

Coatesville football squad had season to be proud of

Hershey >> In each of the past three years, the Coatesville football squad has taken a small – but significant – step forward.

In 2016, the Raiders (11-2) made it to the PIAA 6A state quarterfinals after missing the state tourney the prior year.

The following year, Coatesville improved to 13-2 and advanced to the PIAA state semifinals.

This fall, the Raiders posted a 14-0 record entering Saturday's PIAA 6A state semifinals, becoming the first Coatesville squad ever to win 14 games in a season. That included a 37-6 win against Harrisburg in the season opener.

Though Coatesville suffered a stunning 27-24 defeat to Harrisburg Saturday, Raider head coach Matt Ortega said he was proud of the way the Class of 2019 embraced the tradition of Raider football and took it new heights this fall.

"This was a very, very tight-knit group of seniors," said Ortega. "They just believed in each other and never quit on each other. They laid it on the line – so many guys came before them at Coatesville who showed them how they needed to wear that uniform. So many guys have led to this tradition. Our guys picked up where those guys left off – it's the way we attack the game, and it's the way that we play for our program.

"I couldn't be more proud of my guys today, the way they battled to the last second."

Coatesville, which had outscored its 14 opponents by a total of 642-151 coming into the state semifinal, was in unfamiliar territory Saturday as they fell behind the Cougars 21-10 at halftime. But they battled back on the very first drive of the second half, going 58 yards in six plays, capped by senior wide receiver Dymere Miller's sliding 16-yard touchdown catch of a Ricky Ortega pass down the middle. Miller finished the

day with seven catches for 146 yards.

"Harrisburg was really loading the box against the run; and they were doubling up on Dapree [Bryant], our top receiver, so we knew we had to go to Miller or our other receivers, and Dymere made a bunch of plays that saved us today," said Matt Ortega.

In the locker room after the game, a disappointed Miller said, "We had a great season, made history by going 14-0, but we've got to eliminate the mistakes. This loss hurts, but we are a family and we will stay together as one."

The Coatesville defense battled back in the second half. The Cougars' only score after halftime came on a six-yard touchdown drive, following an interception by Harrisburg junior defensive back Donte Kent that he returned to the Raiders' 6 yard line.

"We came out all fired up in the second half and closed the gap, but we couldn't make the play at the end to take the lead," said Matt Ortega. "The penalties (16 for 99 yards) killed us today."

Actually, both teams committed numerous penalties, in what amounted to a flag fest – a combined total of 27 penalties for 199 yards.

Coatesville had difficulty moving the ball consistently against Harrisburg's defense, gaining only 76 yards rushing. Many of the Raiders' key offensive drives were kept alive by clutch third down passes by Ricky Ortega to Miller, Michigan State recruit Aaron Young and junior Shamur Hall.

Ortega, who was sacked six times Saturday, wound up throwing for 246 yards, completing 13 of 26 passes.

"I just feel bad to leave our seniors like this, not being able to play in the state final for the second year in a row," said the Coatesville junior quarterback. "It hurts really bad because we worked so hard this season. But we'll work through it, and come back next year even stronger, I promise you that."

The announced attendance at Hersheypark Stadium was 1,925 fans who came out despite the rainy, cold conditions.

Matt Ortega said, "We really wanted to try to win it today for the Coatesville community, but we came up a little short. Our guys have nothing to hang their heads about, they had a special year. Our guys are going to be bigger and better people for being part of this program, part of this community. That's what really matters."