

Toms River North and Passaic Tech players highlight conclusion of Fall Sportsmanship Season



When Passaic County Tech met Toms River North in football on Dec. 4 at Rutgers University, there was much on the line, and plenty of emotion involved, for the players on both teams.

The matchup was for the first-ever overall NJSIAA Group 5 state championship, with Toms River North looking to complete a 14-0 season, and Passaic Tech hoping to finish 12-2 by concluding a five-game run to the title.

To top it off, the game was the last of the year's seven state championship football games, and additionally the final contest of the NJSIAA's overall fall sports season.

As it turned out, Toms River North completed its dream campaign with a 28-7 victory. And fittingly, the last event of the season featured acts of sportsmanship by both sides which offered a fitting finish for the fall portion of the NJSIAA Sportsmanship Appreciation Series, presented by JAG-ONE Physical Therapy.

The Toms River North vs. Passaic Tech game was a game between schools from different parts of the state who had absolutely no prior connections before that day. Toms River North led 7-0 after the first quarter and 21-0 at the half, and with the outcome becoming evident, raw emotions could have gotten the better of both sides. Instead, a feeling of mutual



Jahmir Rogers (77) of Passaic Tech offers a hand and helps opponent Micah Ford (1) of Toms River North straighten his leg after he cramped up during the state final (Photos by Michael Cassella)

respect developed between the players from each team.

Two examples of the respect were very evident, one during the second half and the other at the conclusion of the game.

In the first instance, Micah Ford, the highly touted quarterback from Toms River North, was having trouble with leg cramps throughout the final two quarters.

At one point, Ford cramped up and was in severe pain in the vicinity of Jahmir Rogers of Passaic Tech. Ford yelled out for anyone to help, and his opponent was the one who came to his aid, despite the fact that his team was behind in a game that it desperately wanted to win, in large part because of the play of Ford.

Rogers, in turn, helped Ford stretch his leg and then offered his hand to pull him up from the ground.

“I actually called him over to help me because the pain was so severe,” Ford said. “The ref even told him to go to his sideline, but he still proceeded to stretch me. I really appreciated that.”

Even though Ford didn’t interact much with Rogers during the game, the fact that he was a fellow competitor was enough to command respect.

“There is always a sense of mutual respect for my opponents,” said Ford, a junior who was later named state Player of the Year by NJ.com “In this case, they made it to that point in the season just like we did.”

As talented as he may be, Ford likes to think that sportsmanship is a part of his overall package.

“Sportsmanship is a very important virtue when it comes to sports,” he said. “I feel that sportsmanship shows your respect for the game and can benefit your reputation on and off the field. I take sportsmanship as a way to improve the game day by day.”

While that one particular moment was an example of a Passaic Tech player offering comfort to a Toms River



Toms River North players Justin Kaye (left) and Nasir Jackson (right) console Passaic Tech player Quamar Ayscue (52) in the moments after Toms River North defeated Passaic Tech in the Group 5 state final. (Photo by Vinnie Lucia)

North player, roles were reversed at the conclusion of the game.

As the post-game scene played out at Rutgers, the Toms River North team was celebrating its victory, while the Passaic Tech players were feeling the pain of the loss. At least one Passaic Tech player was on the ground and very upset, something which caught the eye of Toms River North players Justin Kaye and Nasir Jackson. The two quickly abandoned their own celebration to help console the Passaic Tech player.

“I saw our team last year hurting the same way when we lost to Kingsway in the South Jersey Group 5 final,” said Kaye, a junior lineman. “My instinct was to do that because that’s what I would have wanted

if I were in the same position. I told him that it stings, but you memories you made will stay with you forever.”

Just because Toms River North went 14-0, Kaye has experienced enough as an athlete to know that there are always ups and downs, and that the experiences gained through competition offer plenty of lessons. Respect for opponents ranks high among them.

“I’ve felt his pain from that moment many times in life, but growing up, my parents taught me not to worry about who wins and loses. It’s about making lasting memories with those around you. I think

that during the course of competition, you should always be considerate of how you would feel in your opponent’s shoes. One sad part about the magical ride we had was that every game we won in the playoffs ended someone else’s season.”

Likewise, the concept of being a good sport is something that is always on his mind.

“Being a good sport means looking at something from the other side,” Kaye said. “And trying to understand what they are going through, because you would feel the same way.”



Officials bump fists with Passaic Tech and Toms River North captains prior to the Group 5 state championship game (Photo by Scott Faytok/NJ.com)