

# SPORTS

## Piedmont punches ticket to first NCS Championship game since 1976

By Jonathan Comeaux

Piedmont High's No. 2 seeded football team made school history on Friday, November 21. It is the second team in school history to qualify for the North Coast Section Championship game after beating No. 3 Willits 28-10 in the NCS semifinals at Witter Field. They are now set to square off in the Division 7 title game against No. 1 Middletown this Friday, November 28 at Justin Siena High School in Napa.

The 1976 NCS title-winning Hall of Fame squad and this year's team are the only Championship game appearances in Piedmont High's 100-plus year history.

"I was just three years old. I've said before, not a lot of people thought we'd be here. The guys stuck with it through my ranting and raving. They never wanted to quit and they never lay down," said Piedmont head coach Jordan Seiden.

It's a miraculous moment for the football program, considering it lost eight seniors from last year's team and fell in the Div. 8 NCS semifinals on Ferndale's swampy playing surface.

This is the first time Piedmont has reached the semifinals in two consecutive years. It has appeared in the semifinals in 1976, 1981, 2014, 2016, 2024, and now 2025.

"We're in the history books. It's amazing; we couldn't get it done last year. We had the talent, but had to play in tough field conditions," said running back and linebacker Xavier Henderson.

"I don't even know what to say; so many words come to mind. We're making history and hopefully we can get that win to make history next Friday," added quarterback Jimmy Lagios.

Piedmont had to lean on its defense to keep Willits out of the end zone. The Highland-



Staff Photos

Piedmont football players stand proudly after beating Willits 28-10 in the D7 NCS Semifinals. Their championship game this Friday marks the school's first since 1976.

ers didn't score the game's first touchdown until 3:43 remained in the first quarter, and the Wolverines stayed just one possession back of the lead through three quarters of the game. But once PHS figured out Willits' rushing attack, Ferndale struggled to finish drives.

"To start the game, they were chipping off small plays, and their big drive came from some big plays. We knew if we did our jobs, we'd be fine. Once our offense started going, it forced them to pass. Our coverage is really good, and their throws were all screens, so we just had to

focus on tackling," middle linebacker Colby Hong said.

Henderson, the team's star running back, made his presence felt on defense as a linebacker. On offense he led the team with three rushing touchdowns.

"I give all credit to my offensive line, as always. I couldn't do anything without them," Henderson said. "Defensively, I haven't played in a few weeks because of a concussion. I had to step up and play for the team. There's a lot to correct still, but that's football; we live to fight another day."

### Game Recap

After trading possessions to start the game, Piedmont struck first with 3:34 remaining in the first quarter when Rehan Mumtaz punched across a two-yard carry. The previous play, Henderson broke a tackle to take a carry 26 yards to the two.

Willits answered on its next possession, scoring on a 12-play series at the 10:56 mark of the second quarter, which capped off with a 31-yard touchdown carry on a 4th-and-4 situation. PHS wound up punting on its next possession, but thwarted Willits on 4th-and-1 at the Highlanders' 16, where linebacker George Saunders burst through the line to stop a fullback carry.

PHS then scored on a nine-play series with 32 seconds left in the half. The drive featured a 23 yard carry my Mumtaz, a 47-yard reception by Diego Hurwitz down to the three, and capped by a touchdown by Henderson.

In the third quarter, more back-and-forth possessions led to a 34-yard field goal by Willits with 2:20 left, cutting Piedmont's lead to 14-10. But PHS' offense came alive with two touchdowns in the fourth quarter.

The Highlanders scored on its next possession, taking it 64 yards on eight plays, finishing with a two-yard score by Henderson with 10:39 left. During the series, PHS had chunk plays of 16 and 15 yards by Henderson, and 18 and 12-yard receptions by Cash Panico.

Piedmont then forced another turnover on downs at Willits' 45 with 6:25 left, leading to a 12-play touchdown series with 1:44 remaining in the game. Jack Meyjes had a 12 yard reception, Henderson had a 14-yard run where he stiff-armed a defender to the floor, while Henderson scored on a six-yard carry.

Final game stats were not provided.

### NEXT UP

No. 2 Piedmont (8-4 overall) squares off for the North Coast Section championship with No. 1 Middletown at Justin Siena HS in Napa on Friday, November 28 at 7:00 p.m.



Xavier Henderson scores one of his three touchdowns against Willits.



Mateo Long jumps on a fumble that was forced by Colby Hong (left). George Saunders (right) celebrates.

## North Coast Section Div. VII FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

### FIRST ROUND

Friday, Nov. 14

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 (1) Middletown (8-2)<br>vs. (8) Archie Williams (6-4) | 2 (4) Vallejo (7-3)<br>vs. (5) Concord (6-4)           |
| 3 (2) Piedmont (6-4)<br>vs. (7) St. Patrick (7-3)       | 4 (3) Willits (8-2)<br>vs. (6) Redwood Christian (7-3) |

### RESULTS

Middletown 36, Archie Williams 7	Concord 36, Vallejo 24
Piedmont 49, St. Patrick 7	Willits 27, Redwood Christian 0

### SEMIFINALS

Friday, Nov. 21

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 (1) Middletown (9-2)<br>vs. (5) Concord (7-4) | 2 (2) Piedmont (7-4)<br>vs. (3) Willits (8-2) |
|---|---|

### RESULTS

Middletown 48, Concord 8	Piedmont 28, Willits 10
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### CHAMPIONSHIP

Friday, Nov. 28

Middletown (10-2) vs. (2) Piedmont (8-4)



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# Sights from football, cross-country teams at NCS

Piedmont High’s football and cross-country teams had monumental performances this week. With the football team’s 28-10 win over Willits, they punched their ticket to the school’s first North Coast Section Championship game since 1976’s Hall of Fame squad. And the girls’ cross-country team placed third at the Division 4 NCS Championship to qualify for the CIF State Championship for the first time since 2019.

Provided is a collection of the best photos from both teams in NCS events.



Xavier Henderson running back makes a Willits defender tumble after a stiff-arm.

Football photos by Staff



John Bunje (left) and Rehan Mumtaz rush to give coach Jordan Seiden the customary Gatorade bath after their NCS semifinal win over Willits, as JV assistant coach Dick Carter cheers in the background.



The beauty of symmetry: Pictured from front to back are center Jax Thayer, quarterback Jimmy Lagios, fullback Colby Hong, and running back Rehan Mumtaz.



Freshman Jared Lavaka chases down Willits’ quarterback after breaking through their offensive line.



Sophomore Nikita Gorelik was Piedmont’s fifth-best runner at the NCS Championship, helping solidify their third-place finish.



Cross-country photos by Jenni Tsoi Best

Leighton Mand leads the charge for Piedmont High’s girls’ cross-country team.



Piedmont gets set at the line. Pictured are Cora Chun (back left), Cora Brozowski Schrader, Viviane Oesterer, Leighton Mand (front left), Skylar Best, and Amalia Gray.



Cora Chun sprints to the finish line at the North Coast Section championships. She finished as Piedmont’s fourth-best runner.



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