

Versailles Runs Past Bulldogs in Semi-Finals

Putnam County Sentinel – Charlie Warnimont, Sports Editor

WAPAKONETA – Versailles defense did a good job of limiting what Columbus Grove did offensively. On the other side of the ball, the Tiger's offense played keep away from the Bulldogs.

Behind a versatile running attack, the Tigers used sustained drives to eat time off the clock with long drives. Versailles overall play led them to a 30-13 Division VI State Semi-Final win over the Bulldogs at Wapakoneta's Mercy Health Wapak Ford Field Friday night.

With the win, the Tigers, 13-2, advance to the Division VI State Championship game Friday morning against top ranked Kirtland, 14-0, at Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium in Canton at 10:30 a.m. The Bulldogs saw another successful season end at 12-3 after advancing to the State Semi-Finals for a second straight season.

"I'm one of those that always thinks we have a chance until the clock ticks out," Columbus Grove head coach Andy Schafer said. "I thought we had a chance there in the second half. We just couldn't get the ball. Our defense couldn't get them to turn it over."

Versailles rushing attack ran for 279 yards Friday night to keep the ball away from the Bulldog offense that also led to them dominating the time of possession for the game. The Bulldogs had the ball just for six possessions Friday night as they ran 41 total plays. Three of the Bulldog's six possessions ended because of turnovers. Versailles never punted in the game.

Columbus Grove had a good start to the contest as on Versailles fourth play of the night, Zach Reynolds intercepted a Tiger pass returning it to the four yard line. Four plays later, Trenton Barraza took a direct snap and bulled his way into the endzone for a score.

Versailles came right back with a 15 play drive that saw them reach the Bulldog 10 yard line. On fourth

down, the Tiger's Joel Gehret kicked a 27 yard field goal.

Columbus Grove fumbled the ensuing kickoff with Sam DeLand falling on the loose ball at the Bulldog seven yard line. Two plays later, Micael Osborne bulled over from a yard out to give the Tigers a 10-7 lead with 11:11 left in the second quarter.

Columbus Grove picked up a first down on their next possession before the Versailles defense halted the drive. After a Grove punt traveled just seven yards, the Tigers took over at the Grove 46 needing seven plays to score as Gehret scored on a yard run to make it a 17-7 game.

The Bulldogs attempted to get back into the game as on their next possession, they went for a first down from their own 30. They were successful on that attempt, but a second try on fourth down ended with Landon Best throwing an interception.

Versailles took over at their own 29 and immediately were in business after a 15 yard run by Gehret. The drive ended seven plays later with Jace Watren catching a 23 yard touchdown pass with 13 seconds left in the half for a 23-7 lead. The extra point try was blocked by the Bulldogs.

Columbus Grove regrouped at halftime as they took the second half kickoff and drove down the field with Best scoring on a six yard run after taking nearly six minutes off the clock. The Bulldogs tried to make it a one score game only to see a pass fall incomplete.

"I talked about Bluffton having some grit in the second half and we needed to show the same grit," Schafer said. "We did. We had a great start to the first half obviously and a great start to the second half. Credit to them, they have an unbelievable offense. It's really hard to simulate in practice. I don't know what the time of possession was, but it was not very good for the Bulldogs. We took some shots that we probably shouldn't have taken offensively. It was hard to establish a rhythm.

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Honestly, it was not being on the field. It was a cold night and the offensive guys that aren't touching the field on defense, for them all of sudden for them to sit eight, nine minutes, then come in and try to have some push after they methodically went down the field, it's very, very difficult."

Versailles slowly answered back as they ate the remaining time off the third quarter clock before scoring a two yard run by Gehret five seconds into the final quarter for a 30-13 lead.

"It's huge," Schafer said of slowing the Tiger's rushing attack. "We talked about it all week that this would be a hard team to stop. They have the jet sweep going, the 'iso' and when you consider their quarterback as an extra runner, they almost have you outnumbered. He (Osborne) is the MAC Player of the Year and that's pretty impressive."

Columbus Grove drove to the Versailles 22 on their next possession before a holding call gave them first and 20. After an incomplete pass, the Tigers intercepted a Best pass. The Tigers ate another big chunk of time off the clock before the turning the ball over on downs. Six plays later the Bulldogs suffered their fourth turnover of the night and the Tigers were able to run out the clock.

Still coach Shafer was pleased with the Bulldogs overall season after overcoming a 1-2 start to win 11 straight games.

"This was a special group," Schafer said. I remember thinking at the beginning of they year if I had any leaders. I have a ton of them in that senior class, a very special class. The way that they were able to get our team to come together, they were all about the team, the whole team. It was awesome. We had lot of special underclassmen and sometimes that's hard on a senior class. They embraced it and made those underclassmen part of their own."