

Chiefs survive big scare from Churchill

Churchill makes it close but loses homecoming 35-28

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Churchill's Malik Johnson (1) rushed for 268 yards on 29 carries in Friday's 35-28 homecoming loss to Canton. / DOUGLAS BARGERSTOCK



Written by [Brad Emons](#)



Churchill's Paul Romain (No. 4) tries to break free from Forrest Hall and a pair of Canton tacklers in Friday's KLAA South clash. / DOUGLAS BARGERSTOCK

State-ranked Canton proved Friday night it can go deep into the well and run a two-minute offense.

After upset-minded Livonia Churchill tied the game up on Malik Johnson's 15-yard touchdown run, followed by Brian Alsobrook's two-point conversion pass to Tim Dulin, the Chiefs had 2:15 left on the clock in a game tied at 28-28.

That's when quarterback Greg Williams went to work and the junior delivered the game-winning TD drive, hitting three straight clutch passes for 19, 6 and 20 yards out of the Chiefs' run-oriented wing-T and leading Canton to a 35-28 victory while spoiling the Chargers' homecoming.

Charles Turfe scored the game-winning TD on a 2-yard run with only 15.9 seconds remaining as Canton stayed unbeaten at 5-0 and 3-0 in the KLAA's South Division.

Williams was 7-of-7 passing on the night for 128 yards, while Turfe went for 161 yards on 23 carries.

"The kid is a winner," Canton coach Tim Baechler said of his QB. "He's so smart. He makes a lot of checks at the line of scrimmage. He's just a calm, cool customer. I like the ball in his hands."

Churchill (0-5, 0-3), which had defeated Canton in their last two meetings, liked the ball in senior tailback Malik Johnson's hands.

The 5-foot-8, 170-pound senior finished with 265 yards rushing on 28 carries as the Chargers looked far from being a winless team.

"We knew coming in they (Churchill) were a great offensive team," said Baechler, whose team won the total yardage battle, 537-392. "Led by their offense, there's just so much stuff they run and you prepare for. They're big up front and they execute well and their backs just ran hard. We were trying to move a lot on them, but when we were there, we couldn't tackle. But give them credit, they played great offensively.

"We just battled enough. It just worked out with the clock. We let them score just fast enough to let us have some time. We executed that last drive with some good throws by Greg Williams and good catches. My God, they just made plays."

Despite taking three 15-yard penalties, Canton scored on its opening drive of the game as Williams hit tight end Jake Boucher on a 23-yard TD pass with 8:39 left in the first quarter on fourth-and-six.

But Churchill came right back to score, as Johnson returned the ensuing kick 51 yards and three plays later the scored on a 3-yard run with 7:35 left after Alsobrook's 30-yard QB keeper set up the score.

Canton then scored on its second possession, going 80 yards in just eight plays, capped by Weston Price's 22-yard TD run up the middle with 3:44 to go to make it 14-7.

The Chiefs made it three-for-three on possessions scoring with 8:33 left in the half, when Williams rolled around end for a 15-yard keeper to make it 21-7. The drive covered 68 yards in 10 plays after the Canton defense stopped Churchill on fourth-and-12 on an incomplete pass in the end zone.

The track meet continued as Churchill zipped down the field in just 4:22 thanks the running of Johnson, who had four carries for 61 yards. Alsobrooks hit Kyle Staff on fourth-and-goal from the 3 for a TD pass with 4:11 left to cut the deficit to 21-14.

But Canton answered again with just 1:08 remaining, when Williams hit Turfe over the umbrella of the Churchill defense to make an over-the-shoulder 43-yard TD grab to give the Chiefs a 14-point cushion at intermission.

Churchill, however, took the second-half kickoff and drove 80 yards in 13 plays, capped by Johnson's 4-yard TD run with 6:10 remaining. But the extra-point snap and hold was botched with 6:10 to go, leaving Churchill behind 28-20.

The Chargers' defense also stopped Canton on drives twice in the second half, but couldn't get the final stop.

“Just some critical mistakes at key times,” Churchill first-year coach Bill DeFillippo said. “I’m proud of our kids’ effort. We missed a couple of passes early in the first half on one drive where we failed on downs. And down at the one (in the final quarter) is when we had a couple of botched snaps. Early in the first half, we allowed them out on some third-and-longs and fourth-and-longs, which kind of did us in at the end.

“They’re a real good football team. Our kids played great football tonight, just a couple of mistakes away from a victory over a great Canton team.”

Johnson, meanwhile, could not be stopped as many of his yards resulted in broken tackles.

“By far our best player,” DeFillippo said. “He’s playing both ways offensively and defensively. And he’s been running like that all year. Just outstanding. We just kept feeding him the ball and our O-line blocked their tails off up front.”

One of the biggest plays came with 1:21 left in the third quarter and Canton ahead 28-20. Churchill got down to the Canton 1, but came up empty on fourth-and-goal at the 2.

“We had a couple of goal line sessions this week to get prepared for that,” Baechler said. “They (the defense) battled. They knew it was coming. They (Churchill) made a lot of plays, too. They’re good.”

Churchill, meanwhile, found its defensive groove in the third quarter limiting Canton to just eight plays.

“It’s hard, because their offense is very deceptive,” DeFillippo said of the Chiefs. “If you’re not disciplined on defense, they can get some play-action pass out there. I thought our kids played real hard on defense tonight and really did a nice job, especially in the second half. We held them to seven points and that was on the final drive. We made some adjustments at halftime, but our kids stayed disciplined and I’m proud of them.”