

Churchill's defense stonewalls Canton, 33-14

Ed Wright 12:38 a.m. EDT October 3, 2015

p402_premium class is utilized by Google Consumer Surveys



The secret recipe to containing Canton junior running back Marcus Sanders has been about as mysterious as the ingredients in Colonel Sanders' Kentucky Fried Chicken fixings.

Thanks to some extra-crunching interior defense and a large side order of discipline, Livonia Churchill's football team not only stymied Sanders – at least for one night – but also the Chiefs' normally steamroller wing-T offense in an eye-opening 33-14 homecoming victory played on a night – windy and cold – that should have aided the run-oriented Chiefs more than the air-it-out Chargers.

In terms of qualifying for the post-season, the triumph was pivotal for the Chargers, who improved to 4-2 overall and 3-1 in the KLAA South Division standings – with challenging games remaining at Livonia Franklin next week and Week 9 against Livonia Stevenson, which will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the school's opening.

Canton slipped to 5-1 and 3-1, respectively, heading into Friday's game against Plymouth, which is 4-0 in the South.

Once the ball was kicked off at 7:01 Friday night, Churchill linebacker DeMarco McKinney couldn't have cared less about the weeks to come. His mind was zeroed in on each snap.

"All week at practice the coaches stressed eye discipline and staying focused on each play, and that's what we did tonight," said McKinney, who even hauled in a 17-yard touchdown pass from Evan Cummins during a rare stint on offense. "Canton is a good team, but we were 100 percent confident we could win tonight, as long as we stayed discipline."



Canton's Jared Stephens hauled in a first-quarter pass from Joel Foster. (Photo: JON VESPAZIANI)

Sanders, who had been on the fast track to a 2,000-yard rushing season, was held to 59 yards on 19 carries. Canton's other two starting running backs – Reid McDonnell and Julian Thorton – combined for 84 yards on 19 carries.

"They schemed us very well and they were more physical up front than we were tonight," said Canton head coach Tim Baechler. "We're not used to having that happen to us. They just kicked our butts defensively tonight. Sometimes getting punched in the mouth can be good for you."

Senior defensive tackle Austin Simpson was a beast in the trenches for the Chargers, creating havoc against a usually smaller blocker.

The Chiefs, who are known for breaking opponents' spirits with mid-range gains followed by a long touchdown run, managed just two plays of 20-plus yards — and they were both passes, one from starting quarterback Joel Foster to Jared Stephens in the first quarter and another on their last play of the game when back-up QB Jake O'Donnell connected with Jesse Warner on a TD pass.

"I can't tell you enough how disciplined our kids played tonight," said Churchill head coach Bill DeFillippo. "If even one kid runs down the field when he shouldn't, he gets trapped and they break a 50-yard gain or a touchdown. The kids just played their tails off tonight."

DeFillippo said the defensive strategy wasn't anything fancy.

"We ran two different fronts and we had a couple calls for each one," he said. "We played fundamentally sound."

Foster, who completed 3 of 5 first-half passes for 34 yards and an interception, was replaced by back-up Jake O'Donnell at the start of the third quarter.



Churchill's Jamal Allen races down the sideline with a second-quarter pick-six. (Photo: ED WRIGHT)

Baechler opted not to comment on whether the move was injury- or performance-related.

Churchill carried a 14-0 lead into the half thanks to a 1-yard TD run by Sean Stenzel (18 carries, 50 yards, three touchdowns) and a 70-yard interception return by Jamal Allen with just 94 seconds left before intermission. Matt Pachota was successful on three of his five extra-point attempts.

The Chargers led 26-0 after three quarters. Stenzel scored from 1 yard out at the 4:47 mark before Cummins connected with McKinney on a 17-yard TD pass on a fourth-and-2 play.

After Canton's Reid O'Donnell got the Chiefs on the board with 8:34 left in the game, Churchill countered with a long drive that was capped by a 2-yard run by Stenzel.

The O'Donnell-to-Warner 20-yard TD closed out the scoring.

The Chiefs turned the ball over five times on four fumbles and Allen's pick-six.