



LOREN ORR Loren Orr Photography

Justin Douglas (No. 32) celebrates a state title with teammates in Rexburg, Idaho, last weekend.

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

Sacramento prep stars play out of state, no regrets

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Justin Douglas and Takeshi Faupula enjoyed playing football so much they were willing to move out of state to continue the competition.

None of this would be a surprise if they were in college. Douglas and Faupula are high school seniors who went to any lengths to keep playing and to raise their chances of playing in

college, preferably through scholarship means.

So, have game, will travel. The governing body California Interscholastic Federation in July announced it was pushing the start of the prep sports calendar into 2021 to combat the rise in coronavirus numbers. But there were no guarantees football would start on time or at all, with those decisions ultimately falling on the shoulders of county health departments, school districts

and individual leagues.

That was enough for the families of Douglas and Faupula to brainstorm. Their options were to stay put and hope for a winter 2021 season, or to move in with relatives out of state and start fresh.

They moved.

Douglas is a 6-foot, 210-pound do-all player who suited up for Christian Brothers last year and now dons the colors of Rocky Mountain High in Meridian, just outside Boise.

He also bears the broad grin of achievement. He played a vital role in Rocky Mountain's 5A State Championship victory. He had a sack, forced a fumble, recovered a fumble and recorded 11 tackles in a 17-14 victory over defending champion Rigby, which came in with a state-leading 20-game winning streak. Rocky Mountain finished 11-0 in a COVID-19-shortened season.

The Nov. 21 state game was played in crisp, dry conditions, in front of a large gathering. Fans wore masks to do their part to ensure no stalls or delays tied to COVID-19 (some prep games across the country had games halted or canceled in progress due to fans refusing to wear masks, despite reminders at the entrance).

In Utah, Faupula carried the ball as a 5-9, 225-pound bruiser of a fullback at Lehi High. It was his third school. He started his prep career at small-school

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powerhouse East Nicolaus of the Northern Section before playing the 2019 season at Yuba City, a Division III program.

Neither athlete has any regrets. It was worth the challenge of getting to know new classmates, teammates and opponents. They arrived at the start of the academic year, impressed, became starters and got the senior year so many of their friends and rivals crave in the Sacramento region.

Douglas' parents bought a home in Idaho. He will remain there and graduate with his new class after a spring season of baseball.

Faupula will return to Yuba County in the coming weeks, where he will sign a letter of intent to play scholarship college football. He will not be eligible to play football or any sports for Yuba City as prep athletes are not allowed to play two football seasons at different schools in the same academic year.

Faupula had to sit his first three games in Utah, per transfer rules.

"It ended up so fun and it worked out," Faupula said of his Utah move, adding the season intensified his recruiting interest, leading to a verbal commitment to Navy.

"I got some good offers and way more exposure. My mind is pretty much made up with Navy, but I'll hear out other colleges until I sign early next month."

He added, "It was the hardest decision of my life to leave my brothers at Yuba City High. Hard but definitely the right decision for the situation at hand. We didn't think there would be a season in California, and it's still not looking good, I think we were lucky in this decision. If there's a season at Yuba City, I will hopefully be able to help coach, but I'll most likely be helping

my dad do concrete work so the family can have that extra money."

Douglas said it wasn't just the school and sports programs that grew on him. It was the the entire region.

"Idaho's always been a place where my parents have looked to move to," he said. "Beautiful town here, beautiful state. Cannot really beat it, honestly. I found a hell of a football program to play for with amazing coaching and amazing talent. The move was definitely worth it. I've made so many new friends and new connections along the process, and it's given me a little precursor to what college will be like."

Douglas has what college recruiters want: size, ability, versatility, grades and maturity. He has received offers from Northern Arizona of the Big Sky Conference and smaller programs. He at least has more game film to show, and memories to last.

"Being able to win state as a senior, I'll remember that forever," Douglas said. "It's definitely the most fun I've had in high school."

Douglas and Faupula said they would recommend a switch of states for other athletes, if they can and if there's time.

"If someone ever had the same idea as me and was in doubt to do a move, I'd say do it," Douglas said. "It's an incredible experience."

Faupula is ready for more experiences. He is committed to doing a Mormon mission after graduation for two years before heading off to college.

"All in all," he said, "I'm happy with the results."

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