

Mick McCabe: Midland cooks up a two-point conversion play to beat Canton

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Midland teammates congratulate Travis Patten (24) after his 92-yard kickoff return for a touchdown to open the second half against Canton on Thursday night. / Photos by JARRAD HENDERSON/Detroit Free Press

Four quarters and one play shy of an overtime had been completed, and Eric Methner had had enough. He drew up a two-point conversion play on the Midland sideline that would end the season-opening game one way or the other.

"Everybody thinks it's a gutsy call to do that, but our defense was worn out," Methner said. "They played an unbelievable game against that Canton offense. It only took them two quick plays to score in overtime. We weren't close to stopping them."

So Methner put the onus on the Canton defense to try to stop quarterback Alec Johnson, who took the snap from center and rolled right.

"They probably thought I was going to run, but there was good blocking -- Travis Patten got to the outside," Johnson said. "He was the lead blocker out there."

As Johnson strung out the play, Ryan Singer found an open spot in the defense.

"I ran an end-zone corner, those guys just went for the other guy," said Singer. "I just sat right down and was wide open. We made eye contact."

Johnson did throw the ball. He almost threw it too far.

"I thought I overthrew," Johnson said. "All of a sudden people started going nuts and we won it."

Midland pulled out a 29-28 victory Thursday in a game that means more to the Chemics than simply being 1-0.

"To come all this way and play strong," Johnson said, "it means a lot to our program to know we can compete with Canton."

Twenty years ago, it would have meant the world to Canton to be able to compete with Midland, but under Tim Baechler, Canton has established itself as one of the premier programs in the state.

"Canton's everything we knew they were going to be," said Methner. "I'm just really proud of our kids to come down and not only represent Midland High, but represent the Saginaw Valley League. We play good football up there."

So does Canton, which trailed, 21-7, after Patten returned the second-half kickoff 92 yards for a score. The Chiefs had only three second-half possessions, but they scored two touchdowns to tie the game with 3:22 left, and they had a chance to win it with 7 seconds remaining on a 34-yard field goal. But a low snap

forced holder James Hall to throw a pass that Michael Wright intercepted.

"We do it 100 times a week," said Baechler. "They could do it 100 times perfect, but the snap rolled back. We ran our fire play and . . . what the hell, they're kids. They didn't do it on purpose." Though the Chiefs are 0-1, they didn't play like a team that deserved to lose its opener.

"I hate the fact that we lost, but our kids showed us something tonight, and it's something to build on," said Baechler. "If we get healthy and learn and grow from this, this is going to really be beneficial for us down the line."

The last two players to leave the field were the biggest -- Midland's 6-foot-6, 315-pound tackle Steven Elmer, who committed to Notre Dame, and Canton's 6-4, 290 tackle Cameron Dillard, who committed to Florida.

"Against a team like Canton, you have to be prepared," said Elmer. "You know how good they are. Their offense is so good. We haven't played anyone like that in a long time. To come out and win it is absolutely huge. This is the most excited I've been after a game ever."

Dillard was less excited, but he was philosophical after battling Elmer.

"That's my boy, we're actually good friends," said Dillard. "I got a couple of pancakes out there. We did everything we could. There was nothing else we could do. We all make mistakes -- plays went our way, plays went their way."

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