

King's Academy @ Pinecrest Academy

CUMMING, Ga. – Pinecrest senior Josh Mahaffey was rolled off Pinnacle Field and into an ambulance with just over five minutes left in the final quarter of the Paladins' game against King's Academy on Friday night.

"He was able to move his hands good and his feet good and he could feel all the tests they did on him," Pinecrest Head Coach Shawn Coury explained to both teams after the game. "Going forward, we would really appreciate y'all's prayers."

Coury informed the players that Mahaffey was having difficulties with his neck and that he was taken to the hospital as a precaution. One King's Academy coach seemed to have seen Mahaffey's head whip hard on the ground when trying to make a stop on a Pinecrest kickoff.

After nearly half an hour, both teams had to perform warm-up drills again before playing out the remaining five minutes and wrapping up the game in a King's Academy 35-16 victory.

"It brings it all into focus," Knights Head Coach Scott Walker said. "We hope he has a really, really quick recovery and is back with [the Paladins] soon."

The injury occurred near the end of a frustrating game for the Paladins. After keeping the game close for the first 22 minutes, the Knights scored twice on three plays in the final two minutes of the first half. A 4-yard touchdown run by King's Academy freshman running back Jaxson Bone and a blocked Pinecrest punt by junior Charlie Parker Singleton were sandwiched by a 54-yard completion from senior quarterback Will Johnson to fellow senior Kyle Mullenix and a 31-yard touchdown pass from Johnson to senior Gavin Smathers.

The Knights (6-2, 3-1) totaled three rushing touchdowns, two from Bone and one from sophomore Bo Beavers. Meanwhile, Johnson racked up two passing touchdowns, the one to Smathers and another to junior Josiah Werner.

Those two minutes stunned the Paladins (3-4, 0-2) and they could not shake it off, despite Coach Coury's best efforts to motivate and challenge them.

"Two little, quick mistakes put us in the hole and that's the important lesson for them," said Coury. "When you're in the hole, you've got to fight and claw and dig your way out of it, and you've got to do it together. You can't do it by yourself."

Juniors Matthew Mitchell and Matthew Tollet were bright spots for the Paladins. Mitchell accrued 139 passing yards and a touchdown, while Tollet collected 86 rushing yards and a touchdown. Freshman Parker Locke blocked a Knights PAT attempt in the first quarter and junior Johnny Lynch held his own on both sides of the ball, picking up 32 receiving yards and a touchdown on offense as well as several big tackles on defense.

But the big story for the Paladins was no doubt injury. Prior to Mahaffey's injury, Mitchell was slow to get up on two plays in the second half, citing head pain, and senior Andrew Spain was also pulled for the night after he came up favoring his left leg only a handful of plays before Mahaffey went down.

When asked about what Pinecrest will do to prepare for next week, Coury did not have an answer.

"I'm just worried about our community and family and want to make sure we take care of our buddy. We'll focus on that for now," said Coury.

The Paladins coaches will have their hands full this weekend trying to juggle keeping up with their players and planning for what they can improve on during next week's practices.

The Knights will look to win their fifth straight game when they host King's Ridge Christian next Friday, Oct. 27 while the Paladins try to bounce back at Cherokee Christian.