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A Perfect Season

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Record-setting quarterback Brett Elliott '06 tries to get off a pass before being tackled by the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor defense.

A perfect season



Riley Jenkins '05, the game's Most Outstanding Player, dives for a touchdown in front of Brad McKechnie '06 (29) and George Carter '05 (2).



It was the perfect end to a perfect season.

In a heart-stopping finish on a cold, clear December day in Salem, Va., the Linfield College Wildcats left no doubt about who deserved the NCAA Division III football title. With less than six minutes left on the clock, Linfield forced a turnover by the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor. Riley Jenkins '05, named the game's outstanding player, made a one-handed grab of a pass from record-setting quarterback Brett Elliott '06 to seal the Wildcat victory, 28-21. UMHB put a crimp in the Wildcats' nation-leading offense, but the Linfield defense stepped up its attack to secure the college's first NCAA Division III football title. This is Linfield's first championship since the three NAIA titles in 1982, 1984 and 1986.

The Wildcats ended the season with a perfect 13-0 record, as well as a slew of awards for the players and coaches and a whole new set of records. Jay Locey, in his ninth year as head coach, was named NCAA Division III coach of the year, earning him a slot as an assistant coach at the Hula Bowl played Jan. 22 on Maui, Hawaii.

In receiving the award, Locey recognized his players, coaches and college administration.

"This is a championship for the entire Linfield family, of which we are very proud to be a part," he said. "The 2004 team had commitment to each other and an unbelievable work ethic and attitude. Our guys have a great passion for the

Left, Garrett Wales '06 (48) and Phil Rombach '06 celebrate the victory.



Clockwise from top left, Josh Ort (9) and Chris Boock (31) signal the fourth quarter; President Vivian A. Bull with some of the Wildcat seniors after the game, from left, Ty Smith, George Carter, Thomas Ford, Eric Hillison, O.J. Gulley and Riley Jenkins; Scott Carnahan '73, athletic director, and head Coach Jay Locey celebrate the Wildcats' victory.

game and a great passion for the team. They play the game because they love it and they love each other. They are great human beings and really fun to be around.”

Team members displayed what true champions they are when they showed their compassion, caring and class during a visit to the pediatric floor at Community Hospital in Roanoke, Va. They read the children stories, played with them and went out of their way to visit those youngsters too sick to come to the playroom or those too shy to go to them. Emily Painter, a nurse at the hospital, later wrote to Locey and Scott Carnahan '73, athletic director.

“I watched your players come to our floor and I saw something that I have rarely seen from college men – compassion and concern,” she wrote. “I was truly touched to watch these men interact with our kids. The fact that your men would get on the floor and play house, basketball and build things and just take the time to spread some love and joy is a victory in itself. I hope that you are extremely proud and fond of this team, because they made a lasting impression on me and our patients. So not only are you national champions on the football field, but you are truly champions in life. Never let that spirit die.”

Ty Smith '05 celebrates with a championship t-shirt.





This championship affirms Linfield's commitment to excellence, said Linfield President Vivian A. Bull.

"I am so proud of our student-athletes," she said. "Everywhere we went in Virginia, people commented on what a terrific group of players and coaches we had representing Linfield, Oregon and the Northwest Conference. Our players and coaches continue to receive many accolades, but it's significant to note that this group of young people talk not about individual awards, but about the team."

The Wildcats were not without their own boisterous cheering section during the championship game in Salem. A charter flew 141 family members, alumni and staff, including President Bull, to the game and back in less than 48 hours. Many others from different parts of the country also attended, giving the Wildcats a loyal and loud cheering section. Fans pitched in to help pay the costs to send the Linfield cheerleaders on the trip.

Signs such as "ESPN - Exceptional Sons Prevail Nationally," "Hit 'Em Hard Linfield Linebackers" and "23 Zahn," were sprinkled throughout the crowd. A bit of history was also on display. A long banner reading "We're from Linfield, Couldn't be Prouder," made by Trisha Johnson Heaukulani '83 has been at every championship game that Linfield has won.

— Mardi Mileham

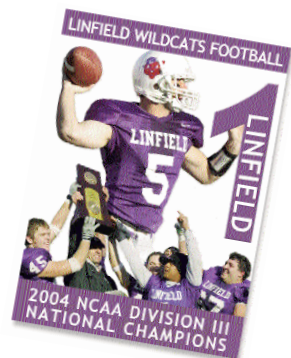


Clockwise from top left, Dwight Donaldson '05, left, and Thomas Ford '05; Coach Jay Lacey talks with Brandon Hazenberg '06 (3); Brett Elliott '06, left, and Mordechai Kotler '05 celebrate the victory; signs throughout the stadium display support for the Wildcats from the loyal fans around the country who traveled to Salem, Va., for the game.



Championship DVD available

A DVD highlighting the Linfield Wildcats' run to the championship is available for \$22 through the Linfield College Bookstore. To order go to:



www.linfieldbookstore.com