Marion Local Denies Bulldogs Comeback

Putnam County Sentinel – Charlie Warnimont, Sports Editor

Columbus Grove's two minute magic fell a little short the second time around. Having downed McComb a week earlier with a last minute scoring drive, the Bulldogs were facing a similar scenario Saturday night in the State Semi-Finals.

Marion Local denied the Bulldogs another late game score with an interception in the endzone, as the Flyers preserved a slim 13-7 win over Grove at Lima Stadium Saturday night.

The win put the Flyers, 13-1, back in the Division VI State Championship as they will face Mogadore this Saturday at 3:30 p.m. at Massillon's Paul Brown Tiger Stadium. This will be a rematch of the 2000 championship game which the Flyers won 54-0.

Columbus Grove saw an excellent season come to a close a 11-3. However, it was a season that almost saw the Bulldogs playing a 15th game.

One week after grinding out a win against McComb, the Bulldogs had another opportunity against the Flyers.

With 3:27 left and Grove on their own 16 yard line after a Marion Local punt, the Bulldogs put together a 12 play drive that took them to the Flyer 13 yard line.

The drive started as junior quarterback Tayt Mayberry picked up three yards on an option play. After nearly getting a pass intercepted, Mayberry ran a keeper over the left side for 12 yards and a first down.

The junior quarterback then hit Steve Palte for 24 yards to the Flyer 45 yard line. Palte picked up good yardage as he spun out of a tackle and found the sideline open.

A running play lost a yard before Mayberry went back to the air hitting Palte for four yards and Lance Heffner for nine yards and a first down. Heffner went high above a Marion Local defender to catch the ball, then held on as he was being upended.

Columbus Grove stayed with the pass as Mayberry hit Adam Kaufman for 10 yards, then Palte hauled in two passes for 11 yards to the Marion Local 13 yard line.

After a trap play gained nothing, the Bulldogs used their final timeout to set up a throw in the endzone. Freshman Blaine Maag got behind his defender, but had the ball bounce off him where it was grabbed by the Flyers Brent Homan, sealing the Bulldogs fate.

"I saw him turn and knew they were going to toss it up for him," Homan said. "I just came down with it. I was worried. I knew it was going to come down to that. I just didn't know it was going to be me."

Marion Local coach Tim Goodwin also felt a sense of relief after the fourth quarter turnover. "They basically did what we had seen on tape all week," Goodwin said. "That quarterback just keeps making play after play. To me, it looked like that pass was right on the money. I don't know how he (Homan) caught it."

The interception added to the Bulldogs night of misfortunes in the red zone. Columbus Grove was inside the Marion Local 20 yard line four times, but only scored once losing the ball twice on fumbles and the interception.

"Our kids put out a great 48 minutes of effort," Grove coach Jerry Cooper said "Minus a couple of mistakes, we might have had a chance to beat them. We were an interception away from playing in the State Championship game. At that last timeout the kids felt we could throw the ball. We had been running the stop play against their zone very well. They were bringing the pressure up the middle, so we thought Blaine Maag would be able to run past him or go up over the top Their kid made a great play. Our kids did a great

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job of keeping their poise and composure the last couple of minutes. They brought it a long way down the field. I give a lot of credit to both teams, that was a well-played football game."

Despite the Bulldogs last minute attempt, the game was basically a defensive struggle. Both teams put together drives, but each time the respective defenses kept coming up with a play to halt the drive.

That was obvious in the third quarter as the Flyers came up with the only score of the second half. On their second possession of the quarter, the Flyers took over at the Grove 46 yard line, after a shot punt to Dane Jesko into the wind.

Marion Local then put together a seven play drive as senior fullback Ryan Fleck plowed into the endzone from a yard out with 3:06 left in the quarter.

Craig Wolters opened the drive by catching a 15 yard pass from Chad Otte, before Greg Schulte, (29 carries, 157 yards) busted off a 16 yard run. Schulte also had a 13 yard run setting up Fleck.

Columbus Grove came right back as they put together a 10 play, 55 yard drive to the Flyer 15 yard line. On a third down play, Palte appeared to have running room inside, but a Marion Local defender knocked the ball loose with Nathan Kuether falling on the pigskin.

Marion Local opened the game with a 14 play drive that resulted in no points The Flyers apparently scored when Otte hit a receiver in the endzone with a score. However, the score was called back on a motion penalty.

The Bulldogs took over on their 22 yard line and went 78 yards in eight plays. Blake Maag scored on a four year run over the left side of the line after younger brother, Blaine, took a pass 34 yards to the Flyer four yard line.

Marion Local came right back with a seven play drive that ended when the Bulldogs Kurt Theising intercepted a pass. Theising returned the pass 37 yards to the Flyer 49 yard line.

Columbus Grove took the ball inside the five yard line, but on a third down play fumbled when Mayberry had the ball slapped out of his hands on an option play.

"The fumble recovery obviously was big," Goodwin said. "Even if they punch it in, I didn't think we were out of the game. It sure made it a lot easier."

Marion Local took advantage of the turnover as they went 95 yards in 13 plays.

Schulte had two big runs in the drive as he picked up 10 yards on the third play of the drive, then had a nine yard run on a fourth down play.

Nick Prenger came up with the big play of the drive as he hauled in a 34 yard pass from Otte to the five yard line. On a third and 13 play from the 37 yard line, the Bulldogs forced Otte out of the pocket and Prenger was left open when the defensive back came up to play a possible run.

"I was proud of our kids from the standpoint, they were blown out in the eighth week of the season, but have shown a lot of character, a lot of class and have worked really hard to come back from that," Cooper said. "I was really proud of the effort and how much they have pulled together and how well they were playing at the end. Marion Local is an excellent football team and I thought they did some really nice things. Our kids had never experienced playing at this level before, but they gave a great effort for 48 minutes."