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In the Washington Catholic Athletic Conference, football is a culture. To some, God is purple. Rivalries run deep, turning friends into foes and dividing neighbors for simply flying a flag. It is not everyday that two teams come together in a huddle.

In the semifinal game of the WCAC conference playoffs on Saturday, the No. 1 St. John's Cadets and the No. 4 seed DeMatha Stag's came together and formed a circle in the middle of the field during the second quarter after DeMatha sophomore defensive back Cole Donaldson went down and didn't get back up.

"Any time somebody on the field is taken off by an ambulance, you know how scary that is," said DeMatha coach Bill McGregor after the Stag's were handed a 34-20 loss, their second loss to St. John's this season.

Donaldson went for a tackle at the six yard-line to prevent 275-pound running back Antwain Littleton from having a straight shot into the endzone and allowing the Cadet's to expand their early 10-0 lead. He was down for nearly 10 minutes before he was lifted into a stretcher and driven off the field.

A St. John's coach yelled "Hats off," as the team joined DeMatha in a huddle. Players embraced each other, grabbing hands and shoulders, under a cloudless sky and prayed for Donaldson's health and a speedy recovery, according to McGregor.

"We talk about our mission to create better men, husbands and fathers," said St. John's coach Joe Casamento. "We talk about our vision... we don't talk about winners and losers."

A field goal and a pair of touchdowns from junior wide receiver Caleb Coombs and Littleton put the Cadet's up 17-0 in the first half, but with 15 seconds left in the first half, DeMatha began to rally. Seih Bangura put the Stag's on the board, making it 17-7 as the teams headed into the locker rooms -- or in DeMatha's case -- a tent.

DeMatha's freshman quarterback Cameron Edge said the team regrouped during halftime and played for Donaldson.

"It really bonded the team, especially after halftime," Edge said "We scored, we got in the endzone. The team was bonding and that's why we came out so good in the second half."

Midway through the third quarter, DeMatha's defense shut down the Cadet's on a fourth-and-inches at the eight yard line that was so close it had to be measured. When the Stag's took control of the ball, senior running back Marshawn Lloyd blew by two St. Johns defensemen and scored on the 92-yard drive, narrowing St. John's lead to 17-14, but DeMatha didn't leave itself enough time for a comeback.

A diving touchdown from Littleton widened the score again, but again Lloyd answered on the first play of the fourth quarter, making the score 24-20 after the extra point was wide.

DeMatha held on to hope of surviving to meet Good Counsel in the WCAC Championship game next Saturday at Catholic University until quarterback So-Jay Maiava ran in the endzone and the Cadet's kicked a field goal.

Casamento said his team is used to remaining focused when it matters most. All of St. John's losses this season have come at the hands of non-conference Super 25 teams, three of which were ranked in the top five at the time of playing. While St. Johns did sweep the WCAC this year, all of their conference victories have been decided by a margin of one touchdown or less.

"You put your head down and lose your focus, you get your head kicked in and we know that," Casamento said.