Bulldogs Fall to Marion Local in Semi-Finals

Putnam County Sentinel – Charlie Warnimont, Sports Editor

LIMA – Columbus Grove was looking too make a big defensive stop after scoring to grow some momentum they felt they were getting. Against Marion Local that is easier said than done.

The Flyers answered the Bulldog touchdown and continued to add to it as they pulled away from the Bulldogs for a 55-7 win in their Division VII State Semi-Final contest at Spartan Stadium Saturday night.

The win sends the Flyers, 14-0, back to the Division VII State Finals Saturday at 10 a.m. against Norwalk St. Paul, 13-1, at Ohio Stadium on The Ohio State University campus in Columbus. Marion Local will be looking for their fourth straight State Championship. The Bulldogs ended their season at 9-5.

Columbus Grove's defense forced the Flyers to punt after three plays on their first possession, but after a Bulldog punt, the Flyers put together an eight play drive that ended with wide receiver Hunter Wilker tossing a 12 yard touchdown pass to Kyle Homa with 6:20 left in the opening quarter. Wilker had come in motion across the field and took a pitch from quarterback Dustin Rethman as he continued across the field.

"That was a big play. We have been practicing that some throughout the year," Marion Local coach Tim Goddwin said. "Hunter is such a dangerous threat to run it, it worked really well. The old man (Flyer assistant coach Bill Goodwin) came up with it. I have to give him some credit. When he first came up with it, I thought he was crazy and I thought if it wasn't there, Hunter could get the first down. It was a good call."

Three plays later the Flyers were back in business after Wilker intercepted a Reid Stechschulte pass at the Bulldog 44. It took only one play for Marion Local to get back to the endzone as senior running back Jacy Goettemoeller found an opening around right end and basically was untouched on his scoring run. The extra point made it 14-0 with 5:12 left in the opening quarter.

Columbus Grove's offense produced their only scoring drive of the night on their next possession. It appeared the Bulldogs would have to punt after three running plays left them facing fourth and one. With Joey Wanecke in punt formation, he took the snap and ran around right end for six yards for a first down.

On the next play, Stechschulte dropped back and found receiver David Bogart behind the Flyer defense. Bogart caught the pass and went in to the endzone to complete a 64 yard touchdown play. With the extra point, it was 14-7 Flyers with 3:16 left in the first quarter.

With the Bulldogs looking for a stop to gain more momentum, they were unable to do it as the Flyers went 80 yards in nine plays, all running, before Goettemoeller capped the drive with an 18 yard touchdown run on fourth and two. It was one of several fourth downs the Flyers converted in the game.

"When we punted the first time, it wasn't very impressive," Goodwin said. "I didn't think we would gain much field position, with this wind, and I have a lot of confidence in our offense, Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't."

Marion Local punted one time in the game for 15 yards into a strong wind. Columbus

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Grove punted six times for an average of 28.2 yards a kick.

"There were a few times in the first half, where we had them in fourth down situations and they went for it and got it. That kind of killed us a little bit," Grove coach Andy Schafer said. "When you get them in fourth down, you want them to punt or make a stop, but we couldn't and they kind of hurt us the first half. Football is a game of momentum and when you're playing the three time State Champs and you can't swing the momentum, you are in trouble. We just couldn't get the momentum swung our way."

After the Bulldogs second punt of the half, the Flyers added to their lead as Goettemoeller scored on an eight yard run with 6:57 left in the half.

The Flyers stopped themselves on their next two possessions as they couldn't convert on fourth down and they fumbled on their next drive with the Bulldogs recovering.

Columbus Grove was unable to take advantage of the turnover and after another punt, they had the ball at their own 45 and less than a minute left in the half. Despite two sacks of quarterback Dustin Rethman, and one timeout, the Flyers scored with time running out in the half.

After the Bulldogs second sack of Rethman by Brant Follas, Rethman dropped back and fired a pass towards the left corner of the endzone and Wilker. Bogart was back there for the Grove defense and appeared in a great position to intercept the ball. However, it went through his hands and into the hands of Wilker for a touchdown with zeros on the scoreboard clock. With the extra point, it was 35-7 at the half.

The Flyers continued to pull away in the third quarter as Wilker scored on a 69 yard run to cap another one play drive by Marion Local and Homan had a four yard run as Marion Local started to rest its first team players. Backup running back Nate Moeller finished the scoring in the fourth quarter.

Goettemoeller led the Marion Local offense with 177 yards on 15 carries, all in the first half. Wilker had 69 yards on two carries and Aaron Nietfeld 63 yards on 11 carries. Rethman was 6 of 15 passing for 112 yards as Wilker caught four passes for 95 yards.

"When you're looking at scouting before the game, you're just trying to find their weaknesses," Schafer said. "There just really aren't a lot, which is why they are in week 15 the last few years. Hats off to them."

Columbus Grove had just 173 yards of offense for the game as they were held to 49 yards rushing on 27 carries. Warnecke finished the night with just 29 yards rushing and Stechschulte was 3 of 12 passing with two interceptions.

"They were really doing a good job of being aggressive," Schafer said. "They blitz on every single play. This is the first time all season where we saw a blitz. It was kind of a challenge for us. To be flat out honest, they are just good."