Carmel Shields, the Deal!

Rams Crowned NYS Class AA Grid Champs, 1st Ever in Putnam County

Carmel senior RB Dylan Shields gets loose for some of his 156 yards and one of three touchdowns he would score in the Rams' 42-12 NYSPHSAA Class AA title win over Section 6 champion Bennett Academy (Buffalo) last Saturday at the Carrier Dome in Syracuse where Carmel Coach Todd Cayea passed off the state title paque to captain TJ Fusco and OL/DL Scott Danvin (inset) before the Rams posed off (inset) as the first team in Putnam County history to ever win a state grid title... see Class AA Grid Notebook
Syracuse -- Section 6 Class AA champion Buffalo Bennett had never seen anything like Section 1 champion Carmel all year. In fact, few teams in state history have seen anything like the 2021 Rams. In one of the most dominating performances in the history of the state tournament, Coach Todd Cayea's Rams (13-0) romped through the field in historic fashion, including Saturday's 42-12 victory over Bennett in the NYSPHSAA championship at the fabled Carrier Dome.

Carmel became Putnam County's first-ever state football champion, doing so by crushing 13 foes by 24 points or more by a combined 512-81 margin, including CBA-Albany (51-7) and Newburgh (47-13) in the state quarterfinals and semis, respectively.

Selecting an MVP would be an arduous task, because, as the state-ranked (No.3) Rams have done all season, they personified the word T-E-A-M from start to finish. After 27 years on the Carmel sideline, Coach Cayea turned the community and student body -- #CarmelCrazies -- into a football-frenzied town, which, oftentimes, played second fiddle to the former juggernaut that was New Rochelle for decades. Carmel's last venture into the state tournament was 1998, something that wasn't lost on Cayea's Rams.

"We wanted this for Coach Cayea more than anything," said Ram senior RB Dylan Shields, who was as close to MVP as anyone after scoring three touchdowns and gaining 156 yards on nine carries, including a game-sealing 90-yard jaunt. Shields added five tackles on defense, a stout unit that held state-ranked (No.5) Bennett's 2,000-yard rusher Dominic Allen to 39 yards on 13 totes.

"He's one of the greatest coaches to ever coach in this state. He's been here for nearly 30 years and we finally got to do it for him. He makes it very hard to prepare for us. We have a lot of different skill players who can get the job done behind an amazing offensive line, and defensively we were the best in the state. This is a once-in-a-generation type of team that had high expectations, so to finally reach them this feels great."

After going 5-1 during the COVID-shortened 2021 spring season, Carmel set the bar high and took its preparation to the next level. Sessions were crisp. The scout team bought in. The leaders led by example and accountability, and the brotherhood became trustworthy.

"We had a goal today and no one was going to stop us from reaching it," senior QB Kevin Dall said after rushing for 64 yards on nine carries while orchestrating the offense that outgained Bennett 257-42 on the ground.
Carmel RB Josh Massi prepares to blow up a would-be Bennett tackle before scoring TD in Rams NYS Class AA title win Saturday at Carrier Dome.

With the game still very much in doubt early in the third quarter, Cayea went deep into his bag of tricks and unleashed the kind of disciplined chicanery few teams can execute. Ram senior WR Andrew Fiore’s fourth-down reverse, optioned into a 38-yard TD strike to senior TE TJ. Fusco for a 21-0 lead after senior K Nick Sodano’s PAT (7 of 7 on the day). Sodano planted Bennett deep in its own territory all game long and added a touchdown-saving tackle on the lone kick the Rams failed to cover. Nick Rosaforte (11) and Massi (8) led the defense in tackles. Menacing Ram DL Dominick Telesco added two tackles, a pair of sacks and a fumble recovery.

“We’re just a bunch of brothers,” said a humbled Massi, who finished with 26 yards and a score. “We never want to get outworked. We always play with heart. I’m going to stay a little chill right now, but I’m definitely going to go home and celebrate with my brothers.”

After Bennett finally got on the board with a third-quarter score, Carmel put additional distance between the two state powers with a pair of touchdown drives that blew the doors off the dome. Junior FB Nick Rosaforte powered in from two yards out for a 28-6 lead with 3:00 to go in the third, and sophomore RB Matt Risley punched in another for a 36-6 lead with 8:29 to play.

Bennett then changed its game-plan and consistently went to the air, tacking on another score before Shields went 90 untouched yards for the final margin.

Cayea admitted the emotions of these last two years -- when he was unceremoniously dismissed after the 2019 sectional runner-up season, only to be rehired -- were on his mind, but procuring the program’s biggest achievement weighed much heavier.

“This means a lot to me and my family, especially my dad,” Trevor Cayea said. “I can’t even explain how this feels to share it with him. As a family, we’re going to kick back and enjoy this.”

With the biggest throng of fans to turn out at the Carrier Dome last weekend, the Cayea clan won’t be alone in celebration. Buy that drink! You’ve been #CayeaO’d!

Rams quickly get with the #CarmelCrazies after winning 1st NYSPHSAA grid title in Putnam County history Saturday at Carrier Dome in Syracuse.
SYRACUSE -- Somers High grid Coach Anthony DeMatteo’s decision to go for two points and the victory in the waning moments of the NYSPHSAA Class A title game last Friday at the Carrier Dome will be second-guessed by opposing coaches, media, fans and just about everybody outside of Coach D’s Tuskers. Not because it wasn’t the right thing to do, but because only half of the play callers and arm-chair coaches in the country have the stones to pull the trigger DeMatteo and his staff did. Somers played to win, and there’s no shame in that.

To a Tusker, there was little if any doubt after RB Matt Kapica’s one yard TD run with 1:19 left that Somers (12-1) would run a play it had designed in August for this particular moment. But Section 3 champion CBA-Syracuse had it defended perfectly, taking Tusker QB Matt Fitzsimons off his line and out of the pocket where a bevy of defenders forced an errant throw, which was picked off by CBA’s Jason Brunson in the end zone, thus preserving the Brother’s 32-31 state championship win over the distraught Tuskers. It was CBA’s first state title since 2004 and Section 3’s first title since 2017.

“After Kapica scored the touchdown we called a timeout, and all the players and coaches wanted to go for two and the win,” said Somers senior LB/TE Ethan Krauss, who the play was designed to go to. “We practiced this play every week since August. CBA covered it perfectly and it just didn’t go our way. We knew coming in they had some guys and we tried our best. We did what a lot of people believed we couldn’t do and I’m proud of my brothers. They’re private and we’re public so in my eyes we are the best public school in Class A.”

As tough a loss as it was, Somers’ big-play capability kept the Tuskers in the game, including senior RB Ravi Dass’ 85-yard kick return right before the half, which cut...
the Christian Brother's lead to 16-15 after Luke Savino’s easy two-point conversion. State-ranked (No.5) CBA (9-3) began the game with a 19-play, nine-minute drive, then connected on a 50-yard TD strike with 20 seconds left in the first half. In between, Dass (11 rushes, 50 yards) scored off a nine-yard run to make it 8-7. The state-ranked (No.2) Tuskers answered each time CBA scored and eventually took a 22-16 third-quarter lead off Trey Mancuso’s 26-yard jet to paydirt.

“Tough loss and this will sting for a while,” said senior DB/WR Mancuso, who had six grabs for 74 yards. “Hats off to CBA. That’s a great team over there. That being said, I am extremely proud of my brothers and how they battled. We never quit down to the last man. We had a chance, but it just didn’t work out for us in the end. We were confident in our decision and we as a TEAM will live with the choice that we collectively made.”

CBA’s vaunted passing attack featured several D-I receiving prospects and junior QB Jordan Rae, who found 10 different receivers and finished 25 of 35 for 346 yards and threw three touchdowns to three different receivers. That phase of the CBA game plan brought about a 10-point lead deep into the fourth when things looked very bleak for Somers. But the never-say-die Tuskers (12-1) responded with consecutive scores and a shot for the win. Savino’s 37-yard field goal cut the deficit to seven points, 32-25, before Kapica’s touchdown run with 1:19 left brought them within one. CBA kneeled out the waning seconds, denying the Tuskers their second NYS title since 2016.

“Tip my hat to those wide outs and their QB,” Somers junior OL/DL Jake Polito said. “Those are by far the best athletes I’ve seen in my high school career and in a few years from now you’re gonna see those kids on TV playing on Saturdays. I’m extremely proud to call myself a Somers Tusker. That play call was a reflection of this town, these coaches, and the players. I love these coaches and they mean the world to me. I’m sure the rest of the team feels the same way. So when coach Ant asked what we wanted to do it was a no-brainer. We wanted it. Unfortunately, it didn’t work out, but I just want it to be known that these coaches are second to none, not only as football coaches, but as my family members. I love this town. I love this team, and most importantly I love these coaches win, lose or draw.”

Krauss (9 tackles), Francesco Gioffre (8 tackles), TJ Olifers (6 tackles), Luke Kennedy (4 tackles, sack), Mancuso (4 tackles) and Johnny Crecco (4 tackles, sack) led the Somers defense, which faced its toughest test of the season.
Early Lead Disappears as Pleasantville Falls in State Final

For a little while on Saturday afternoon, it sure seemed as though the Pleasantville Panthers possessed what it would take to bring down the top-ranked football team in the state.

The Panthers’ sophomore star, Daniel Picart, had already found his way into the end zone for a pair of touchdowns not long after the game’s opening kickoff and a surprising 12-point lead gave their fans reason to believe a second state championship plaque would soon be headed to the school’s gym lobby.

But the Panthers never scored again after Picart’s electrifying 79-yard punt return just past the midway point of the first quarter and the Maine-Endwell Spartans eventually took command on the way to a 21-12 victory in the Class B state final at the Carrier Dome in Syracuse. For Pleasantville, which had arrived with a perfect 12-0 record, it was a crushing end to a season that exceeded all expectations.

Facing a Spartan team that had scored at least 40 points in a game seven times this year, Pleasantville began the day with poise and purpose. With the Panthers setting aside their usually reliable running game, quarterback Michael LaCapria engineered a seven-play, 71-yard opening drive by completing five consecutive passes, highlighted by his perfect deep toss down the right sideline that fell right into the arms of Picart in stride for a 42-yard touchdown with just a couple of minutes elapsed.

Unfortunately for Pleasantville, the point-after kick by John McCarthy, who hadn’t missed one all season, was blocked and the Panthers had to settle for a 6-0 early lead. Perhaps inspired by the team’s offensive fireworks, the Panther defense then forced a three-and-out for Maine-Endwell.

McCarthy soon recovered a Spartan fumble, but P’ville wasn’t able to take advantage. Later in the quarter, another long Picart punt return was called back because of a penalty. In the final seconds, the Panthers’ Kieran Cotter picked off a pass, assuring that Pleasantville would take a lead into the locker room at halftime.

The Panthers’ try for a two-point conversion was stopped and, moments later, so was all their early momentum. Spartan star Mike Mancini returned the ensuing kickoff 90 yards, getting a couple of blocks and then bursting past everyone like a rocket untouched all the way to paydirt. Jack Hennessey’s PAT cut the Pleasantville lead to just 12-7 with 5:17 remaining in the opening quarter.

On their next possession, the Panthers kept the ball for over five minutes, but the drive finally stalled at the Maine-Endwell 21-yard line a minute into the second quarter. McCarthy soon recovered a Spartan fumble, but the Panthers never scored again after Picart’s electrifying 79-yard punt return just past the midway point of the first quarter and the Maine-Endwell Spartans eventually took command on the way to a 21-12 victory in the Class B state final at the Carrier Dome in Syracuse.

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Panther senior Nick Paternostro does some celebrating in the victory over Briarcliff at Parkway Field.

Aidan Picart tries to elude a tackle in the Panthers' victory over Bronxville.

Sophomore sensation Daniel Picart carries the ball in a home win at Parkway Field.

John McCarthy’s last-second field goal lifted the Panthers past Port Jervis in the state playoffs.

The Panther defense converges to make a tackle en route to a home win midway through the regular season.

Junior lineman Joseph Alesawy gets set for the Panthers’ state semifinal against Section 2’s Ravena at Middletown High School.

Pleasantville seniors Dom Matica (left) and Michael LaCapria proudly display the team’s championship plaque after defeating Nanuet in the Section 1 title game.

Head coach Tony Becerra has now taken two Panther teams up to Syracuse to play in the state final.

Kieran Cotter easily steps into the end zone for a touchdown in the Panthers’ state-regional win over Port Jervis.

Pleasantville seniors Dom Matica (left) and Michael LaCapria proudly display the team’s championship plaque after defeating Nanuet in the Section 1 title game.

ANDY JACOBS PHOTOS
Class A Somers and Class B Pleasantville represented Section 1 to the best of their abilities last weekend at the Carrier Dome in Syracuse where an emotion Derek Marcus’ Somers Tuskers suffered a 32-31 NYSPHSAA championship setback to Section 3 champion Christian Brothers Academy Friday before Pleasantville’s Joseph Allesawy’s Panthers had their hearts ripped out in similar fashion during a 21-12 NYS title loss to Section 4 champion Maine-Endwell Saturday... see Class A/B Grid Notebooks