

Canton's gamble on fourth down leads to KLAA South crown

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Canton High coach Tim Baechler Free Press file photo

Canton does not have a reputation of being a risk-taking program with its run-the-ball, control-the-clock, hold-the-ball focus on offense.

So going for it on a fourth down with 5 yards to go near midfield, about halfway through the final quarter Friday with a 10-point lead and possibly giving Plymouth great field position, did seem a bit perilous.

"I always go for it on fourth-and-5 from midfield," coach Tim Baechler said with a chuckle. "We had a two-score lead and about 4 minutes left (more like 6). I didn't want to give them the ball back. I like watching our offense play a little more than watching the defense."

Quarterback Greg Williams faked a handoff, dipped his shoulder, looked up and found senior Jake Boucher downfield for a 30-yard gain and first down in the red zone. A few plays later, Williams scored on a 1-yard run to give Canton a 17-point lead before winning, 34-23, to improve to 7-0 and clinch the Kensington Lakes South.

"We thought of it as a regular first down (attempt)," said junior running back Chuck Turfe, who scored two touchdowns and gained 114 yards on 27 carries. "No one was getting too cocky or too confident. But we did it all for the seniors."

Before the long pass on fourth down, Canton had stopped Plymouth on two running plays with 1 yard to go for the Wildcats' own first down.

Plymouth's offense never touched the ball in the first quarter, yet the Wildcats led, 7-6, thanks to a 98-yard kickoff return for touchdown by Cameron Stella and Viet Nguyen's extra point. The big special-teams play followed Canton's opening-drive touchdown, a 24-yard run by Weston Price.

Canton answered with a 12-play drive and Turfe's first score, then Plymouth (5-2) followed with a 12-play drive, capped by D.J. Rossell's 1-yard plunge into the end zone, making it 14-13 Plymouth in the second quarter.

That was the Wildcats' last lead as Canton scored on the ensuing possession on Turfe's second touchdown, which was set up on a 35-yard run by Williams to the 1-yard line.

"Except for the one (interception) right before the half, our offense definitely controlled the game and dominated," Baechler said. "We did a great job taking care of the football; that was the name of the game. They don't turn it over often, and we don't either. The offense did an awesome job."

A 42-yard field goal by Nguyen and a 26-yard touchdown reception by Matt Busch closed out the second-half scoring for Plymouth. Chase Winingham had a 27-yard rushing touchdown for Canton, which as a team had 335 yards on the ground.

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