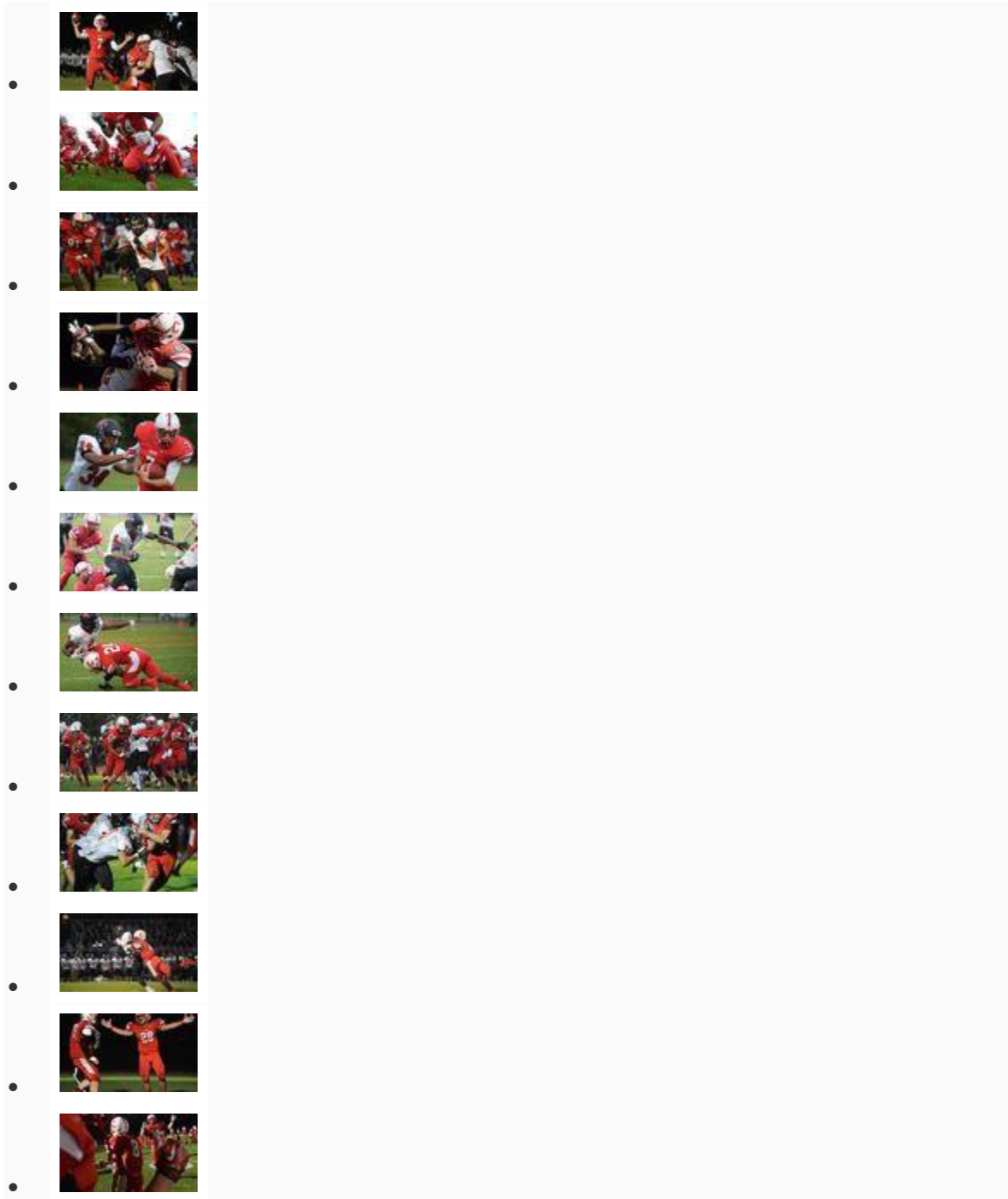


# Fourth-down stops help Canton upset Livonia Churchill

David Goricki, *The Detroit News* 11:42 p.m. EDT October 3, 2014

(Photo: Steve Perez / The Detroit News)





(Photo: Bryan Mitchell)

*Canton* — Canton came up with two huge fourth-down stops in the fourth quarter to come away with a thrilling 40-35 upset victory over previously unbeaten Livonia Churchill Friday night in the battle for first place in the Kensington South Division.

Coach Tim Baechler said coming in that Canton (5-1, 5-0) needed to limit Churchill's big plays to have a chance at an upset. It didn't happen in the first half when Churchill (5-1, 4-1) — which averaged 47 points the previous three weeks — made several big plays to open up a 28-14 lead, the final one a 54-yard TD pass from Brian Alsobrooks to Steve Szymanski in the final minute.

After giving up 303 first-half yards to Churchill, Canton limited the visitors to 165 the rest of the game ... and made the two fourth-down stops.

"That was probably the sweetest win in my career, better than the win at Macomb Dakota that got us into Ford Field," Baechler said. "We had no business beating these people today, no business. Our kids, I don't get it, they just battled. Oh my God, I'm so proud of them.

"At halftime I'm like, 'You guys are like the freshman team. I thought I was coaching the varsity team.' You know what we did? We started running our JV playbook and it worked — that was the magic. We could not base block them because they were too big and strong, everything was double-team, double-team (in second half) because they made us look like ninth graders until we started double-teaming."

Canton piled up 305 yards rushing on 48 attempts with Marcus Sanders rushing for 114 yards on 20 carries and a touchdown, Charles Turfe getting 86 yards and 3 TDs on 10 carries and quarterback Greg Williams running eight times for 52 yards. Williams also completed 8 of 13 passes for 99 yards and a TD.

Still, it was Canton's defense which proved to be the difference.

First, Canton stopped Paul Romain for no gain on fourth-and-1 from Churchill's 32 with six minutes left, holding a 35-34 lead.

On the ensuing first down, Williams broke loose for a 29-yard run to the 3. After a mix-up on a handoff cost Canton yardage, Williams hit Gilo Nolan for an 8-yard TD in the right corner of the end zone with 2:42 left for a 40-35 lead.

"We needed to stay calm, that's what championship teams do, and we did to finish the game," said Williams. "We were running inside and the outside was there (on 29-yard run) and the line did a great job."

"Against Churchill, it's been shootouts the last two years. I was telling our defense during the second half, 'We're going to score every time, I just need one stop from you guys' and they did it."

Canton's defense did it again and again.

Churchill moved the ball to Canton's 5 for a first-and-goal in the final minutes, but Alsobrooks had to throw the ball away on the first two downs, then the ball bounced off the hands of Szymanski, who was well-defended on third down, leading to Jared Stephens' interception in the right corner of the end zone.

"I just went up against 17 (Tim Dulin) and made a play, got the pick," Stephens said. "It was a great win."

Alsobrooks completed 17 of 34 passes for 289 yards and two TDs, but he also threw two interceptions. Romain had 125 yards rushing on 26 carries, just 32 during the second half.

"It's been crazy the last four years when we've played them," Churchill coach Bill DeFillippo said. "We came into halftime feeling OK with a 28-14 lead, having already had three turnovers. We kind of figured if we cleaned that up we'd be OK in the second half, but we just seemed to lose some momentum and defensively we couldn't get a stop and that's why we went for it on fourth-and-inches. Our kids played hard, but we just didn't execute at key times.

"We got down to the 5 and we just needed to make a play and they did and we didn't. We got down there and four consecutive red zone passes from the 5 and we couldn't hit on one. Give credit to their kids for playing great red zone defense. And, I don't know what the stats were, but it seemed like we had 40 penalties and they had like none."

Churchill had 11 penalties for 101 yards and Canton, one for 5.

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