

JAGUAR JUGGERNAUT

Where does Thomas Jefferson's dynasty rank in history?

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For PA Football News

Placing the term “dynasty” next to Thomas Jefferson High School’s football team isn’t a stretch, not that that statement is breaking news.

Every year, since TJ won its first PIAA championship in 2004 in dominating fashion, the black and gold juggernaut has been somewhere in the top-5 of most “AAA” statewide polls.

But it’s more than just rankings that has brought the dynasty to life. In addition to the high rankings, add three PIAA football titles, including two consecutive, along with three straight WPIAL titles and four in the last five years. Throw in a 31-game winning streak against PA competition; a team that has won 92 of its last 101 games in the WPIAL, and a team that has won 93 of its last 101 *overall* games.

To put it in perspective, the 2009 TJ senior class has been part of a three-year run, which to date has an overall record of 45-2 (.957). The two losses came to General McLane in 2006 and to Cleveland Glenville in the Friends of Coal Prep Classic last season.

Sit back for a minute, though, and digest those numbers. For many teams, it’s tough to maintain a string of dominance for more than one or two seasons. TJ’s dominance has come over a seven-year period, which began in 2002.

The WPIAL has seen other teams post multi-year periods of dominance before TJ. Aliquippa played in eight “AAA” WPIAL title games during the 1980s, winning five titles in a six-year period from 1984-’89. Rochester, a class “A” school, won five WPIAL titles from 1998-2004, including three PIAA titles over Southern Columbia. Blackhawk won four WPIAL titles from 1991 to 1996, and posted a 92-12-2 record from 1991-’98.

In addition, West Allegheny won four WPIAL titles in five years from 1997-2001, and played in three straight “AAA” state title games. Upper St. Clair played in eight WPIAL “AAAA” finals from 1988-’97, winning four titles and the 1989 PIAA title. Mt. Lebanon also won four WPIAL titles from 1980-’84 under WPIAL coaching legend Art Walker, Sr.

Where TJ ranks among those dynasties within the WPIAL is definitely a good subject to debate. An even better subject to debate is where the Jaguars rank among some top dynasties throughout state history.

Berwick immediately comes to mind when the topic of statewide dynasties is mentioned. Under George Curry, Pennsylvania’s all-time winningest coach, the Bulldogs went 158-

11 (.934) from 1987-'98. Berwick won two mythical USA-Today national titles in this period and six PIAA championships, including four in a row from 1994-'97.

Strath Haven had a remarkable run from 1996-2003, a stretch in which the Panthers went 107-7 (.938), winning eight District 1 "AAA" titles and PIAA titles in 1999 and 2000. Haven won 44 straight games from '99-'01 before West Allegheny snapped the streak in the 2001 state championship game.

Two District 1 "AAAA" dynasties need to be mentioned as well, those being the Central Bucks West Bucks and the Ridley Green Raiders.

CB West, under the guidance of 300-game winner Mike Pettine, posted a record of 121-8 during the decade of the 1990s. The Bucks played in five PIAA championship games during the '90s, winning four titles. Add in CB West's 14-1 record and state runner-up finish in 2000, and you get an 11-year period in which the black and gold went 135-9 (.937).

Ridley's run from 1978-'91 was also equally impressive. The Green Raiders went 140-9-2 in that 14-year span, winning 12 Central League conference championships. Ridley, though, only qualified for the PIAA playoffs once in that run, which came in 1990. The 1990 team finished as state runner-up to North Allegheny, 21-14. Ridley also had a stretch from 1957 to 1970 in which it won 112 of the 130 games it played.

Few teams dominated like Southern Columbia did, even though the Tigers compete in the state's smallest classification. Southern has won 90 of 100 games since 2002, and became the only PIAA affiliate to win five straight PIAA championships from 2002-'06. During the 1990s, Southern posted an overall record of 124-18-1 (.867).

If winning championships is the definition of a dynasty, then maybe Manheim Central doesn't qualify. The Barons only have one PIAA football title – it came in 2003. But if you base a dynasty on overall record, then the Barons easily qualify. Manheim Central went 183-20 (.901) from 1992-2006. Included in that 15-year span is 13 of the school's 15 District 3 "AAA" championships. Add in the 2007 and 2008 seasons, and Central has a 200-28 (.877) overall record.

Other notable strings of dominance in Pennsylvania history include Erie Cathedral Prep, which went 83-13-1 from 1985-'92, winning seven District 10 "AAAA" titles; Westinghouse, which won 12 City League titles in 13 years from 1954-'66; Easton Area, which posted a winning percentage of .842 from 1912-'25; and Frankford, a Philadelphia Public League school that went 152-22-2 (.863) from 1969-'84.

So now, it's up to you, the reader, to decide just where Thomas Jefferson's dynasty ranks with the others listed in this article. Only time will tell if the Jaguars can turn this string of dominance into one that lasts a decade or more.

No matter how you slice it, TJ's had an impressive run.

