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# Manchester East Cobras take national 10U football title with thrilling win over Texas

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When the Manchester East Cobras won the American Youth Football 10U Division II state championship earlier this season, coach Matt McDonald emphasized the team had not accomplished anything yet.

He delivered the same message after the Cobras defeated Hartford, Conn., 37-6, to win the regional title and qualify for the AYF's eight-team national tournament.

When McDonald spoke to his players after the Cobras defeated the Garden Villa (Texas) Giants, 27-26, in the AYF Division II 10U All American national championship game Dec. 8 in Kissimmee, Fla., he gave a different speech.

"After that final game, we accomplished what we came out to do," McDonald said. "We came down to Florida not to lose....I'm over ecstatic about what the kids were able to accomplish when they put their minds to it."

The Cobras defeated the CYAA (Fla.) Wolverines, 32-19, in the national quarterfinals before downing the Maryland-based Showcase Sharks, 25-13, in the semifinals, becoming the first New Hampshire team to ever reach an AYF final, according to McDonald.

Manchester East trailed, 26-14, late in the first half of the final before scoring the game's final two touchdowns and shutting out Garden Villa in the second half.

Shawn O'Neil ran in a 25-yard touchdown and caught a 35-yard TD pass from McDonald's son, Aiden, in the championship game. Jayden Pares scored the game-winning point when he ran into



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Members of the Manchester East Cobras celebrate after winning a national championship in Florida. (COURTESY)

the end zone from three yards out on the point-after play following Chase Burris' 15-yard TD run.

In the AYF 10U league, a point-after kick is worth two points and a point-after score on a pass or run is worth one point.

McDonald said his team was outmanned and outgunned in each of its three national-tournament games but it did have the edge in one area.

"They were faster, bigger, stronger but what separated us from them was we were by far the most mentally tough team and we had the most heart of any of the teams," McDonald said. "We wear teams down mentally and as soon as the mind goes, the body follows soon after that."

The Cobras finished with a 14-1 overall record and were never scored on in the second half in any of those 15 contests.

McDonald said he believes Manchester East would not have accomplished what it did this season without suffering its lone loss of the season — a 19-6 setback in Week 4 to the Pelham Razorbacks. After the defeat, the Cobras refocused and practiced harder, McDonald said, which paid off when they defeated Pelham, 19-12, to win the state title.

"If it wasn't for that loss, we wouldn't be here," McDonald said.

McDonald said he was in disbelief after the title game ended and he realized what the Cobras had achieved. The moment he celebrated the victory with Aiden is something McDonald will always remember.

"I really try my best to separate the father-son aspect when it comes to coaching," McDonald said. "To share that with him after the fact and have that father-son moment, it was unbelievable. It's something we'll never forget."

McDonald said Aiden and his teammates — O'Neil, Pares, Burris, Aidan Calden, Treyvon Cannon Bennett, Steven Flatthey Jr., George Whitehead III, Michael Landmesser, Cayden Salvi, Liam Corman, Elijah Ellis, Xavier Whitehead, Ajow Luwal, Jaythean Obando, Matthew Koenig, Jhystoni Riviera, Jonathan Saldi, Nathan Saldi and Grace Chantasiri — had smiles on their faces long after the game ended.

Now that the 27-hour car ride back home from Florida and the celebration with family and friends is over, McDonald said his players are already thinking about next season.

"They have short-term memories," McDonald said. "They're wise beyond their years, that's for sure."

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