

# Chiefs run over Tractors



When Canton took the field Friday night, they did so without two three-year starters that were lost to graduation in 2015. Naturally there were questions as to who would fill the roles of quarterback Greg Williams and running back Chuck Turfe.

From the get-go, the Chiefs pounded Dearborn Fordson, 42-25, in the annual Detroit Sports Commission Prep Kickoff Classic held at Wayne State's Adams Field. The big stage didn't spook the Chiefs, who proved they were as well-prepared as possible.

"We were able to put the plow down on offense and we were ready," veteran Canton head coach Tim Baechler said.

"We had an opportunity to practice on our turf field, but we practiced in our shoots and our sleds. This was absolutely perfect how they had it set up. I loved it."

After a grueling competition between Jared Stephens and Joel Foster at quarterback, Baechler chose Foster to keep Stephens at safety on defense and give him the opportunity to play running back on offense.

That decision proved to be right on the money as Stephens scored three touchdowns — two on the ground and one receiving, thrown by Foster.

"(Foster) made a lot of improvement from last week; we turned the ball over a lot in the scrimmage," Stephens said. "But we practiced it a lot and made sure it didn't happen again. We all, the players, the coaches, trust him. Joel is a good kid and I like him."

### **In the trenches**

Canton jumped out to an early 14-0 lead on touchdowns by Reid McDonnell and Stephens. Baechler, Stephens and McDonnell credited their early momentum and late-game ground attack to the offensive line. Josh Dunn, Ben Phillips and Devin Obrec paved the way to more than 300 rushing yards in the game.

"I had a great offensive line blocking for me and that helps out a lot," said McDonnell, who had 61 yards on 13 carries.

The story of the night was Canton maintaining a two- to three-possession lead, but never being able to break away. After Fordson cut the Canton lead to 35-25 with 12 seconds left in the third quarter, the Chiefs methodically went on a 70-yard drive, capped by a 15-yard Jakob Wickens touchdown with 6:42 left to play.

Behind the play of Fordson quarterback Hamze Elzayat, the Tractors marched inside the Canton 5-yard line with 5½ minutes remaining. The Chiefs' defense stood their ground on a fourth-and-goal from the goal line when Kassem Beydoun fumbled and McDonnell pounced on it at the 5.

"We just couldn't put them away," Baechler said. "Credit to their coaches and their kids, they never quit. They scored quickly several times, too, and we had that fumble (which set up a Fordson touchdown), so that gave them life. That's something we've got to get better at; when we have a chance to put someone away, we've got to do it."

### **Key first down**

Markus Sanders led the Chiefs' rushing attack with 201 yards. He ground out a 25-yard first down on third-and-22 from Canton's own 31 while leading 35-25 early in the fourth. Without that first down, the game could have gone in a different direction, according to Baechler.



Canton's Markus Sanders (top) fights for extra yards during the Prep Kickoff Classic at Wayne State University. (Photo: MICHAEL VASILNEK)

"That was critical. We said we are not throwing the ball there. He made some big plays tonight," Baechler said.

"Big-time players make big-time plays in big-time games, that's all there is to it," Sanders said. "My line worked harder than anybody in the state. That's why I had the success that I had."

Sanders' 201-yard performance was surprise to Stephens, who is tasked with defending him in practice.

"It's his height," Stephens said. "You can't see him, he's so small, his pad level is so low — it's hard to find him — and then when you do find him it's hard to tackle him."

Stephens was named MVP by the Detroit Sports Commission for his three-touchdown performance. Also scoring for the Chiefs was Wickens on Foster's second touchdown pass of the night in the third quarter.

"My offensive line has been working hard. They came out and proved a lot of people wrong," Stephens said.

Canton will travel Thursday to Hartland in a KLAA crossover to battle the Eagles (1-0).



Taking a handoff from Canton quarterback Joel Foster (right) is running back Jakob Wickens. (Photo: MICHAEL VASILNEK)