and drop a runner for loss before he could turn up field or fall back in pass coverage on third down and swat away passes intended for much bigger opponent receivers. He finishes his career with over 50 tackles, six tackles for loss, and more passes defended than I can begin to count.

There are others who toil in the areas of the field that don't yield headlines. These are the guys who get dirty each and every day in practice and then sweat and get bruised on every play on Friday nights. Without their success and dedication, however, few others would achieve any level of success. I am speaking, of course, about the offensive line. North is lucky to have a number of underclassmen who will return next year to ensure a measure of continuity in the Huskies' continuing climb to the heights of the SIAC conference—**Delshaun Dixon, Jayden Hazelwood, Timothy Dixon**, and sophomore **Ben Brasher** provide a front line that should produce enormous expectations for 2023. There are two starters who won't be back, however, and they deserve mention.

Chase Reeves played strong side tackle for a ball club that produced 200 or more yards rushing in five of its first seven games this season. That sort of performance, while North was waiting for its passing game to catch fire and its quarterback situation to stabilize, is only produced with five guys up front succeeding in the trenches. Playing tackle, a position as close to the sidelines as any lineman gets, you could often see **Reeves** teaming with a tight end to waylay the defensive end or linebacker and spring a runner outside for a big gain.

One player, someone who toils in the interior, whose best efforts occur when the crowd doesn't notice him, has succeeded for North for years. I am speaking of **Landon Caswell** who has served as the Husky center for eleven victories. Having been a center myself, I can tell you that **Landon** comes to the line and manages the calls that ensure every gap is accounted for. He then puts his head down because his first priority is to deliver a perfect snap to a quarterback several yards behind him. After completing that task with zero tolerance for error, he then most likely must deliver either a reach block to fill a hole in a gap next to him against a defender that no one has touched because a guard was pulling in one direction or another, or he must deal with a behemoth nose-to-nose across from him. If he fails in any of those three tasks, his performance will become immediately noticeable to everyone in the stands. If he succeeds at all three, no casual fan will be aware of his existence.

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To his immense credit, **Caswell** enjoyed his season in relative anonymity. I say that because on over 1,200 offensive plays that North has run the last two seasons, 99.57% of them began with the quarterback with the ball in his hands (*and this occurred, if you will recall, with a pair of quarterbacks wearing braces or casts on their wrists*). On the over 1,050 of those plays that did not result in an incomplete pass, the Huskies gained an average of 6.2 yards per play. Those numbers validate that the center was making the correct line calls, fulfilling his obligations blocking the defenders, and doing both those chores at an exceptionally high degree of performance. You probably didn't notice **Landon** if you weren't related to him and watching the game, but I can tell you, from one center to another, **Caswell** was one of the good ones and he will be missed.

There are players, however, who get to experience the spot light. Like **Caswell**, however, the job of place kicker and punter is most noticeable when the task goes wrong. Fortunately for North, for three seasons, **Mitchell Renfro** has ranked among the very best to ever hold the position. He completes his career with 100 kicking points (third most all-time), nine career field goals (second all-time), and tied for most kicking points in a game all-time with his double field goal, nine-point performance against Harrison this year. Not to leave out, for my money, **Mitchell** was the best punter the Huskies have had in a decade.

There are players who just seem to excel in the moment, guys who can't help but draw attention to themselves by the high level at which they are able to perform. North has been blessed during the Paridaen era to witness a bevy of thoroughbred runners carrying the ball. In consecutive seasons, Husky fans have had the pleasure to watch **Dylan McKinney, Cape Presswood, and T.J. Hankins** carry on a banner that dates back to the earliest days of North football. If you enter North's front door, you begin to see banners hanging in the halls that recognize running backs from days gone by. If you venture to the second level of the gym to view the plaques in the Husky Hall of Fame, they are there. Names like **Madriaga, Garrett, Bushrod, O'Donnell...** in fact the hallmark of North football for over 60 years has been a fleet footed running back in a green jersey with white numbers blazing down the sideline to glory. No fewer than 24 Husky runners (and some of them multiple times) have been chosen as All-City or All-Conference running backs in 60 years of North football. No other school can match that total.

Angelo St. Louis extended that string of special runners with a special season in 2022. Of all the great runners that I have mentioned, **St. Louis** may be the most complete package as a tailback. His combination of speed and power mixed with an incredible endurance is evidenced his 33 carries against Vincennes—in 65 years of North football, only four players have had more carries in a single game. And this came just a couple weeks after he carried 31 times against Memorial—a total which ranks #9 all-time. His 189 carries rank #7 for a single season and a number of those ahead of him played on teams that won Sectionals and played many

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more games. His 2022 season total of 1,189 yards rushing is the 12th best in school history as are his 14 rushing touchdowns. There was little that **Angelo** could not do—and think about this: he had several runs that measured 50 yards or longer called back by penalties that would not likely have impacted the success of his runs.

If two players deserve to “*go out*” in the same class, two players who exemplified the “*whatever it takes*” mentality that a winning ball club must have, it is **Jaylonn Mitchell** and **Cale Johnson**. Their individual sets of talents are nothing alike—they are blessed with different skill sets that it is up to a coaching staff to utilize best for the needs of the team. What they have in common is the mind-set, the drive, the dedication, and the heart that champions must possess.

Mitchell exited his junior season a virtual lock to set a number of school records as a receiver. In the off season, however, circumstances dictated that the staff ask for something different of him to start his senior year. He changed positions and quarterbacked the team to a 3-2 start with an upset victory over Memorial and very nearly engineered a comeback from a 21-point deficit against Castle. He did this at the expense of his personal goals because it was what his team needed of him. Once the quarterback position stabilized, he moved back to wide receiver, took an active part on the defense, and excelled at his customary level of play.

Trailing Vincennes late in the game, **Mitchell** made one of the biggest plays of his career. The Huskies were behind and a winnable game was slipping away. A ball was thrown his way but it was long and he had a defender glued to his hip. **Jaylonn** hauled in a ball that few players who have ever worn the green and white could have caught. North had a 25-yard gain, the ball in Lincoln territory, and went on to win the game that turned the season around. It was typical of **Mitchell's** ‘*never say die*’ attitude. Over his career he pulled in 101 receptions—the only North player in 65 years to ever top 100 receptions. He ranks among the top 10 all time in yards and a handful of other categories and finishes his career as one of the most ‘*complete*’ players to ever wear the uniform.

If this class had one player who exemplified the type of drive it takes to deliver a big play at a big moment and the right skill set to deliver it, it has to be **Cale Johnson**. From his first two varsity plays as a sophomore outside linebacker, **Cale** let it be known that he had “*the right stuff*”. Against Castle back in ‘20, he stopped a pair of runs on back-to-back plays for no gain by shedding a guard who outweighed him by at least 70 pounds and dropping an All-Conference tailback like it was nothing. His junior season saw him lead the team in tackles from his middle linebacker spot, drop twelve runners for loss, and shut down the middle of the field for opposing offenses. For his senior season, the staff determined that they needed him to move to

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defensive end—a position that, at 5'10" and 170 lbs., few could say he would pose a physically intimidating presence. **Johnson's** response was characteristic and along the lines of "*whatever the team needs...*".

He went on to have one of the finest seasons any defensive end has had for North in several decades. He *again* led the team in tackles—a rare feat for a defensive lineman—and recorded 11 quarterback sacks. That total was the most by any North player in 28 years and ranks second all-time. He set the school record for tackles for loss in a single season. His ability to provide a big play at the precise moment the team needed it most *was not limited to defense*.

With momentum turning toward Vincennes Lincoln and the Huskies facing a critical third-down situation, **Cale** was inserted at H-Back and caught a pass over the middle. Catching a pass over the middle requires that you leave your body open for assault from a defender—you have to give yourself up and just take the hit if that's what your team needs. **Johnson** took a ferocious hit from a linebacker and did two things:

1. He held onto the ball to insure the first down and prevent Lincoln from gaining momentum.
2. He refused to go down and instead shook off the blow by the defender and spun away, picked out his route, and turned a four-yard gain into a 57-yard reception and first and goal for the Huskies from the Vincennes one yard line.

You see, **Cale Johnson** was raised in a program that supports its players. **Cale Johnson** first played in the North Youth Football League and learned '*the Husky Way*' along with the rest of these seniors. **Cale Johnson** experienced the growth of this organization first hand and had tasted the fruits of its success. As much as any other player, he exemplified the spirit of what brings us here tonight: *he believed that North will support him equally if he gives the team his best possible effort*.

No one can ask for more than that, but it takes a special type of program to create an atmosphere where that balance of give and take, the expectation that maximum effort will be matched by maximum support exists. Tonight, we are here to celebrate, praise, reward, and remember the talented 2022 Football Huskies and their achievements.

What has been built here is delicate and can be fleeting if not supported. This season would indicate North football is once again in the best of hands.

And now it is my great privilege to introduce the architect of this rebirth—my coach, your coach, our coach, **Joey Paridaen**.