

Coldwater's Big Plays Hamper Bulldogs in Division VI State Semi-Finals on Saturday

Putnam County Sentinel – Charlie Warnimont, Sports Editor

SIDNEY – Coldwater's goal on offense is to share the wealth between their running and passing games. It doesn't hurt to have a number of players that can break off a big play when they have the chance.

Coldwater used big plays running the football and in the passing game Saturday night to defeat Columbus Grove 41-27 in a Division VI State Semi-Final contest at Sidney's Memorial Stadium. With the win, the Cavaliers, 11-0, advance to the Division VI State Finals Sunday to face New Middletown Springfield at 5 p.m. The Bulldogs saw their season end at 10-1 as they were making their first State Semi-Final appearance since the 2014 season.

Coldwater finished with 470 yards of offense on a damp Saturday night in Sidney as they rushed for 313 yards and threw for another 157 yards. Of their six touchdowns in the game, five of them were more than 25 yards in length.

"All year we have called it spreading the wealth," Coldwater coach Chip Otten said "When you give all those guys opportunities it makes us hard to defend. When Kibby (RB Zack McKibben) gets going and you have two big, tall wideouts that can run and catch it, that's big. We have a lot of good skilled guys and you just can't focus on one guy. We have five, six, seven guys that we are not afraid to give the ball to."

Columbus Grove coach Andy Schafer admitted the big plays were a key in the setback. "Not only was it the big plays, but missed tackles," Schafer said. "That's the one that kind that hurts a little bit. A big play because of a blown coverage is one thing, but a big play because we didn't wrap up is

another. That hurts, I'll be honest. We thought we had that fixed earlier this season. We played Fairview really well and we played Archbold really well and those were two big play teams so I thought coming into this we got this. Their kids played really, really hard and they are a physical team."

Columbus Grove had the ball much of the opening quarter as they took their opening drive to the Coldwater 17 where the Cavalier defense stopped them on downs. After forcing a Cavalier punt, Columbus Grove was at the Coldwater 10 yards line before a holding penalty forced them into a third and long situation. When they were unable to recover from the penalty, Rece Verhoff stepped in and kicked a 30 yard field goal for a 3-0 Grove lead with 2:35 left in the opening quarter.

It didn't take Coldwater long to get their offense going to overcome the three point deficit. Behind a five play drive the Cavaliers took the lead as Myles Blasingame scored on a 26 yard run. Just before the score, McKibben had carried the ball for 15 yards to the Grove 36. A missed extra point made the score 6-3 with 1:04 left in the second quarter.

After a good first quarter by the Bulldog defense, the Cavalier offense got rolling in the second quarter as they scored three touchdowns.

Just over a minute into the second quarter, the Cavaliers took a 13-3 lead when McKibben kept battling by breaking three tackles on his way to a 7 scoring run. McKibben led the Cavalier rushing attack with 195 yards on 15 carries and two touchdowns in the game.

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It took only two plays for Columbus Grove to answer back as quarterback Blake Reynolds hit Gabe Clement in stride down field for a play that covered 68 yards for a touchdown. The Bulldogs were down 13-10 after Clement's touchdown, but also that would be the last offensive play Clement ran for Grove in the game as he injured a knee playing defense on the next series.

"That hurts," Schafer said. "We talked to our kids all season that we never knew if we going to lost someone, that it was next man up. I don't know if it really bothered our kids. I didn't see that in our players. But as a play called, my play sheet got cut in half as I had things we wanted to do with him. We actually put in a Wildcat offense this week and we just had one snap to him. Credit our kids, we moved the ball fairly well on offense.

After the Grove score, Coldwater kept the ball on the ground as they ran the ball six times before Blasingame found Tyler Schwieterman in the right corner of the endzone for a 33 yard scoring play to make it a 20-10 game.

Columbus Grove put together a drive mixing the run and pass before it stalled at the Coldwater 15. Verhoff kicked his second field goal of the night, time from 32 yards out with 1:15 left in the half. The Cavaliers quickly marched down field as Blasingame and Schwieterman hooked up on a 30 yard touchdown pass that made the score 27-13.

With just 22 seconds left in the half, the Bulldogs quickly moved into field goal position as passes to Jackson Schroeder and Jon Banal had the ball at the Cavalier 25 with two seconds left in the half. Verhoff attempted

a 42 yard field goal, that had plenty of distance, but hit off the left upright as time expired.

The Bulldogs defense came up with a stop on Coldwater's first possession of the third quarter, but they were unable to take advantage of it. Coldwater then went down and scored on a Blasingame two yard run that made the score 34-13 with 3:29 left in the quarter.

"Coming out of halftime, we told them how important it would be to get a stop," Schafer said. "We did. Coldwater is good football team and it's not like we lost to anyone not good."

Columbus Grove would reach the endzone two times in the remaining time as Reynolds scored on runs of seven and five yards in the fourth quarter. Coldwater added a 37 yard run by McKibben in between scores.

Reynolds threw for 263 yards in the game and rushed for 93 yards, while Colin Metzger rushed for 67 yards and caught three passes for 68 yards. Clement caught two passes for 78 yards and Schroeder had five catches for 54 yards.

"I have a sign in my classroom from when I was first hired that says, "Faith, Family and Football," Schafer said. "These guys are not at that football level, but are my family, that second level. This was such a great team with a group of seniors I will never forget. They honestly changed the culture of the school, our community and everything. It really hurts losing this game, but I told them looking back, "Remember the day we didn't even have a season, we will look back and say that was good football team."