

The Bandera PROPHEET

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Historic season capped off by host of all-district awards

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The Bandera football team put the final touches on a historic 2023 season late last week with the announcement of its all-district awards, featuring a host of Bulldogs who earned individual recognition for their efforts contributing to the team's district championship and 10-2 record. Five players earned superlative awards, with senior quarterback Jesse Cardenas taking home District MVP honors. Cardenas had 1,446 passing yards and 25 touchdowns, 1,836 rushing yards and 20 touchdowns, 27 tackles, three interceptions and two punt return touchdowns to cap off a record-setting four-year career with the Bulldogs.

Cardenas finishes as just one of six quarterbacks in Bandera history to lead the Bulldogs to a 10-win season, joining the 1956, 1984, 1994, 2000 and 2002 (state championship) teams.

"I don't know if there is enough time or space to say all of the good things Jesse has done for our program," Athletic Director and Head Football Coach Joel Fontenot-Amedee said. "It took a larger investment into the off season and summer program by Jesse. I'm so grateful to him and his teammates for sacrificing the time during the summer to put our team in a position to get over the hump. He is one of the most physically and mentally tough players I've ever coached. To do what he did as a quarterback in his first year at that position is nothing short of remarkable."

Senior Corben Gonzales also earned superlative honors as the district Utility Player of the Year after posting 42 catches for 777 yards and 10 touchdowns, seven carries for 53 yards and one touchdown, 20 tackles,

and three interceptions. Gonzales will compete in the 2024 San Antonio Sports All-Star Game as a member of the Gold Team on Jan. 6 at the Alamo Dome.

“I have a spot on our call sheet that says, ‘Get #10 touches’,” Fontenot-Amedee said. “It was a focal point of our offense to get him the ball. He is such a special football player. It's not the size of the dog in the fight but the size of the fight in the dog. And that dog has a lot of fight and will to win every play. Corben has "that dog" in him.”

Sophomore Jeffry Thomas also shined in his first season at the varsity level, making an impact in all three phases of the game. Thomas was the district Newcomer of the Year, finishing with 22 catches for 571 yards and 10 touchdowns, and 17 tackles, seven pass break-ups and three interceptions.

“JT gives adds an explosive over the top element that our offense has been lacking in the past,” Fontenot-Amedee said. “We felt every week like he would win over the top in a given situation, and as a sophomore that is a pretty special thing. His improvement on defense as a lock down corner over the course of the year was evident when he had two interceptions in the first half of the second playoff game. His future is bright.”

Senior Jorge Cabasos was the leader of the Bulldogs’ defense from start to finish this season from his position at insider linebacker and finished with a team-high 115 tackles, 11 tackles for loss, 4.5 sacks and two forced fumbles. Cabasos, a three-year varsity player, helped the Bulldogs allow less than 20 points per game (19.7) in district play, and was named the district’s Defensive MVP.

“Jorge came in as a freshman who just loved football,” Fontenot-Amedee said. “He was willing to play any position, and I think we played him at just about every position over his 4 years here. Jorge is a very smart guy. This combined with his experience playing multiple positions and most importantly the amount of hard work he put in afforded him the opportunity to be the defensive player of the year. This guy never missed an opportunity to get better: at our off season and

summer workouts he was a lynch pin. He was always there. I'm so proud of Jorge and the amazing senior season and career he had.”

Junior Gavin Spruell earned recognition for his play on the offensive and defensive line as the Bulldogs’ anchor in the trenches, and was named the district Lineman of the Year. Spruell helped pave the way for 3,015 rushing yards and 1,553 passing yards from his position at left tackle, and he finished with 56 tackles, 13.5 tackles for loss and four sacks on the defensive line.

“Gavin is a physical football player with a relentless motor,” Fontenot-Amedee said. “I really think he believes he is the best lineman on the field every time he plays a game. He plays with great leverage and has really good length which helps him out defensively. This guy has also earned every single accolade he gets through his hard work. I usually have to kick him out of the weight room when the day is done because he is so passionate about getting better.”

The Bulldogs also had a handful of players earn first team all-district honors. Senior outside linebacker Dylan Gherman (91 tackles, 10.5 tackles for loss, two sacks, three PBU, three forced fumbles, one fumble recovery), sophomore safety Dane Barnett (62 tackles, one tackle for loss, six PBU, one fumble recovery, two interceptions), junior nose guard Josh Goff (31 tackles, 2.5 tackles for loss), senior defensive end Carson Powers (52 tackles, 6.5 tackles for loss, 1.5 sacks, two fumble recoveries), senior outside linebacker Daniel Freeman (80 tackles, 10.5 tackles for loss, one sack, one forced fumble, one fumble recovery), and senior inside linebacker Eric Straeter (51 tackles, 3.5 tackles for loss) were all first team all-district selections on the defensive side.

Junior defensive back Samuel Snavely (32 tackles, 3 PBU) was a second team all-district selection.

“For most of the year, we played really good defense,” Fontenot-Amedee said. “Our front 7 this season were as good as any team I've coached. They were a special group who had to learn their 3rd defensive scheme of their high school careers. Coach [Jacob] Campsey did a great job of getting our defense to believe in what we were selling and executing on a weekly basis. I was so impressed with the next level

conversations our defensive guys were having with their teammates and coaches this season. I'm so proud of their growth. These guys believed we would win the 4th quarter and that is what we did for the majority of the season. It is a dream come true as a coach to have your team buy in to what you are preaching and this team sold out to win the 4th quarter.” Offensively, sophomore running back Juan Cabrera (197 carries, 1,118 yards, nine touchdowns), sophomore wide receiver Benton Cloudt (9 catches, 118 yards, 6 touchdowns), sophomore right tackle Logan Harman, senior center Noah Sizemore, senior left guard Roger McCrobie, and sophomore kicker Maverick Short earned first team all-district honors.

Freshman right guard Isaiah Coloney was a second team all-district selection.

“All the pieces fit together well and these guys did everything we asked them to day in and day out to improve,” Fontenot-Amedee said. “Our offensive line took a while to get there, but they really gelled and at times absolutely dominated this year. We had a really good group of receivers who were extremely unselfish (which can be rare in the receiver world), and they weren't worried about counting the number of touches they got but making the touches they got count. Our dynamic duo in the backfield were very unselfish and were willing blockers and gave great fakes to help generate big plays for one another as well. Hats off to our offensive coaching staff who busted their butts to build an offense tailor-fit for this group of football players. We had two 1k rushers and two receivers with at least 10 touchdowns this season.”

Additionally, the Bulldogs had 11 players earn Academic All-District honors for their efforts to maintain at least a 90 grade point average throughout football season. Daniel Freeman, Jorge Cabasos, Ibrahim MacNeil, West Cloudt, Benton Cloudt, Eric Straeter, Dane Barnett, Roger McCrobie, Carson Powers, Noah Sizemore and Quinn King were each academic all-district award recipients.

“We have good, smart kids,” Fontenot-Amedee said. “We take pride in being successful. The same character and integrity that our players

practice with is the character and integrity that they exemplify in the classroom. They want to win, and that starts in the classroom.”