

RED 'C' RISING: Canton buries Stevenson

Ed Wright 3:50 a.m. EDT October 17, 2015



Sidelined by a lingering headache last week, Canton senior Jared Stephens was a headache for Livonia Stevenson during Friday night's Kensington Conference crossover clash.

And the hard-running speedster wasn't the kind of ailment a couple of capsules of ibuprofen were going to make go away.

Just moments after Stevenson's Frank Carlin squirted through a hole on a counter play and dashed 28 yards to put the Spartans up 7-0 and momentarily silence Canton's homecoming crowd, Stephens took a handoff from quarter" back Jake O'Donnell, followed a kick-out block by Jacob Wickens and exploded up the visitors' sideline for a 62-yard touchdown run that doubled as a lightning bolt for the Chiefs, who eventually steam-rolled the Spartans, 49-7.

On the heels of a rare two-game losing streak, Canton improved to 6-2 and punched its eighth consecutive postseason ticket with next weekend's regular-season finale in Galesburg, Ill. looming.

Stevenson, which clinched a playoff berth on the same P-CEP field during last Saturday's 38-19 win over Salem, will take a 6-2 mark into Friday's homecoming game against Churchill.

Stephens looked like a picture of health on Canton's second drive, too, breaking off a 58-yard TD up the home team's sidelines.

"I went to the doctor Monday and got cleared to play tonight – thank God," Stephens said, smiling through his visor. "I felt pretty good all along, but our trainers wanted to be cautious. I was back at practice Tuesday.



Stevenson's Devon Dunn chases down Canton's Markus Sanders. (Photo: ED WRIGHT)

"Both of my touchdowns were on off-tackle plays. I followed a great block by Jacob Wickens on the first one and my fullback, Markus Sanders, sacrificed his body – and he reminded me about it after the game – on my second one."

"Jared was hungry after missing last week's game," Canton head coach Tim Baechler said, "and he ran like it. He ran hard tonight."

Baechler said the last thing he wanted for his team was to carry the burden of having to win the last game – which will require an eight-hour bus ride – in order to get win No. 6

"If we would have had to go down there to qualify, that would have been tough," he said, revealing a relieved smile. "(Galesburg) is a good team; they're huge.

"Three words sum up tonight's win – effort, accountability and responsibility. The kids have been giving the physical effort it takes, but our mental effort was lacking. In our two losses, there were four, five, six plays that killed us and we don't have that much margin for error this year."

Speaking of huge, that is the best word to describe the Chiefs' 35-7 halftime lead, which was constructed by Stephens' two TDs along with 65- and 31- and 5-yard TDs from Sanders.

The catalyst of the Chiefs' swarming defense was senior captain Thomas Evely.

Stevenson's usually-productive offense suffered a setback in the first quarter, when starting running back Austin Petrie was forced to leave the contest with a lower-leg injury.

Petrie's absence forced the Spartans to shift slot back Frank Carlin to the backfield.

"We got beat by a really, really good football team tonight," Stevenson head coach Randy Micallef said. "We knew they'd be fired up with it being homecoming and needing a win to qualify.

"Obviously, losing Austin wasn't ideal for us. We had to move some things around. Once Canton got that moment going, I think our kids kind of sensed what was going on. The bottom line is that they just kicked our butts."



Jared Stephens hits full stride on his 62-yard touchdown run. (Photo: ED WRIGHT)

Canton ran 28 plays to Stevenson's six during the second half, which breezed along like the gusty winds that swept the field due to the running clock that kicked in once Canton pushed its lead to 42-7 on Sanders' fourth TD of the night, a 9-yard run with 8:21 left in the third quarter.

Jacob Thornton found pay dirt on a 9-yard run with 9:02 left to cap the night's scoring.

One of the more entertaining plays of the night was provided by Stevenson's 6-foot-3, 261-pound sophomore offensive lineman Giovanni Agazzi, who scooped up the ball after a teammate fumbled and rumbled 19 yards.