

Canton sends Northville packing, 48-7

Brad Emons 8:56 a.m. EDT November 1, 2014



The wind was gusting upwards of 35 MPH, it was damp and temperatures plunged into the 30s.

Just what a meteorologist would dial up on a Friday Halloween night for Canton's Wing-T running attack as the host Chiefs took advantage of the elements and opened the Division 1 playoffs with a resounding 48-7 pre-district victory over Northville.

Canton, which improved to 8-2 overall, also had the statistics to back up their performance up by rushing for a total of 469 yards, to go along with 20 first downs, while limiting Northville to a total 142 in total offense.

Canton coach Tim Baechler could revel in the fact that there were also snowflakes serenading the victory afterwards as the Chiefs will move on to face Livonia Churchill (8-2) for the Region 3-District 1 title next Friday at home. (It will be a rematch of the Oct. 3 meeting won by Canton, 40-35.)

"This is perfect Canton football weather," Baechler said. "I saw the forecast on Sunday and I said, 'Oh, my God, I hope this comes true.' The worse it is, the better for us. And it did."

Canton led 21-0 after one quarter and 34-7 at halftime racking up a total of 280 yards – all of which came on the ground.

One of the big reasons was play of the offensive line.

"We've been waiting for this," Baechler said. "I think we finally came of age on the offensive line, too. We've had some injury problems, just plugging people around and

keep grinding it out. And I think today I finally think we have a Canton offensive line ... finally."

On its first possession, Canton took just six plays to score. Senior Brian Newton started the scoring parade with 1-yard TD run with 9:17 left in the first quarter, which was set up by Newton's own 42-yard burst down to the Northville 13 on just the third play from scrimmage. With the wind blowing from the north, Canton got the ball back at the Northville 46 when the Mustangs' punt traveled a mere 4 yards. And on the second play, sophomore Marcus Sanders busted a 42-yard TD run to make it 14-0 with 6:06 left in the first.

The Chiefs then scored again with 1:16 to go in the first period on their third drive, this time on a Charles Turfe 9-yard TD run to go up 21-0 (following Andrew Loehnis' extra point).

"The hardest thing playing against that offense is that you're depending on 11 players to remain disciplined at all times," Northville coach Matt Ladach said. "And, of course, they're teenagers and it's just easy for one of them make a mistake or not have him do his assignment. And when that happens, they make big plays."

The Mustangs, who went three-and-out twice to start the game, got on the board with 8:13 left in the half on quarterback Justin Zimbo's 5-yard TD pass to tight end Ryan Roberts to cap a 12-play, 65-yard drive. Jake Moody's PAT cut the deficit to 21-7.

Canton, which went 4-for-4 on its first-half drives, took just five plays to score again as quarterback Greg Williams

faked a handoff into the line, the Northville defense bit, and the Canton QB kept it himself for a 46-yard TD keeper with 5:39 left in the half to make it 28-7.

"There were a couple of times where we blew up the trap, they bounced it out, and had a huge seam on the outside," Ladach said. "Those are backbreakers. A kid does everything he's supposed to, blows it up, and their kid just makes a great play."

Northville then gambled on fourth-and-two at its own 37, but got stopped when P.J. Schnepf was denied short of the first down marker by Canton linebacker Jacob Stephan with 3:26 to go.

And the Chiefs took advantage by taking just five plays to score once again capped by Sanders' 11-yard TD run with 1:00 left in the half. (The PAT attempt was blown short by a stiff wind to keep it 34-7 at intermission.)

"Until they (Northville) had the wind at their backs, I definitely think it was to our advantage for us because we got that early lead and they were kind of stuck running the ball," Baechler said. "We did a great job containing their quarterback (Zimbo) most of the time running. He's a good athlete, very shifty and quick. We didn't give up the big pass play. That was our goal coming into the game." After a scoreless third quarter, Sanders scored with 10:43 remaining on a 30-yard run and Williams ran in for two to make it a running clock as the Chiefs increased their advantage to 42-7.

And with 3:34 left, Newton broke through the seam of the Northville defense to score on a 67-yard TD run to complete the rout.

Newton paced the Chiefs with 171 yards rushing on 14 carries, while Sanders added 168 on just 12 attempts.

Turfe was 13-for-81, while Williams added 3-for-49.

Darren Tuttle, a 5-foot-11, 215 pound senior, helped key the resurgent Canton offensive line.

"We've faced a lot of adversity, you know, a lot of injuries," Tuttle said. "This is the 10th different offensive line arrangement we've had, and tonight we played a full four quarters, which we have had a hard time doing.

"It was blocking and blocking hard. Come off the ball and just hit people. We don't need a scheme, just come out and play the game of football."

And the Chiefs more than held own in the trenches.

"Northville, they're a good team, a lot of size on them, some D-I players, and we came out and had one of the best games we've had," Tuttle said.

Northville, which finished 6-4, losses 37 seniors to graduation.

"This is a great group of kids," Ladach said. "I'm truly blessed to be the head coach here and this class is just another example of why I love my job. as much as I do."

bemons@hometownlife.com