

# COWETA SCORE

## MIDDLE SCHOOL FOOTBALL: Knight, Knight - Arnall repeats as CCMSAL champs with 39-6 victory

Arnall defeated Smokey Road 39-6 in the CCMSAL title game while avenging its only loss of 2021.

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*Arnall Middle avenged a previous loss to Smokey Road in the CCMSAL championship game, defeating the Wildcats 39-6 at Drake Stadium. It was Arnall's second consecutive title after both teams played in last year's title game.*



The second of two meetings in 2021 between Arnall and Smokey Road middle school football teams looked drastically different than the first a month earlier.

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*Arnall celebrates Andrew Shoch's short punt return for a touchdown that opened the scoring for the Knights in the first quarter.*

And by the end of a second straight CCMSAL championship game between the league's two most successful programs over the past two seasons, the Knights, now a slight underdog on paper, were still on top, holding a first-place trophy at the end of another year.

Arnall successfully defended their hold as CCMSAL champions, using a convincing 39-6 victory over Smokey Road at Drake Stadium to both add a second straight title while also avenging their only loss over the past two seasons.

The Knights completed the title run with a 6-1 record while Smokey Road finished 5-2.

Despite ending the season in mid May rather than late October as in years past due to a shift in the CCMSAL schedule amid COVID-19 conditions, an abnormally cool afternoon with

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temperatures dipping below 60 provided a fall-like atmosphere. *Tyler Horsley attempts to rip the ball out of the hands of Nathan Scales in the first half.*

the backdrop of snapped trees and damaged buildings at Newnan High from the EF4 tornado, however, provided a stark reminder of the move to spring in the first sporting event held at Drake Stadium since the storm ravaged the campus just after midnight on March 26.

Arnall's first half was as much a stunner to Smokey Road, jumping out to a commanding 21-6 lead while holding the Wildcats outside the 20-yard line throughout four quarters.

The Knights put a previous 14-0 shutout loss to the top-seeded Wildcats on April 14 in the rear-view mirror, scoring in all three phases of the game before halftime and staving off any hopes of a comeback by Smokey Road.

The Wildcats, entering the title contest with a similar 5-1 record after equally dominating East Coweta Middle 34-6 in the semifinals at home, never got a chance to get comfortable despite holding opponents to just under 10 points on average.

Instead, the Knights held Smokey Road's offense to minus-11 yards and zero touchdowns. The Wildcats' only score came with 12 seconds before halftime on Taydin Florence's 60-yard interception return.

Arnall eighth-grade standout Jayshon Stegall took care of the offensive load, racking up 175 rushing yards and three scores while also connecting on a 36-yard pass play to eighth grader Cohen Peeples to put an exclamation point on the victory.

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Twice, Stegall found running lanes to score on fourth down, either getting help on a block or by way of his own two feet while making something out of nothing.

A 45-plus yard kickoff return by Stegall to open the game was as much of a sign of things to come. He also had a long touchdown run in traffic called back prior to Smokey Road's interception return to end the half.

The Knights, however, used a couple of heads up plays on special teams and defense to set an early tone with opening touchdowns by two more eighth graders, Andrew Shoch and Austin Arrington.

Shoch made a heads-up play on a short punt from inside the Smokey Road 10-yard line that was left to sit on the turf, scooping it up and scoring with 3:05 to go in the first quarter. Peeples seemed to get a piece of the kick attempt on a rush from right end while being able to force a short punt.

Just when the Wildcats seemed to finally be building some momentum on an ensuing drive, a screen pass attempt to the sidelines fell to the turf as a ruled lateral and Arrington quickly made a move on the ball for a 51-yard fumble return and a 14-0 lead.

It was a position Smokey Road hadn't faced all season, having dropped its only regular season game in overtime. Punt situations were uncomfortable for the team, resulting not only in Shoch's score, but kicks that rarely went more than 20 yards.

Smokey Road didn't pick up its initial first down until early in the fourth quarter while pressured by an Arnall front line that was led by Tyler Horsley, Chase Lewandowski and Devoris Reams. Gavin McCoy and seventh grader Brysen Davies equally kept ball carriers from gaining ground among a group of Arnall defenders that also included Braxtyn Davies, Dominic DiGiulio and Calvin Pettaway in addition to Peeples, Arrington, Stegall and Shoch in the secondary.

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*Austin Arrington wraps up Smokey Road's Dedre Arnold.*

Horsley had a legitimate argument on a stripped ball that could have easily been ruled a fumble during a call for stopped forward progress in the first half.

Arnall nearly came up with a safety on Smokey Road's initial possession, which resulted in the punt return for a score.

The Wildcats' first successful punt early in the second quarter still gave Arnall the ball inside Smokey Road territory. Two snaps later, Stegall waited for blocks to materialize on a run to the left side, only to spin out of trouble and break away for a 43-yard touchdown run for a 21-0 lead following a third consecutive PAT from Kevin Mateo Raymundo.

Arnall was on the march again after a turnover on downs by the Wildcats when Smokey Road found some momentum for the first time on Florence's interception to close the first half.

But with the ball to open the third, the Wildcats were again held in check and forced to punt. Starting quarterback Rodney Colton, who was limited after suffering an injury before halftime, taking a weapon out of the Wildcats' offensive rotation.

The CCMSAL's top seed, however, didn't help itself with 55 yards of penalties in the first half.

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Another infraction prior to Arnall's first snap of the second half put the ball at the Knights 42 to start a drive that seemed to stall immediately.

But facing fourth-and-two from near midfield, Stegall followed the blocks of teammates off right end, including a well-timed seal by Arrington at running back, to race all the way to the end zone while increasing the Arnall lead to 27-6.



*Cohen Peoples celebrates a final touchdown for Arnall with teammate Austin Arrington (2) in the fourth quarter.*

After Smokey Road turned the ball over on downs, the Knights next possession carried into the fourth quarter and again seemed to stall facing fourth-and-10. It set up Stegall's final carry on a weaving 51-yard run that began with lead blocks and had him finding some daylight at the finish to make it 33-6 with 6:43 to play.

A final touchdown throw from Stegall to Peoples was as much a reciprocation for the latter Knight player, who completed two straight passes at quarterback prior to Smokey Road's interception return.

Peoples caught a pass in stride inside the 20 and took it the rest of the way with 1:48 remaining to close Arnall's scoring.

In all, the Knights, led by head coach Tom Horan and assistants Alex Mull, Brennan Knight and Bradley Skelton racked up 211 yards of total offense.

 **COWETA SCORE****CCMSAL Championship****Wednesday, May 12, 2021 at Drake Stadium****Knights 39, Wildcats 6****Arnall                    14 7 6 12 — 39****Smokey Road         0 6 0 0 — 6****1st Quarter**

A — Andrew Shoch punt return (Kevin Mateo Raymundo kick), 3:05

A — Austin Arrington 51 yard fumble return (Mateo Raymundo kick), 0:00

**2nd Quarter**

A — Jayshon Stegall 43 run, (Mateo Raymundo kick), 4:32

SR — Taydin Florence interception return (run failed), 0:12

**3rd Quarter**

A — Stegall 50 run (kick failed), 3:26

**4th Quarter**

A — Stegall 51 run (run failed), 6:43

A — Cohen Peeples 36-yard pass from Stegall (run failed), 1:48