

In memory of mother, Brighton QB scores game-winner in OT on Pink Out night

BRIGHTON -- Brighton quarterback Will Jontz fought back tears after his team's 23-17 victory over visiting Canton on Friday.

The senior scored the game-winning touchdown in overtime on a 10-yard run to give the Bulldogs their fourth straight victory and first place in the Kensington Lakes Activities Association West Division, but that wasn't the first thing he thought about when he dove across the goal line.

Friday also was Brighton's "Pink Out" game, with the team wearing cancer awareness-themed jerseys. Instead of the players' last names written on the back of their jerseys, they were able to choose to play for someone they knew affected by the disease.

The back of Jontz's jersey read, "Mom," in memory his mother, Kathleen Jontz, who lost her battle with breast cancer when Will was 8 years old. "This one goes out to her and all the other cancer patients out there," said an emotional Jontz after the game.

Brighton coach Brian Lemons said he couldn't be happier after seeing Jontz rush for that touchdown, especially after Canton tied the game at 17 in the final play of regulation.

The Chiefs (3-2) had the first possession of overtime, starting with the ball at the Brighton 10-yard line. On third-and-goal, senior Zach Hopman intercepted quarterback Ben Wright in the end zone, meaning the Bulldogs needed just a field goal to win.

Jontz didn't want it leave it up to a field goal attempt. He scored on Brighton's first offensive play in overtime, sending the capacity crowd into a frenzy.

"It seemed like we put those emotions in the right spot when we were on the field, but after that, as soon as he put it in the end zone, it seemed like every kid's emotions on the sideline just completely emptied out," Lemons said. "I am really proud of them. I am proud of everyone who is here tonight. This is a great celebration. I think everyone involved deserves a huge pat on the back."

Jontz accounted for all three Brighton touchdowns on Friday. He gave the Bulldogs a 7-0 lead in the first quarter with a 17-yard laser to Jackson Krause.

After the Bulldogs tied the game at 10 in the fourth quarter, they recovered a pooch kick and started the drive at the Canton 37. On the next play, Jontz connected with Austin Lin for the score.

He finished 9 of 14 passing for 90 yards and rushed for 17 yards. Although his output on the ground was his lowest of the season -- he averaged more than 100 rushing yards per game entering Friday -- Hopman said Jontz still finds a way to make players around him better.

"He is a great leader," Hopman said. "He shows it on and off the field just being a good teammate. Everyone looks up to him."

Regrouping after regulation

Down 17-10, Canton got the ball back with 2:19 remaining and an no timeouts. It marched down inside the Brighton 10, picking up two first downs on fourth-and-long.

It spiked the ball to stop the clock with 1.3 seconds remaining. On the next play, 1uarterback Ben Stesiak connected with Caden Domzalski in the back of the end zone for a 9-yard touchdown.

But on the Chiefs' first two plays of overtime -- a fumbled snap and negative-yardage run -- led to third-and-goal from the 13.

Brighton had good coverage in the end zone on the third-down play, and Hopman stepped up to make the interception.

"That 3-minute break before overtime gave us a chance to regroup," Lemons said. "Honestly, I think the defense on first down caused a little bobble (that led to fumbled snap) and that was big for us. That interception was big at the end. Our kids stepped up and made a play."

"Proud of the effort"

Canton's Wing-T offense is accustomed to moving the ball on the ground, led by senior running back Steven Walker, a candidate for Michigan football Player of the Year.

But the Chiefs were forced to go to the air on their final drive. Stesiak completed two crucial passes on fourth-and-10 and fourth-and-15 to keep the drive alive.

"They showed their toughness," coach Andy LaFata said of his players. "We had been telling them all the time if they work it is going to pay off. I am so proud of our kids for battling and fighting. Who would have thought Canton could have an (81)-yard drive throwing the football. They just made one more play than we did."

Containing Walker



Canton's Steven Walker (4) runs the ball during the high school football game between Canton and Brighton at Brighton High School on Friday, Sept. 21, 2018. Brighton defeated Canton, 23-17. Photo by Ben Allan Smith

In Walker's previous two games, he combined for 449 rushing yards and seven touchdowns.

Brighton's defense limited him to 112 yards and 23 carries on Friday. "I think the defense we are putting out there right now is very disciplined and very task-oriented," Lemons said. "They are not selfish guys. If we give them a scheme, they are pretty on point with that. But the biggest thing they do is have the desire to do well. Defense did a great job."

Key stats

Total yards: Brighton 146, Canton 296

Canton individual stats

Stesiak: 5-12 passing, 101 yards, 1 TD, 1 INT

Jawuan Frazier: 9 carries, 58 yards

Noah VanBerkel: 3 catches, 50 yards

Brighton individual stats

Lin: 3 catches, 55 yards, 1 TD

Cole Riddle: 8 tackles, 1 for a loss

End first quarter: Brighton 7, Canton 0

Brighton forced a three-and-out to start the game and then marched 65 yards to take a 7-0 lead. Will Jontz completed four passes on the drive, including a 16-yard strike to Jackson Krause in the end zone.

The Chiefs began their next possession at their own 20 with 5:53 remaining and still had the ball in Brighton territory when the clock expired.

End second quarter: Canton 10, Brighton 7

Walker bookended a 14-play, 80-yard drive with a 1-yard touchdown run at the 9:40 mark of the quarter.

He set up first-and-goal from the 6 with a 14-yard run up the middle. Two plays later, he found the end zone.

The Chiefs got the ball back on their own 24 with 7:43 remaining. They had another long drive that resulted in a 19-yard field goal with 11 seconds to play.

Canton had first-and-goal from the 2 but had three straight runs stuffed at the line of scrimmage.

End third quarter: Canton 10, Brighton 7

Both offenses struggled to gain any rhythm in the quarter. Brighton had great starting field position on its second drive, beginning at the Canton 28 after a muffed punt. But the Bulldogs turned the ball over on downs, still trailing by three.

The Chiefs, though, also stalled on their next drive after a 15-yard run by Walker. They punted from their own side of the field, and Brighton started its game-tying drive from its own 39.

End fourth quarter: Canton 17, Brighton 17

The Bulldogs tied the game with a 20-yard field goal at the 8:13 mark, and they went right back to work.

They recovered a pooch kick at the Canton 37, and on the next play, Jontz connected with Austin Lin for a touchdown and 17-10 lead.

Canton drove inside the red zone on its next possession, but Hopman intercepted Stesiak in the end zone.

The Chiefs forced a punt and got the ball back with 2:19 remaining and no timeouts. It marched down inside the Brighton 10 -- picking up two first downs on fourth-and-long -- and spiked the ball to stop the clock with 1.3 seconds remaining.

Stesiak connected with Domzalski in the back of the end zone for a 9-yard touchdown on the next play.

End overtime: Brighton 23, Canton 17

The Chiefs were on offense to start overtime and their first two plays -- a fumbled snap and negative-yardage run -- led to third-and-goal from the 13.

Brighton had good coverage in the end zone on the third-down play, and Hopman stepped up for his second interception of the game.

The Bulldogs scored on their first offensive play when Jontz found the edge and dove into the end zone to finish off a 10-yard run.