

# **St. Frances Academy rolls to another A Conference football title**

St. Frances Academy in Baltimore completed its total dominance of the local scene Nov. 19, when the Panthers scored five second-half touchdowns in 13 minutes to run by Gilman School, 44-7, in the Maryland Interscholastic Athletic Association A Conference championship game at Homewood Field on the campus of The Johns Hopkins University.

It was a familiar effort from the Panthers, who have outscored the opposition by an average of 36 points this season.

St. Frances Academy, which went 6-0 in conference play, improved to 12-0 overall and isn't done with its landmark season. Ranked No. 1 in the state and No. 13 in USA Today's Super 25, the Panthers will play Dec. 23 in Phoenix, against an opponent to be determined, in the GEICO State Champions Bowl Series.

The A Conference title was the latest accomplishment for a school that did not have a football program until 2008. It showed its ambitions in 2013, when the Panthers leapt from the C Conference to the A Conference, but they did not win a game at that level two years ago.

All that changed, however, when the coaching staff and accompanying resources that had built Gilman into an A Conference power moved to St. Frances Academy.

"It's a great season with a bunch of great kids," said Biff Poggi, a co-head coach along with Henry Russell.

In the A Conference semifinals the previous Sunday, St. Frances Academy beat McDonogh and Gilman beat Calvert Hall a second time.

The Panthers, who trounced the Greyhounds 50-0 during the regular season, fell for an onside kick to open the game and fell behind 7-0, but outscored their opponent 44-0 the rest of the way.

Joachim Bangda, a junior, carried the ball 16 times for 148 yards and four touchdowns on an afternoon when a strong wind put greater emphasis on the ground game.

Classmate Jake Larson put St. Frances Academy ahead for good with a 34-yard field goal with 3:25 remaining in the first half. His punts and kickoffs helped the Panthers control field position.

Four touchdowns in the third quarter included an 8-yard run from junior quarterback Jalon Jones, and a 29-yard interception return by sophomore linebacker Osman Savage.

“We wanted to show them (Gilman) we’re here,” Savage said. “We’ve been preparing this whole week. Our motto is ‘practice how we play.’ On that first series (following the game-opening onside kick), we didn’t play hard.”

*View more photos in our Smugmug gallery **here**.*

*Visual journalist Kevin J. Parks contributed to this article.*

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