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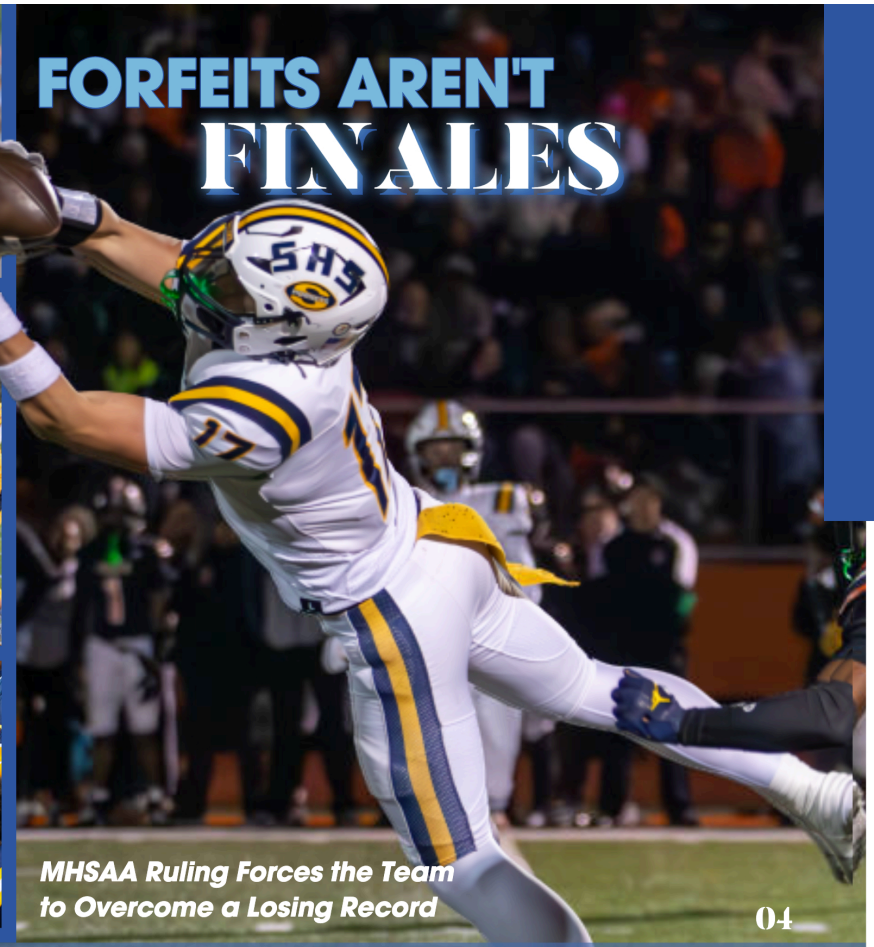
FORFEITS AREN'T FINALES

MHSAA Ruling Forces the Team to Overcome a Losing Record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In the first few games, the team beat Brighton 41-20, Dexter 34-14 and then Pioneer 50-0. It was an objectively successful start to the season. However, the team soon found themselves in hot water with the MHSAA, throwing their season into a sudden, unfamiliar direction. On Oct. 1, due to a misunderstanding regarding residency issues, the team was forced to forfeit their first three games, all wins, which transformed their record from 5-0 to 2-3. With the help of parents, Superintendent Dr. **Steve Laatch** appealed the decision but, after review, the forfeits stood. Receiver **Jaiden Leonard (12)** knew the team had to work even harder after the setback.

"We were really mad at first," Leonard said. "Honestly, I thought it was going to mess the season up a little, especially considering we had already faced a lot of (obstacles) the last three weeks, but I think it worked out in the end."

Players used the decision to fuel their determination to make the playoffs. **Isaiah Harris (11)**, defensive end, appreciated the daily inspiration provided by his coaches.

"I think the forfeits were a source of motivation for us, and I think we improved a lot from it," Harris said. "Coach **(Kyle) Short** helped us throughout the whole thing. He was the one that was taking all the criticism, so showing the team he was able to get through that helped us get through adversity."

The team welcomed coach Short from the Belleville program. He kept the players in the right mindset, while some, such as coach **Christopher Patton**, made sure to check on the players outside of football. Leonard made sure he was focused on the next task at hand.

"(I learned that) we'll face a lot of adversity, whether it's in football, through life, or other problems and situations," Leonard said. "As long as we stick together, we'll get through it."

Despite the setbacks, they clinched a spot in the playoffs, winning against Northville 37-7 on Nov. 1. The season ended, though, after a 42-7 loss to Belleville in the district finals. **Ayden Burton (12)** remembered his senior season in a positive light.

"Grit, determination, and resilience are what our team is all about," Burton said. "We don't just take a step through adversity...we run through it."

01. AN IMPORTANT TRIBUTE Making a start-of-the-season statement, **Austin Abbate (11)** leads the team through the banner, dedicating the game against Brighton to his dad, who had recently lost his battle with cancer. Abbate played receiver and was on special teams throughout the season. He particularly enjoyed playing these positions because they involved having possession of the ball and making big plays. Before the game, all teammates linked arms and walked across the field together, reassuring that they had each other's backs."(Walking through the banner), honoring my dad that night, being able to lead the team out and scoring a touchdown that night is really cool," Abbate said. "(The team) is a group of guys that love each other and have a lot of respect for each other and they'll do anything for the guy next to them."
A. ZABRISKIE

02. TENACIOUS TACKLE While teammates **Elijah Johnson (11)** and **Bryce Barbarino (10)** practice tackling before the Homecoming game on Oct. 8, the student section, wearing blue and gold, piled into the stands ready to support their team. Since Barbarino enjoyed tackling other team's players, being physical and leading the defense this season, the linebacker position was very suitable for him. The team swept Bedford in a 48-3 game, securing a win for the Homecoming weekend. "The student section was a lot bigger than normal," Barbarino said. "It shows that the students are supportive of you, so it makes you want to play harder."
M. SAKEL

03. ABSORBING ADVICE Rocking the home game jerseys, defensive players **Coleman Ross (12)** and **Jericoh Powe (10)** sit on the sidelines watching film, focusing on their coach's critiques. To boost the team's performance in the second half of the game, defensive coordinator coach **Duane Wilson** gave the players corrections to improve their plays. Ross made 12 tackles during the first game of the season against Brighton, assisting the team to victory 41-20. "(The win) was definitely a statement because they were supposed to be a pretty good team," Ross said. "We didn't really know where we were at, so it gave us all confidence to go out there and win by that much the first game of the year." K. SMITH

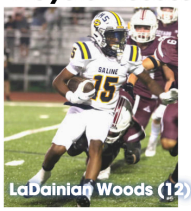
04. AIRBORNE Although the team faces its toughest opponent, **Lincoln Keyes (11)** leaps to make a catch and move the chains. After defeating Northville in the playoffs, the team moved onto Belleville on Nov. 8. Keyes made several catches to assist the team in attempting to take down the favorite; however, Belleville came out on top, winning 42-7. Despite coach **Kyle Short** previously coaching for Belleville's team, he made sure to direct his attention towards his current players."Coach Short came in here last year, and he has been a great influence on me and the whole team," Keyes said. "It's definitely a personal game for him. The players are making it kind of personal but he cares more about us."
K. MARION

ALL THINGS NUTRITIOUS

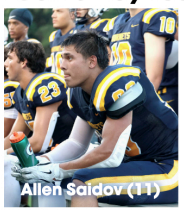
Players Discuss Their Game-Day Food Choices

Isaac Furlong (12)

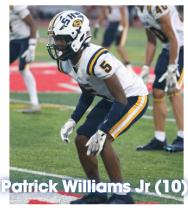
"Protein, protein, protein. It fuels your muscles and it gets you stronger."
K. MARION


LaDainian Woods (12)

"I eat (Chipotle sometimes) before a game. I don't eat before practice because I don't eat the school food." A. ZABRISKIE


Allen Saidov (11)

"PB&J is the most filling. It makes you gain the most weight, and that's what you need for a defensive end." K. MARION


Patrick Williams Jr (10)

"My diet has changed (for football). I've stayed away from fast food a lot, and I've been eating healthier." K. MARION

POST-SEASON PRESSURE

Team #122 Falls to Belleville in a Hard-Fought Playoff Game

In front of hundreds of fans overflowing Belleville's away stands, **James Rush (11)**, playing on both defense and offense throughout the game, executes a play fake with quarterback **Thomas Carr (11)**. The team took on the Belleville Tigers, led by the nation's top-ranked quarterback recruit, Bryce Underwood. Prior to the game, the Hornets were 7-3 and had a satisfying week of practice leading up to

"A state championship sounds nice, but it's about growing as a team, as a unit, and being a better person overall." **James Rush**

the game in order to prepare. Despite falling to Belleville 42-7, the team made several great plays. The team tallied two interceptions: one in the first quarter made by **Princeton Jones (10)**, and one by Rush in the fourth. **Cole Kreuzer (12)** also secured a touchdown reception in the second quarter.
E. JANECZEK