2024 Husky Football banquet remarks by Timothy Grimm

Greetings Husky football fans! For those of you who don't know me, my name is Tim Grimm. I have been the statistician for North football and basketball since long before any of the players in this room were ever born. In fact, possibly since before many of their parents ever met one another.

I maintain a website called www.nhsrecords.com that contains 64 seasons of Husky football history—from which all of the records and statistics that I site this evening are drawn from. I missed this event last season with a bad case of the flu, but am back for what is now my 18th time to be given the honor of addressing the Husky Football banquet.

This class—this class of 2024-25 seniors—have enjoyed a storied position in North football history.

1. They were part of an organization that one its first Sectional championship in 24 years.
2. As a group, they witnessed 24 varsity football victories, the most in a four year period since 2001.
3. They were members of a program that has enjoyed five consecutive seasons with 5 or more wins for the first time since 1969!

You see, at times in its 64 year history, North has been a powerhouse football program. In the 60's, it was a cradle of coaches and rivaled Reitz for the title team of the decade. Indiana Hall of Fame Coach Morris Riley had a staff of assistants that included three men who would also become Indiana Hall of Fame coaches—Archie Owen, Ed Wessel, and Don Watson.

There were some individual seasons in the 70's when North challenged for state wide recognition and beat exceptional opponents.

It wasn't until the 90's, however, that North would again soar to the heights of the top of state competition and win multiple Sectional titles and challenge for a state title. But even that group of athletes and over-achievers could not accomplish the sustained success of five consecutive seasons of five or more wins.

I hope that provides some context of what Coach Paridaen and his staff have managed to create here on the North side. The youth football program provides skilled players to the junior high who then matriculate into the freshman, jayvee, and varsity programs with skill sets necessary to generate sustained winning football.

Congratulations to all of you coaches, parents, supporters, and players who have created a culture of success here on Evansville's north side.

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Tonight, we celebrate the accomplishments of the 2024 team and this talk normally highlights the careers of the seniors in the program. Which is not to say that the underclassmen did not help produce success, it's just that their stories are not complete yet (and… everybody would have to sit through a much longer talk…).

There were multiple seniors who waited their turn to take over at a position—we graduated an exceptional senior class last season and some spots had been manned by multi-year starters. But when their turn came to shine, these seniors did so with great success. Take for instance **Ethan Bowden**—a two year starter at jayvee, he had to wait for his chance on Friday nights. And when it came, he did not disappoint. Playing middle linebacker, he swallowed up runners as they came through the line and played the field from the inside to the outside. His speed allowed him to chase down runners and his nose for the football put him in position to create turnovers. On the season he finished with 86 tackles (45 of the solo variety), 8 tackles for loss, and four turnovers on fumble recoveries and interceptions. He even blocked a kick for good measure.

Playing just in front of him was another senior who had to wait his turn behind three linemen who each made All-Conference or All-City in multiple seasons. **Zethan Colon** was patient and learned from practicing against such talented upper classmen. He made the most of his senior season with 41 tackles (19 solo), 7 tackles for loss, a pair of quarterback sacks, and a fumble recovery. Zethan was so recognized as a 'disrupter' by opponent coaches and players that he, too, was named to post season All-Conference and All-City teams. His senior season was an example of the type of 'sustained excellence' that this program has generated.

Alongside him, senior **James Beck** proved he earned his spot on the defensive line. After a junior season in which he excelled on special teams with multiple tackles on punt and kickoff returns, James stepped into a starting role and earned his keep with 20 tackles, 4 tackles for loss and three quarterback sacks.

Alex Wheeler comes from a long line of Husky footballers. His father was a two-sport All-City performer (including City Baseball Player of the Year) and is still listed on the all-time interception lists at North. His brother was a two-year starter at quarterback and this year, Alex continued the family tradition. He held down multiple spots in the offensive line over the course of the season playing center, guard, and tackle.

Not every first year starter was required to wait—at least not 'within' the North program. Senior **Jake Tenbarge** endured a waiting period of his own across town before transferring to the Huskies for his final season. "All" he accomplished in that single season was to throw for 1,022 yards and complete 60.6% of

his passes. *North's 'Red Rifle'* ended up with the SECOND best completion percentage in school history and the 12th most passing yards in a season.

We did have quite a few players who were multi-year starters and significant contributors on the Sectional Championship team of 2023. The Happe family has produced several siblings who have blazed a path across both boys and girls sports these last few years. **Grant Happe** was the latest of his siblings to attain such heights. As a receiver, he caught 41 passes (good for 16th in school history) for five touchdowns and 383 yards. As a defender, he was the glue that held the pass defense together this season as we brought in three underclassmen as first time starters. Grant proved to be the leader they needed and finished his career with 42 tackles (32 solo) and finished tied for 9th all time in career interceptions.

Austin Bell and **Mathew Pegram** filled outside linebacker slots for the last two seasons and played a huge role in holding our 2024 opponents to UNDER 100 yards rushing in 8 of our 11 games. Few runners could 'turn the corner' and get up field because of their containment. **Bell** finished his career with 43 tackles (31 solo) and a pair of fumble recoveries. When post-season accolades were handed out, had Tim Grimm had a ballot for All-City, you can rest assured I would have penciled in **Mathew Pegram** at linebacker. Not only did he finish his career with over 110 tackles (60 solo) but this season alone he accounted for 12 tackles for loss, four quarterback sacks, he caused a pair of fumbles and picked off a pass. For my money, **Mister Pegram** was a *'difference maker'*.

When you look at the continued success the program has had at the varsity level, there is one area that you have to point to as the strength of the team the last several season. While we have had record setting quarterbacks, stout defenders, five consecutive seasons with a 1,000 yard rusher in the backfield, it's not "the glory boys" who enable such success. No, it is the men who toil in the trenches, the ones who get dirty on every single play, the faceless players who open the holes, hold back the defenders, and grunt and fight for every inch of success a team realizes… those are the players who matter most when you're talking about long-term success in a football program.

North was blessed with four multi-year starters in the offensive line and you cannot say enough about their contribution to the victories this team has experienced. **Ty Acuff, Brady Reeves, Aiden Wargel**, and **Ben Brasher** were the faceless numbers up front who enabled exceptional offensive performances. Try these stats on for size:

The last two seasons, with these four in the offensive line, North played 23 games and AVERAGED almost 200 yards rushing per game and 2.5 rushing touchdowns. Our quarterbacks had time to throw for another

150 yards per game and another touchdown. The Husky offensive line was successful by any measure you want to place against it. Ask a coach going into any single game if he will be happy with 350 yards of total offense, 3 or 4 touchdowns and 200 yards gained on the ground, and you will not hear a single negative reply.

Acuff's senior season was cut short by injury, but he was there every game providing support from the sidelines. **Reeves** was the second multi-year starter in the offensive line that his family produced and it leaves us all wishing there was another brother. **Wargel** teamed with **Brashe**r to make one of the more devastating left sides of the line the Huskies have witnessed this decade. Many was the time those two would not only blast open holes, but you would look up to see them moments later in the second tier of the defense dealing with yet another would-be tackler.

Ben Brasher, perhaps, has enjoyed one of the most prolific offensive line careers in the last couple decades at North. A four-year starter at left guard, he has opened holes for FOUR thousand yard rushers—**T.J. Hankins, Angelo St. Louis, Cainen Northington**, and **Jason Rucker II.** He received post-season accolades last year and has repeated those All-City and All-Conference titles this season. I have no doubt his name will be among those listed on the All-State football team as well. His big frame and his text book blocking technique will be incredibly difficult to replace next season, but the joy of this event is to celebrate careers like his and say thank you for an exceptional job well done.

If the Huskies needed a "home run" on the football field for the last several years, they could look to one reliable player to provide it: **Jason Rucker II**. As a sophomore, he burst onto the scene with an amazing 257 yard rushing performance and 4 touchdowns versus Bosse—including a pair of scores from 89 and 57 yards out. Later that season he set the school record with a 97 yard kickoff return for a touchdown in the sectional against Castle.

As a junior, he played behind a 1,000 yard senior rusher, but still managed to score 10 touchdowns and run for over 700 yards. He played an enormous role in the Sectional Championship with another 4 touchdown game in which he gained an amazing 293 yards and scored from 55 and 70 yards out.

His time in the spotlight came as a senior and his 10 touchdowns told a similar story. North's *'home run'* averaged nearly 30 yards per score. He electrified the crowd whenever he broke free**. Jason** finished with 1,002 yards rushing for the season. He totaled 2,129 rushing yards despite just a single season as the 'feature' back in the offense. That number puts him in the TOP 10 ALL TIME for a career. He scored 152

points—THE 12TH MOST BY ANY PLAYER in school history. Over his career, **'Ruck'** averaged 6.8 yards per carry—good for SEVENTH best all time.

As we draw to a close, however, there is one player who will always typify for me the spirit of this 2024-25 class. Thrust into the spotlight as a freshman when injuries required him to start a game at quarterback, **Luke Grayson** went in, did his job, and the Huskies won the game.

As a sophomore, his exceptional *'head for the game'* and physical style of play won him the job as the starting middle linebacker. Luke produced 53 tackles that season and four tackles for loss.

He set the tone for the defense as a junior with sensational play in the opening minutes of the game against Harrison. He followed up an opening play blitz for a quarterback sack with another blitz for a safety. On offense Luke played at tight end as well as running back and recorded another 59 tackles including 9 tackles for loss.

Throughout his career he displayed a willingness to play wherever his team needed him to play whenever they needed him to play there. **Grayson** did this without objection and whenever he moved to a new position, he did his best to play the game with a combination of heart, determination, and intelligence.

As a senior, it became apparent that the linebacker position was deep, but the defensive line was not. **Luke** moved to the defensive line and, *though undersized*, held down his spot. When the offense was in need of a '*tough yard',* he came in an took the ball and dove into the middle of the line for first downs. And when the call came to fill in at quarterback, he again answered the call the only way he knew how.

The son of a pair of Husky legends—*his father, Buster, was an All-City quarterback on North's first sectional championship team in '92 and his mother, Tiffany, was an All-Conference volleyball player and Division One athlete at U of E*—**Grayson** stepped in at halftime against Jasper and completed 7 of 8 passes and nearly led the Huskies to a come from behind victory. Had that game lasted two minutes longer I'm confident he would have found a way to win it

His next two starts saw the Huskies destroy arch-rival Central with a running clock victory and **Luke** led the team to a 21-0 lead against New Albany in the sectional semi-final before an injury ended his season. Whatever the team needed, whenever they needed it, **Luke Grayson** gave the team his all.

That has to be the defining spirit of any successful program and is the type of program that Coach Paridaen and his staff continue to build at North.

And now if I may, I turn the podium back over to my coach, your coach, our coach, Mr. Joey Paridaen.