

Chiefs drop wild football opener in OT

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BY TIM SMITH
OBSERVER STAFF WRITER

Two football teams with a playoff pedigree gave fans at Plymouth-Canton Educational Park quite a season-opening game Thursday night, with Midland needing overtime to edge Canton, 29-28.

Despite not having senior playmaker Kendall Scott in the lineup due to an ankle sprain, let alone falling behind 21-7 following a 90-yard kickoff return touchdown by Travis Patten, the Chiefs (0-1) rallied and nearly stunned the Chemics in OT.

A fortuitous bounce along the goal line enabled Midland (1-0) to match Canton's OT-opening touchdown and it took a brilliant throw-and-catch for a two-point conversion to give the visitors the victory.

"You play a great team in the opener, you make some mistakes and some bad things happen to you, that's just the breaks," Canton head coach Tim Baechler said. "That's football. But our kids did battle back and came back. I'm very proud of them."

Canton sophomore quarterback Greg Williams piloted two long, effective scoring drives to make it a 21-21 game with 3:22 left in the fourth and the Chiefs' Olaniyi Owagbemi forced a fumble a minute later (recovered by Matt McKoy) to set up a potential game-winning score.

The Chiefs moved it down to the 15 only for the drive to stall. Then with seven seconds remaining, Baechler sent kicker Connor Shennan in for what would have been a game-winning field goal.

A one-hop snap stymied that try, although James Hall gathered the ball and tried to make something happen anyway. His throw into the end zone was intercepted by Michael Wright to send the exciting game into OT.

Canton converted the first attempt (each team took turns from the 10-yard line) on a three-yard carry by junior Robert Daoud — who was outstanding with 124 all-purpose yards, including 91 rushing. Shennan nailed the extra point to make it 28-21.

ANSWER TIME

Then came the Chemics. Quarterback Alec Johnson ran the ball down to the one, but on the next play the ball popped out of the running back's hands toward the goal line.

Instead of Canton recovering it to finish a win, it landed in the hands of Austen Irrer for six points.

For the tying and winning points, Johnson bootlegged far to his right, looking for an open teammate to throw to or run it in as an option.

Almost crossing the line of scrimmage, he finally launched the pigskin to wide-open Ryan Singer in the back-right corner of the end zone to close out the win.

"Coach (Eric Methner) drew it up on the sidelines, and we ran it and it worked," said Johnson, who completed eight of 11 passes for 85 yards. "I couldn't really tell but I think I was pretty close (to the line of scrimmage). ... Everybody thought I was going to run."

His counterpart, Williams (7-8, 133 yards), played a solid game in his varsity opener at quarterback.

"I was a little nervous in the beginning, but I don't care if I'm a sophomore, junior, senior. I've got to get the job done. that's why I'm here," Williams said. "The whole team did a great effort, down 21-7, we came back and that shows a lot of who we are."

TRADING TOUCHDOWNS

Midland opened the scoring midway through the second quarter on a 58-yard run by Patten (13-110), with the extra point unsuccessful.

The Chiefs responded to take a 7-6 lead one minute later.

Williams' 28-yard pass to Daoud and a 13-yarder to McKoy moved the chains down to inside Midland's 30.

Senior tailback Malcolm Hollingsworth (18-84, two TDs) then burst around right end for the 28-yard TD (with Shennan hitting the extra point).

Midland regained the lead with 15 seconds to play in the half on an 18-yard pass from Johnson to Thomas Smith (four catches, 57 yards) followed by a two-point conversion pass to Will Williams.

On the first play of the second half, Patten scooped up the kickoff near the Midland 10-yard line, found a seam and raced up the gut for a touchdown.

Undaunted, the Chiefs then went on an 84-yard scoring drive in 17 plays to make it 21-13.

Key plays included a pair of 12-yard runs by Daoud and a 15-yard pass to Hall. Punching it in from two yards was Hollingsworth.

After the Chemics missed on a 40-yard field-goal attempt early in the fourth, Canton embarked on another long drive (80 yards in 13 plays) with Hall scoring on a short run and Williams' floater to tight end Scott Gring good for two points.

A crucial play in that march was a 29-yard pass to McKoy down the left sideline on fourth down.

That merely set the table for a wild ending.

"(Singer) was supposed to run a curl and sit there and he was wide open," Midland's Johnson said. "I thought I overthrew it but people started going nuts and we won. I couldn't believe it."

IN THE TRENCHES

The game also featured a much-anticipated matchup of two highly touted linemen who have made verbal commitments to play Division I college football.

Canton senior Cameron Dillard (6-3, 280) and Midland senior Steve Elmer (6-6, 310) committed to Florida and Notre Dame, respectively.

"It was pretty much every play," Dillard said. "We had some real good battles tonight. I really enjoyed it. Steve and I are super good buddies."

Although it was a tough loss, Dillard noted that the chain of events showed the Chiefs they can play well in a playoff-type battle.

"It will make us better at the end of the season," Dillard said. "Some calls went their way, some calls went our way. Nothing you can do, just go out Monday (and prepare for Week 2 next Thursday against Brighton)."

Concurring was Williams, who completed seven of eight passes 128 yards.

"We got to get this loss out of the way and I think we'll be stronger and we'll get it together," Williams said.

tsmith@hometownlife.com | (734) 469-4128