

Two Third Quarter Touchdowns Lead Marion Local Past Columbus Grove

Putnam County Sentinel – Charlie Warnimont, Sports Editor

LIMA – Columbus Grove went toe-to-toe with Marion Local Saturday evening. While the game was a defensive struggle most of the evening, the Flyers connected for two late third quarter touchdowns to defeat the Bulldogs 27-0 in a Division VI State Semi-Final contest at Spartan Stadium in Lima.

Marion Local, 15-0, advanced to the Division VI State Championship game Saturday at Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium in Canton at 10:30 a.m. against Kirtland, 15-0. Columbus Grove saw its season end at 12-3.

“Coach Goodwin said, ‘You guys put up a heck of a fight’ and he’s right, we did.” Columbus Grove coach Andy Schafer said. “Our game plan was working. We called that gutsy call there at the start of the second half to go for it back in our territory on fourth and one. We got it and I thought that would spark us. They have a really good defense and we just couldn’t get any points on the board.”

“If we had scored on that drive, it could have been a different game. When we went down 13, we had to change our game plan a bit. We thought the way to beat these guys was to run right at them and be physical upfront. Our goal was to stick to our base and run right at them. We just couldn’t get it in the end zone. I was really proud of our defense, really proud of our seniors.”

For two and half quarters Saturday evening the two defenses dominated play as the Flyers had managed the only score in that time. Late in the third quarter, the Flyers saw two plays go for touchdowns as they were able to lengthen their lead and force the Bulldogs to stray away from their game plan in an effort to catch up.

Columbus Grove finished the night with 168 yards of offense, while the Flyers ended up with 314 yards of offense. This was the 11th shutout the Flyer defense has had this season.

“They (Grove) were just physical,” said Flyer coach Goodwin. “They were physical and they kept those safeties deep. When you put that combination together, it’s tough sledding until we could figure some stuff out. I think we wore them down some in the second half and when we got up two scores, they knew it was tough sledding against our defense. It wears on you mentally. Columbus Grove played hard the entire game. They have nothing to be ashamed about.”

After a scoreless first quarter in which the Bulldogs didn’t record a first down, they were moving the ball after the Flyers punted to start the second quarter. Showing the Flyers some different looks on offense that included running back Trenton Barraza taking direct snaps, Columbus Grove moved into Marion Local territory for the first time.

The drive eventually ended with the Bulldogs turning the ball over on downs. The Flyers took over at their own 36 and got the offense going behind a 23 yard run by Kyle Otto to the Grove 41.

After a 22 yard completion to Nathan Buschur moved the ball to the Bulldog 25, the Flyers eventually found the endzone when Tate Hess tossed a screen pass to Otte in the right flat and he took the ball into the endzone with 2:39 left in the half. With the extra point, Marion Local had a 7-0 lead.

“Obviously every score was important tonight,” Goodwin said. “Tate executed well on that drive and we needed it. He struggled the first quarter, but he played pretty well down the stretch.”

Columbus Grove had the ball to start the second half starting at their own five yard line. Three plays netted nine yards leading up to the Schafer ‘gutsy’ move going for it on fourth down. Barraza was able to follow his offensive line for that one yard giving the Bulldogs new life.

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“I told coach Kohls at halftime, I was going to have to go for it. I didn’t think it was going to be that early,” Schafer said. “I said some of these fourth downs, I’m just going to have to go for it. He said we were good. It would have been nice to get some points out of it when you take a gamble like that.”

After the fourth down conversion, Barraza went around the right side for a 46 yard gain. The drive stalled there as a fourth down pass was incomplete.

Like they did the first half, the Flyer offense responded by driving down and scoring with 4:01 left in the quarter. Once again, it was Otte that took a short pass in the flat and weaved his way through the Bulldog defense to make it a 13-0 game as the extra point try failed.

After the Bulldogs were forced to punt on their next possession, the Flyers took over at their own 26. Two plays garnered three yards before Hess hit Natan Buscher with a pass down the left sideline. Buscher was able to slip a tackle and take the ball 71 yards for a score with 53 seconds left in the quarter. With the extra point the Bulldogs were down 20-0.

“The first half our kids played them toe-to-toe. They didn’t go into the game scared of them,” Schafer said. “Unfortunately, this game got away from us in the second half.”

Marion Local finished the scoring on a three yard run by Drew Seitz in the fourth quarter with 5:44 left to play.