

Hartland holds off Canton, 24-21

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CANTON – Canton quarterback Greg Williams couldn't have seen it coming.

Trailing by three, the Chiefs were facing fourth-and-2 from Hartland's 32-yard line with under 30 seconds to play.

Williams rolled to his right, scanning for an open receiver. Worst case scenario, maybe he could scramble for a fresh set of downs or get within range for a potential game-tying field goal.

Then, the rug was pulled out from underneath him.

Hartland junior linebacker Aaron Laird shot through a gap on the left side of the line, and as Williams surveyed the field, he dove and tripped up the Chiefs quarterback by the ankles, his sack preserving a 24-21 win Saturday at Plymouth-Canton Educational Park.

"I just remember exactly what I was taught," Laird said.

"Everything, how it happened how it did, is exactly how I was taught. Shoot through that gap, sack the quarterback. That's it."

An appropriate finish, especially considering the way Hartland's defense has performed in the first two weeks of the season. The Eagles (2-0) pitched a second-half shutout against a vaunted Canton run game that had

already put up more than 100 yards and two touchdowns before the game was postponed Friday night, with the Chiefs leading 14-7 midway through the opening quarter. The Eagles held Canton (1-1) to just 96 yards the rest of the game, which was resumed Saturday just after noon. “We know exactly what they’re doing,” Laird said. “We just had to play our game and do our assignments, because we know where they’re going. They’re the kind of offense that runs right up to the line, lets you know where they’re running it and runs it right there.”

“He’s done the same thing for years,” Hartland coach Brian Savage said of Canton coach Tim Baechler’s run-predicated offense. “It’s a very meticulous offense that just kind of wears you down and physically tries to take advantage of you when you’re asleep. They try and throw a deep one on you, and I thought our kids stayed sharp all game.”

The Eagles showed their spread offense could work much the same way. Hartland chewed up clock and moved the ball with high-percentage short passes from Noah Marshall, inside handoffs to Ryan McRobb and on several jet sweeps to Max Cadman.

“Standing back there, you could see they weren’t really covering the flats,” Marshall said. “That’s a nice, easy throw right there and it wears them out. You could tell in their eyes they were tired going both ways a little bit. We just took advantage of it and kept pounding it every single play.”

Marshall did take a couple shots down the field, including a 23-yard touchdown pass to junior tight end Nathan Skene on fourth-and-5 to tie the game at 14 in the second quarter.

“Maybe just a little underthrown, but (Skene, who’s 6-foot-3) is a big guy who can go up and get it,” Marshall said, “so it doesn’t really matter where the ball is because he’s an athlete and he’ll go up and get it.”

Canton’s final scoring drive ensued. The Chiefs drove 86 yards in 14 plays and 6:02, capped by Chuck Turfe’s second touchdown from two yards out, to give the Chiefs a 21-14 halftime lead.

Hartland cut it to 21-17 on Spencer Hayes’ 40-yard field goal on its first possession of the second half.

Williams was intercepted on Canton’s next drive, when Eagles junior safety Brett Borseth, not fooled by the play fake, jumped the route.

“The defense, I mean Aaron Laird, that kid was all over the field making plays,” Savage said. “They tried inside and (Andy) Maschke inside, (Jake) Economou, those guys were just making plays. Outside, Brett Borseth, I know he had the pick and that was huge, I think. That kind of got the momentum going our way.”

The Eagles capitalized with the go-ahead touchdown late in the third to take a 24-21 lead. Hartland went 53 yards in seven plays, keyed by a 28-yard run by McRobb and capped by Marshall, who kept it to himself in walking in from a yard out.

Marshall finished 12 of 18 passing for 163 yards and a touchdown while adding 18 yards and a score on the ground. McRobb had 114 yards on 22 carries and Cadman, the all-purpose threat, had 101 yards of total offense with five catches for 56 yards and six rushes for 45 yards. Hartland's first touchdown came on a 97-yard kick return by Brett Oliver in the first quarter Friday night. "Physically, I thought our kids were maybe in a little better shape," Savage said. "They did a great job of getting Ryan some holes and Max Cadman had some great sweep runs. We kind of distributed it around and wore them down."