

Canton grinds out 35-21 win over Churchill for KLAA title

Veteran Canton football coach Tim Baechler knew all too well what kind of damage Livonia Churchill quarterback Drew Alsobrooks could inflict with his left arm if given the chance.

With the Kensington Lakes Activities Association title on the line Friday night, Alsobrooks did put a dent in the Chiefs. He did so particularly with a 37-yard touchdown toss on fourth down to senior wide-out Martell Dooley deep in the Canton end zone to put the Chargers up 21-20 in the third quarter.

But Canton's trademark power running game kept Alsobrooks and the Churchill off the field for long stretches and the Chiefs took advantage of a couple turnovers in the fourth quarter to post a 35-21 victory for the coveted KLAA trophy. Scoring four TDs for Canton was senior running back Colin Troup.

"We just needed to make some plays, and we got some pressure when we needed to," said Baechler, whose 8-1 team now gets ready for postseason action. "We controlled the ball and tried to keep them off the field as much as possible and limit how many touches he had, their offense."

Consider the second quarter. The Chiefs had their offense on the turf field at Livonia Churchill the first 11:02, but the Chargers (7-2) scored the only points during that span — on an 80-yard fumble return by junior Josh Momeyer. Following Alsobrooks' PAT, Churchill enjoyed a 14-13 lead.

Canton's offense got the ball right back, and went on a methodical 83-yard scoring drive in 14 plays, with Troup taking it in from the 3-yard line with 58 seconds to go.

Augmenting the Chiefs running game were some timely completions from senior quarterback Connor Engel to senior tight end Lou Baechler, with gains of 15 and 13 yards moving the chains.

Chipping away

“Five yards a carry, that’s what we live for, and six, seven, eight -minute drives,” Lou Baechler said. “Our backs ran their hearts out, our linemen blocked, we were smart about it.

“I think we broke the concrete, that’s what we were talking about the whole week. just got to break the concrete, keep pounding, pounding, pounding and soon it will break. I think second half late they broke. They’re a tough team.”



Lou Baechler (1) playing with a spiral fracture of his forearm, is helped up by Colin Troup (3). (Photo: Bill Bresler | hometownlife.com)

But Churchill hung in there, and took a 21-20 lead with 9:34 left in the third quarter on the Alsobrooks-to-Dooley touchdown strike.

“They walked their outside backer out on Deon (Pitchford), and he got a good shot and missed up the timing,” Churchill head coach Bill DeFillippo said. “And so (Alsobrooks) went to Martell and he stepped up and made a great play on fourth down.”

Canton still trailed by a point as the fourth quarter began, but the Chiefs put together another tried-and-true drive that paid off with Troup’s 1-yard run midway through the frame. Engel then raced around left end for a 2-point conversion and Canton enjoyed a 28-21 lead with 6:35 to go.

“Our line, best line in the state of Michigan,” Troup said. “All of those guys work hard every single day and us backs, we just try to get better for them

because they're the boys doing all the hard work and they deserve all the credit."

Playoff-bound Churchill (7-2) tried to answer and a 32-yard kickoff return by senior Tyrese Williams gave the Chargers hope.

Then came a crucial interception by Canton senior Nick Polydoras on a ball that bounced out of the hands of a Churchill receiver.

Canton subsequently tacked on an insurance score when junior running back Luke Jouppi bounced off a couple tacklers and broke loose for a 49-yard touchdown with 3:10 remaining.

"That was a big run," said Tim Baechler, adding with a smile that he wished Jouppi "*wouldn't* have scored, I just wanted to work the clock and get out of there.

"But we blocked it well and he ran it hard. He's steadily getting better every week. It was a big game for him."

Following are several takeaways from the game:

TIMELY PICK

Polydoras not only contributed to the offense with some solid carries, but his interception in the fourth quarter arguably was the play of the night.

"We worked on that all week," Polydoras said. "We knew what the play was, their guy was going to run a post route. Everyone else was covered up, I just tried to make a play on the ball, just like coach always tells me to. And it just happened to fall into my hands."

According to coach Baechler, the pick was a "huge momentum swinger, they were very fast, they had a lot of speed. They were giving us some issues. And then a good throw, it just bounced off their player. Sometimes you need some luck."



Nick Polydoros (12) is brought down by Michael Parrish (20). (Photo: Bill Bresler | hometownlife.com)

CAN'T GET IT BACK

The Chiefs, among the top teams in Division 1, once again showed they are a tough team for rivals to figure out — not to mention try to get the ball back from.

"The first quarter we only ran five plays," DeFillippo said. "And then when we got the fumble, and the scoop and score they went back on offense again. We had the last two plays of the half. We only ran seven play in the first half. So, that was a little bit crazy. Came out, scored, took the lead 21-20. Going into the fourth quarter we had the lead. It's just hard to stop their offense."

Williams added that the Chargers "have a really good defense, but the Canton offense is just so confusing, with all the trick plays and everything."

DOWN TO SIZE

With 10 KLAA teams whittled away from the conference before 2017-18, the KLAA Black Division champion Chiefs and KLAA Gold Division champ Chargers squared off for the league trophy. Going by the wayside with the downsizing were the Kensington and Lakes conferences, so Friday's game was for all the KLAA marbles.

FEELING PROUD

Even though his Chargers came up short in the KLAA title matchup, DeFillippo said his team — especially the seniors — have a lot to be proud about.

"Our seniors won two games their first two years," DeFillippo emphasized. "You know, to come as far as we did, being division champions and having the lead in the conference final in the fourth quarter says a lot about them and our program, the way we develop our kids."



Canton QB Connor Engel (7) keeps the ball and gains yards before Charger Josh Momeyer (16) runs him out of bounds. (Photo: Bill Bresler | hometownlife.com)