

# Canton's scoring machine crushes Churchill

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(Photo: JOHN KEMSKI | EXPRESS PHOTO)

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Like a well-oiled machine, the Canton Chiefs came out clicking on every cylinder from the start of Friday's Division 1 football district final against Livonia Churchill.

The first eight times the Chiefs had the football, they scored touchdowns.

Add to the mix 637 yards rushing – with 5-6 sophomore Marcus Sanders racking up 363 yards on 27 carries and three touchdowns — and there was really nothing the Chargers could do to stem the tide.

Canton (9-2) rolled to a 56-21 win and advanced to Friday's regional final against either Saline or Monroe.

"We're excited just to be practicing and to keep playing," said Canton head coach Tim Baechler, whose team won a district for the first time since 2009. "Whoever we play next week, we're going to be jacked to play.

"We're still not great. Because of the injuries, we still have not peaked yet as a full football team. Hopefully we do, but it's starting to happen at the right time."

Baechler prepped his squad to come out hard against Churchill, remembering the tussle the KLAA South rivals had Oct. 3 (a grueling 40-35 Canton win).

"We're finally a little healthy up there (offensive line)," Baechler said. "It's the first time we've had the same line healthy for three straight weeks and that's definitely helped us.

"(Churchill is a) great offensive football team. We went in thinking we might have to score every time we get the ball to beat these guys."

The Chargers (8-3) found themselves behind the eight-ball right away when Canton senior running back Chuck Turfe (13 carries, 107 yards, one TD) took the first offensive snap of the game and broke 48 yards down the left sideline.

That set up Sanders for a 20-yard touchdown run with 9:56 left in the first quarter. After the first of eight extra points by Andrew Loehnis, it was a quick 7-0 lead.

Churchill immediately answered the bell, however.

A 46-yard pass from senior quarterback Brian Alsobrooks (8-of-16 passing, 148 yards, two TDs) to senior slot receiver Shakur Lockett moved the Chargers down to the 2-yard line. Alsobrooks, on third down, wheeled around the right edge to find the end zone.

This time, it was Canton that responded when Sanders scored on a carbon-copy run, this time from 19 yards out. Both early TDs were scored after he made sharp diagonal cuts toward the front-left pylon of the end zone.

"We kind of started as a track meet in the beginning," Churchill head coach Bill DeFillippo said. "They got the ball first and we had to keep answering scores and answering scores."

The Chargers let one get away on their next possession, when an Alsobrooks deep pass intended for senior Tim Dulin could not be hauled in.

Canton then got the ball back and made it a 21-7 game with 10:18 left in the half. Sanders slashed his way down the left sideline for 64 yards, down to the Churchill 6-yard line. He would have scored if not for a diving tackle by sophomore Jamal Allen.

But that only delayed Sanders from scoring by one play.

"He makes some things happen," Baechler said about Sanders. "He's not the fastest kid, but he's quick and has great balance.

"We run a system, sometimes our right halfback has the big day, sometimes our left halfback, sometimes the fullback. Tonight was his night."

Churchill showed some of the bounce-back toughness displayed all season when senior running back Paul Romain (10 carries, 80 yards, two TDs) answered with a 58-yard scoring run to cut the deficit to 21-14 with 9:30 left in the half.

He waited for a hole to open up on the left side and shot through it, all the way down the field.

The teams traded touchdowns later in the second quarter, with Canton senior running back Brian Newton (19 carries, 89 yards, three TDs) scoring on a 2-yard run.

On the Chargers' subsequent possession, Alsobrooks connected with senior receiver Dylan Padget for a 63-yard completion and Romain then scored from the 4-yard line to make it 28-21.

Before halftime, Canton senior quarterback Greg Williams completed a 4-yard TD strike to senior tight end Nolan Gilo.

With Churchill getting the ball to open the second half, down only 35-21, DeFillippo knew the first possession was crucial to any comeback.

"Being it was 35-21 at the half and we had the ball first, we had to get a score to turn it into a game again," DeFillippo said. "And we weren't able to do it."

Instead, Alsobrooks was picked off by Canton senior Robert Guajardo near the Chiefs' 25-yard line.

Canton took advantage of that mistake by marching 75 yards in six plays, scoring on Turfe's 1-yard run with 7:43 remaining in the third. That opened up a 42-21 edge.

Newton added a 7-yard touchdown early in the fourth and the Chiefs made it a 35-point spread when Sanders scored, also from the 7.

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