It wasn't the way an Airline senior class that has contributed so much to the success of the program the last two years wanted to go out. The Vikings fell to the defending state champion West Monroe Rebels 34-14 in the Class 5A quarterfinals Friday in West Monroe. But the loss in no way diminished what the senior class accomplished this season. Airline, the No. 6 seed, finished 10-3 and shared the District 1-5A championship with Parkway and Byrd. It was the school's first district title in football since 1998. Winning the district and playing during Thanksgiving week were two of the main goals coach Bo Meeks set for his team before the season. "This senior class was unbelievable," Meeks said. "I think that they brought pride and a great amount of success back to Airline football. I think (Airline) had won four playoff games in the last 16 years before last season and they won three in the last two. They won 17 games and had the first 10-win season since 1998. "Those are things that they are going to be able to hold on to for a lifetime. And they're going to be able to look back and say they were a part of a group that got this thing rolling. I have a lot of respect for them and am extremely proud of the things they've done." One of the 23 seniors was quarterback Hayden Hildebrand, who twice returned to the game in the second half after being knocked out on hits to his already injured right knee. Hildebrand played with a torn lateral meniscus ligament in his right knee the second half of the season. Meeks said he is scheduled to have surgery Thursday. Hildebrand is also a three-time All-District 1-5A selection in basketball. Hildebrand's father, Bryan, said Sunday that Hayden will likely have to miss just two to four weeks of the season. Against third-seeded West Monroe (11-2), Hildebrand completed 16 of 36 passes for 211 yards. He also rushed for 59 yards and scored on a 5-yard run. Hildebrand finished the season with 2,982 yards passing, breaking his own school record set last season. He finished his career as the school's all-time leading passer. Meeks said every member of the senior class contributed in some way, whether it was in games or practice. In addition to Hildebrand, the senior class was comprised of running back Michael Nunnery; wide receivers Chris Stinnett, Trey Turner, Laterious Pouncy and Logan Williams; defensive backs Kevin James, Jaquavis Hart, Gus Boniao, Drevon Rhodes, Selby Baker and Jaterious Pouncy; linebacker Ladariun Stinnett; kicker Matt Hanisee; defensive linemen Demontre Evans, Hunter Harris, Joshua Smith, Drake Averitt and Aaron McGuire; and offensive linemen Doss Pickett, Cameron Robertson, Tyler Wooten, Matt Turpin and John Szwak. The Vikings dug themselves a big hole in the first half, falling behind 26-7. West Monroe amassed 420 yards — 279 rushing and 140 passing. "Their guarterback is strong and their backs are strong," Meeks said. "We just didn't tackle well in the first half. You can't get behind a team like that, especially as good they are defensively and how well they work the clock. It makes it tough. At the same time, we had a couple of opportunities to get back in it. So I was really proud of the way our guys fought. Just didn't make enough plays you have to make to beat a great team like West Monroe." Airline got within 12 early in the third quarter when Demontre Evans returned a fumble 12 yards for a touchdown.<sup>9</sup> The Vikings got the ball back around midfield. Facing third-and-long, Hildebrand threw an interception on a deep route as he was hit and had to leave the game for the first time. Trey Turner caught eight passes for 81 yards and Laterious Pouncy had five for 59. Jaterious Pouncy had an interception in the end zone. The Vikings had some scoring opportunities in the first half but couldn't convert. They reached the West Monroe 34 early in the game but turned the ball over on downs. Near the end of the half, they drove to the 8 but couldn't score.

## **West Monroe too much for Airline**

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