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In Snowy and windy conditions, the Hillsborough Junior Raiders Varsity football team won the New Jersey Unlimited Weight Youth Football Association American Division state championship on Saturday, Dec. 14, by beating the Orange Tornados, 8-0, in double overtime at Winton White Stadium in Englewood.

ny time you get to play football in December, you know you have accomplished something special,” said Head Coach Jamie Moore. “Add in two playoff games in the snow and you really have something to remember.”

The Jr. Raiders (12-1) opened the game on defense and slowed down the athletic Orange offense after it had gained two first downs in its initial drive. Ryan Wheaton’s tackle for a loss and a pass breakup by Charles Amankwaa halted Orange.

The Raiders were without their star player, Jackson Parham, who was out with an injury. The Jr. Raiders moved the chains a few times on their opening drive with runs by JR Metallo and Tyler Boatwright, who also caught a play action pass from QB Matt Moore.

On 4th and 3 they came up short against a defense that blitzed on most plays.

Two plays after taking possession, middle DT Tyler Minter put a big hit on the Tornado runner and caused a fumble that was recovered by Trevor Pavenski. Boatwright's run on a trap play gained to the 30-yard line, but Hillsborough turned the ball over when the slippery conditions caused the snap to squirt loose. After a mad scramble, Orange recovered the ball near midfield. The Jr. Raiders' front line defense was led by Ryan Wheaton, JR Metallo, Jack Edwards, Trevor Pavenski and Tommy Zdroik. Orange's attempts to pass deep were covered by JJ Bagdan, Charles Amankwaa, Tyler Boatwright and Dylan Boczon.

In the snow, the Raiders were forced to use the leg of JR Metallo, who has averaged over 40 yards on his punts, to control field position.

"Our game plan was to make them have to drive the field against a defense that bends but doesn't break. They would have to earn it," said Coach Moore. The Jr. Raider defense had five shutouts during regular season and posted two more in the state playoffs.

Neither team was able to get close to the end zone for the rest of the game, which headed into overtime. Hillsborough won the toss and chose to play defense first.

On first down the defense stuffed the run. On second down Ryan Wheaton broke into the backfield and took down the runner for a five-yard loss. On third down the Hillsborough defense was not fooled by a bootleg pass and nearly intercepted it. Orange then attempted a long pass that was broken up by Charles Amankwaa on the goal line.

With possession, Hillsborough QB Matt Moore's snap count caused the defense to jump offside on first down. On the next play Boatwright handed the ball to Amankwaa on a reverse good for 8 yards. A facemask penalty on third down put the Raiders on the 8-yard line, but Orange recovered a fumble two plays later to send the game to a second overtime.

Hillsborough had the ball first. After an incomplete first-down pass, Tyler Boatwright took the team on his back behind the blocking of JR Metallo, Brian Reilly and the offensive line, led by Greg Koll, Brandon Melendez, Jack Edwards, Nolan Washborn, Ryan Wheaton, Patrick Vinchur and Tommy Zdroik, that got stronger and wore down the Orange defense.

Tyler Boatwright took the handoff from Moore and punched it in behind Metallo and Reilly on third and goal. Metallo added the extra point kick to make the score 8-0. With the game on the line in the snow, wind and cold, the Jr. Raider defense held the Orange to negative yards on the first two plays. Orange's third-down pass fell incomplete, and a fourth-down pass in the end zone fell incomplete to end the game.

The Jr. Raiders won their first-round playoff game, 21-0, over Trenton on Dec. 8. Jackson Parham returned a punt 67 yards for a touchdown.

Kevin Diaz had an interception and knocked down another pass. Trevor Pavinski (3 tackles) helped contain the Trenton backfield and also broke up a pass. J.R. Metallo (3 tackles), Pat Vinchur (2), Brian Reilly (1.5) and Jack Edwards (3) clogged up the middle. Stopping Trenton's first possession with three straight tackles for loss by Jackson Parham had 3 tackles, Ryan Wheaton 4 and Tom Zdroik 2.

Tyler Boatwright had 70 yards rushing, including a 23-yard sweep for a touchdown. Quarterback Matt Moore had 57 yards passing and a 2-point conversion to JJ Bagdan. Fullback JR Metallo added a touchdown plunge.

"This team deserved to be champions the way they played all season," Moore said. "We came up a bit short in conference championship game, but the team bounced back and played two tough teams in the state playoffs under tough conditions and proved they are special and are state champions."

This is the second unlimited weight state championship the Jr. Raider varsity team has won and the third time it has played in the final in the last six years.

"Our JV program won the Jr. Skyland Conference championship back to back this year. The varsity won the states and both finished the regular season undefeated. Jr. Raider football is as strong as ever," Moore said.