

Defense carries Chiefs past Patriots

Evan Paputa, Correspondent *12:07 a.m. EDT September 17, 2016*



On a night when Livonia Franklin was honoring the 50th anniversary of its state championship and graduating class of 1976, the Patriots came out inspired. With poise, they took a 14-7 lead over Canton behind quarterback

Jacob Clark with 1:25 left in the first half and forced Canton to a fourth-and-five on the Franklin 28-yard line.

Instead of kicking the field goal, Canton quarterback Jake O'Donnell rolled out and found tight end Brennon Pelland for a 28-yard score to cut the Franklin lead to 14-13 before half.

Canton took the momentum into the second half and won, 34-21.

"We had to finish the deal in the second half. We got physical and played hard. That is a really good football team," Canton head coach Tim Baechler said.

Canton (2-2) played inspired all night, especially in the second half. They held Franklin to just 161 yards total offense in the second half.

The Canton defense was much improved overall, according to Baechler.

"They are very good offensively, so hard to defend. I'm really proud of our guys. They gave up three big plays. Other than that, we played a lot better defensively; tackled better, most of the time," Baechler said.

Franklin (2-2) played with heart all night, but could not get over the hump. Every time it seemed it had Canton stopped, the Chiefs would convert a fourth down. Canton was 4-for-4 on fourth downs on the night.

"I just think the difference came down to the mistakes. We made too many mistakes. We knew we could play with them, we knew we could match up with them. They don't make mistakes, very few. We had to play mistake-free to beat them and that did not happen in the second half," Franklin head coach Chris Kelbert said.

Defensively, Canton came out of the locker room at halftime knowing it needed to get stops as it trailed, 14-13. The Chiefs got three consecutive stops to start the second half before Clark hit Jake Giacobbi for a 78-yard touchdown with only 3:25 left in the game.

"Every week, we are getting better. We learn from our mistakes and are correcting them on film. At halftime, we knew we needed to come out and get stops and we did," Canton defensive back Eddie Lang said.

Lang and Steven Walker held down the fort in the Canton secondary and limited big plays by Patriots receivers Giacobbi and Ke-Mauri Heard.

"Getting beat deep would happen sometimes, but this game, we didn't let that happen. We had a good, good week of practice," Walker said.

Franklin's first-half lead was thanks in large part to Clark. He ran for a 51-yard touchdown in the first quarter and a 48-yard touchdown in the second quarter. Those runs ignited the Franklin defense, which held Canton to just 192 first-half yards.

"Jacob is a great athlete and really threw the ball probably the best he has all season. We're glad to have him," Kelbert said.

Clark completed 6-of-16 passes for 131 yards and the touchdown. He ran for 156 yards and the two touchdowns on 16 carries.

Giacobbi caught three passes for 82 yards and a touchdown.

Sandwiched between Clark's two first-half touchdowns was a 1-yard plunge by Canton senior Julian Thornton (102 yards).

Reid McDonnell (51 yards) gave Canton its first lead of the night on a 1-yard touchdown just 2:06 into the third quarter. Markus Sanders (179 yards) rushed for two fourth-quarter touchdowns of 33 and 51 yards, respectively.

“During halftime, coach (Baechler) gave us a talk. After he gave us the talk, our blood was pumping and we got some momentum. His message was that we had the heart and the skill,” Walker said.



Off to the races for Canton Friday is senior running back Markus Sanders. (Photo: THOMAS BEAUDOIN)

Canton will play host to cross-campus rival, Plymouth (1-3), next Friday night at the Plymouth-Canton Educational Park varsity field at 7 p.m. Momentum is certainly on the Chiefs' side after they have won two games in a row following a 0-2 start.

“It feels really good. It means that once you get momentum, it's hard to stop,” Walker said.

Franklin held a halftime ceremony celebrating the 50th anniversary of its class of 1976 that were seniors in fall 1975, when they won the state championship over then-Traverse City.

The players honored from the 1975 team will forever be remembered and respected by Kelbert and his current team for putting Franklin on the map.

“Those guys put Franklin on the map. We are always playing for the people that represent this school. We love Franklin and think it's a great place. We

always want to project that and make people proud to say that they are from Franklin,” Kelbert said.

Franklin will travel to play Wayne Memorial (1-3) at 7 p.m. next Friday.