

Shout out to the Super Bowl champs!



The Falcon Youth Football Association won its Super Bowl on Nov. 11 against Westfield by a score of 38-26. Photos courtesy of the Falcon Youth Football Association.



The Falcon Youth Football Association won its Super Bowl on Nov. 11 against West Springfield 14-6, securing a Super Bowl championship. Photos courtesy of the Falcon Youth Football Association.

Falcon Youth Football junior, senior teams each win title

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EAST LONGMEADOW – Nov. 11 was a banner day for the Falcon Youth Football Association, as both the junior and senior squads won the Super Bowl, earning their respective titles on the turf at East Longmeadow High School.

Falcon Youth Football is the youth football program for Wilbraham and Hampden. Both the junior and senior teams compete in the Suburban Amateur Football League; the junior team consists of players in grades five and six, while the senior team is made up of seventh and eighth graders.

Both title-winning teams took unique paths to the final, where they handled business and brought home the crown. Along the way they learned life lessons that are meaningful beyond the football field.

Falcon Youth Football Seniors

The Falcon Youth Football Seniors defeated top-seeded and then-undefeated Westfield in the SAFL Senior Bowl, or Super Bowl, 38-26 on Nov. 11 to cap off a championship season. Matthew Bean, the senior team coach, used the words selflessness and comradery to describe his squad.

"They were so willing to do whatever it took to help their teammates and put their teammates before them. In a team sport, that's so important," Bean said. "The friendships they built, the relationships they built for each other... there's a lot more to why we play football than winning a game."

Bean praised his team for its willingness to be coached hard and ability to meet chal-

lenges. En route to averaging over 35 points per game, the senior team took pride in its ability to make in game and in season adjustments.

Major adjustments were necessary after the first game against Westfield, a tough loss. Bean said the players responded well after getting beat up in the regular season matchup, when they managed only six points.

"I think that was a turning point for our players, as we had a very honest conversation about who we are, who we want to be and knowing we would most likely see them down the road," Bean said. "If we were willing together to put in the work and face some fears, (Westfield is) a strong team and comes out and hits hard; we had to look in the mirror and decide if we could match that."

After being held to single digits in the first matchup against Westfield, the Falcons nearly put up 40 points to secure the upset in the championship game. Bean said it is a testament to the players willingness to learn and grow.

"They faced their own challenges and were able to take on their own fears and push past those," he said. "I think that really helped set a tone for their lives that if you get some challenges, you're going to have to face them head on, and if you do that you're going to do okay."

Following the victory, Bean said there were tears amongst the players, coaches and parents. He circled back to the parents, crediting them for their support and noting that they were as big a part of the team as anyone else.

"It was like this complete team effort; players, coaches, parents and community just rooting for what we wanted to accomplish," Bean said.

Winning the championship was a mile-

stone moment, as many of the players and coaches had been together since the children were in the third grade. As the eighth graders move to high school next season, Bean said completing the journey by beating Westfield was "nothing short of magical."

At the end of the day, however, Bean is confident the players know the game is about more than the final score.

"Wins and losses are great, but supporting each other, having each other's backs and creating that family environment is the pinnacle to all of this," he said.

Falcon Youth Football Juniors

The Falcon Youth Football Juniors were a juggernaut, finishing a championship season with a perfect 10-0 record after a 14-6 victory against then-undefeated West Springfield in the SAFL Junior Bowl, or Super Bowl.

"Entering the Super Bowl, we were undefeated; we hadn't let up a point yet on the whole season," Junior Team Coach Ryan Minns said. "So, it was two undefeated teams who kind of beat up on everybody the whole year, and (West Springfield was) very good. They were very big. They were tough kind of like us."

The Falcons jumped out to a 14-0 lead after two long touchdown runs by Dylan Bean. However, adversity struck early in the second half when West Springfield recovered a fumble and proceeded to score a long touchdown on a pass play.

"That was the first points we let up all year, so I was kind of nervous how we'd respond, but we actually intercepted the two-point conversion, which got momentum back on our side," Minns said.

From there, the defense took control. When West Springfield was driving deep in Falcon territory, Jeremiah Frazier stepped

up with a big interception. When the Falcons stalled out on offense, Dylan Bean struck again, with a 51-yard punt to flip the field.

After one more stop, and a first down on offense, the junior team was able to take a knee and run the clock out, securing the championship. Minns was impressed by his team's resiliency.

"It was the first time we really had a tough game all year. We basically blew everybody out the whole year," he said. "It made the coaching staff a little nervous going into the final game because we hadn't been punched in the mouth yet, and West Springfield was tough... I think our guys finally got a challenge, and they stepped up to it."

Minns is proud of how his team locked in mentally and worked hard throughout the season without the coaches having to constantly remind players to focus on their goals. He said his team plays the game the right way.

"They're tough kids, smart kids, they cheer for one another," Minns said. "We have a bunch of different guys who scored touchdowns for us and who got big sacks and tackles and all that. Our guys are really happy for each other when we do things like that. There's a real good team spirit."

Minns described football as the ultimate team sport. He said it is a privilege and a blast to be able to coach the players. He explained why he and his team have such an affinity for the game.

"You have to sacrifice physically to play football. It's not like some of these other sports where you kind of get by, so you kind of get that action too where you're sacrificing for your teammates and they're sacrificing for you. They're really good life lessons," Minns said.

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TOWN OF HAMPDEN
CONSERVATION
COMMISSION
NOTICE OF
PUBLIC HEARING

In accordance with the provisions of the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act, (MGL CH 131, S 40), it's implementing regulations (310 CMP 10.00) and the Town of Hampden's Wetlands Protection Bylaws,

the Hampden Conservation Commission will hold a public hearing on Wednesday, December 20, 2023 at 6 PM at the Town House, 625 Main Street, Hampden, for a Notice of Intent, (NOI), submitted by Rory Walker for the purpose of installing an agricultural ground mounted solar system at 530 Glendale Road. Additional information relating to this request is on file in

the Conservation Commission office and available for review by the public by contacting the Commission. Anyone interested in or wishing to be heard on the request may appear at the time and place designated.

On Behalf of the
Conservation Commission,
Judy McKinley-Brewer,
Ted Zebert, co-chairs
12/14/2023