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11/2/2023	0	CITY COUNCIL	ADOPTED		

Congratulating the Martin Luther King High football team for winning the Public League Liberty Division Title.

WHEREAS, From 2019 to 2023, Coach Malik Jones has done a good job of keeping his Martin Luther King High football team, The Cougars, on the right track; and

WHEREAS, On October 20, the team was able to win their first division title since 2018. The Cougars traveled to West Philadelphia High Field where they defeated the Speedboys, 34-22, capturing their first Public League Liberty Division title in the school's history; and

WHEREAS, In the first quarter, the Cougars struck first when quarterback Isaiah Robinson threw a great pass to wide receiver Amir Muhammad, who was wide open for a 32-yard touchdown reception. The touchdown pass gave them a 6-0 lead. Robinson then scored a two-point conversion on a quarterback sneak. That extended King's lead to 8-0. After the Speedboys failed to score a touchdown, the Cougars took over the football at their own 10-yard line. Two plays later, Robinson struck again. He threw a 90-yard touchdown pass to wide receiver Makhai Robinson. The touchdown pass and a two-point conversion extended King's lead to 16; and

WHEREAS, On West Philadelphia's next possession, the Speedboys moved the football inside the 10-yard line. But instead of throwing a touchdown pass, the Speedboys quarterback threw an interception in the end zone. King cornerback Shameer Keith picked off the pass and ran the football back for a 103-yard touchdown giving the Cougars a 22-0 lead with 4:35 left in the first half. About three minutes later, King scored their third touchdown. King running back Shamir Norton rushed into the end zone which gave the Cougars a 28-0 lead with 1:48 left in the first half. Before the first half ended, the Speedboys managed to score a touchdown. After that, King held a 28-6 lead at halftime; and

WHEREAS, Once the third quarter started, there was tough defense played by both teams until Isaiah Robinson found Makhai Robinson wide open again, but this time for a 25-yard touchdown pass which extended the

Cougars' lead to 34-8 with 2:05 left in the third quarter. With the game out of reach, the Speedboys managed to score a rushing touchdown early in the fourth quarter. They also picked off an interception that was returned for a touchdown late in the fourth quarter. But it was too little, too late and Martin Luther King won the game, 34-22; and

WHEREAS, During the game, King's junior cornerback Sameer Keith was a beast in the secondary. He finished the game with two interceptions which included his first interception that went for a 103-yard touchdown return. Meantime, King's wide receiver Makhai Robinson was named Offensive Player of the Game when he caught two touchdown passes, his first one going 90 yards for a touchdown; and

WHEREAS, The Cougars finished the regular season with an overall 7-1 record, their best since 2018 when they finished at 9-3. This season, the Cougars were undefeated in the Liberty Division and the Public League. The story behind the success of this year's team can be attributed to the Cougars' head coach Malik Jones; and

WHEREAS, On June 19, 2019, Martin Luther King High School appointed Jones as its new football coach. Upon Jones becoming the new coach, he was able to bring a new kind of leadership to a respected and competitive football program. Not only did Jones come back to his alma mater, but he offered both opportunities and experience to a young team that had a difficult time dealing with life away from the football field. One of the things he did to improve this football team was to provide mental health classes for his players. He was able to set up group sessions that dealt with different issues outside of football; and

WHEREAS, ABC World News interviewed Jones about his focus surrounding mental health when dealing with his players. According to Jones, many of his players were already dealing with the gravity of gun violence outside of the school walls. So, by dealing with these serious issues, Jones was able to provide an open-door abuse awareness and prevention program to his players; and

WHEREAS, The program also included bringing in high-profile athletes, like Philadelphia Eagles tackle Lane Johnson, to talk to the players about his experience related to his mental health; and

WHEREAS, By providing these kinds of services, Jones has been able to peel back the stigma that is often connected to players seeking help or acquiring the necessary tools to survive outside of football. By supporting his players, Jones can communicate with them in a way that relates to them as individuals; and

WHEREAS, "A lot of my players have lost personal close friends due to gun violence," Jones said. "So, it was a very scary time when I became the head coach. Not only was there a pandemic - we were trying to dodge COVID - we were also literally trying to dodge bullets"; and

WHEREAS, With his fourth season under his belt, Jones has his team on the right track. With a playoff game scheduled for October 27 against the Frankford Pioneers, the Cougars had a shot at advancing to the 5A Public League Title game. There was a good chance the Cougars would have to face the West Philadelphia Speedboys again in the next Public League playoff round; and

WHEREAS, "West Philly is an extremely tough team," Jones said. "We had a very tough time with them last year in the playoffs - we lost to them in overtime. We knew we were coming in here in a hostile environment. They were not looking to lay down, they were going to give us their best. We knew what to expect. We knew we had to give our best. If not, it could have been the end to our title hopes. I'm glad that we responded the way we did. They put up a good fight. They made it into a tough game. Much respect to the West Philly Speedboys"; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, The Council of the City of Philadelphia hereby congratulates the Martin Luther King High football team for winning the Public League Liberty Division Title.