

## Canton plays like they're dying and knocks off unbeaten Northville



Adversity has always seemed to be on the Canton sideline this season. Adversity's latest calling was the funeral of 2011 graduate, Josh Nolen, which took place this morning.

"The funeral service today was inspirational, it was awesome. I talked to the kids a little bit about that and we played for him and his family today," Canton head coach Tim Baechler said. The Chiefs were able to ride early momentum with the memory of Nolen fresh in their memory banks to defeat previously unbeaten Northville, 34-27, for their second consecutive District Championship.

"It was a special day. I told the kids in the meeting room before we left. I said 'Guys, if you knew you had a week left to live, what would you do? How hard would you play? This young man was sitting here like you five years ago.' You can't waste a down, a play, a day," Baechler said.

"You got to live like you're dying."



From the opening kickoff Canton (9-2) did indeed play like they were down to their last minutes of life. Markus Sanders ran for 74 yards on the second play of the game to set up a Jakob Wickens touchdown.

Colin Troup intercepted a Justin Zimbo pass as Northville was driving into Canton territory on their first drive of the game. Canton cashed in on its ensuing possession on a 7-yard touchdown run by Wickens.

Northville (10-1) head coach, Matt Ladich, admitted that the interception sandwiched between two Canton rushing touchdowns put his team behind the eight ball early on.

“It did, that hurt,” Ladach said. “Every possession in this game mattered and turning the ball over was something we knew we could not do and unfortunately we did, but that kid (Troup) made a great play.”

Both teams traded blows in the second quarter as Jared Stephens rushed for two touchdowns and Zimbo connected with Zach Prystash and Terrell Cunningham to make it 28-14 at half.

The Mustangs came out firing in the second half and converted a nifty hook-and-latter play when Zimbo connected with Jack Burke who pitched to Adam Ghabra who trotted in from 60 yards out. The Ghabra touchdown cut the Canton lead to 28-21 just a minute into the third quarter.

Unfortunately for Northville, the Chiefs countered with a clock consuming touchdown drive. To make matters worse, the Mustangs only had the ball for 41 seconds in the fourth quarter. They were forced to punt just 41 seconds into the fourth quarter and didn’t get the ball back until there was 5:35 left, trailing 34-21.

The Mustangs seized their opportunity on a 60-yard touchdown pass from Zimbo to Burke. The quick strike (one play drive) cut the Canton lead to 34-27.

From there, the Chiefs went back to the ground and ate up the final 5:29 left of the clock with runs by Jared Stephens and Sanders.

“It was a tough game coming in, but we had a focus to be physical one play at a time. I really want to give a shout out to my offensive line: they work their tails off each and every day,” Sanders said.

The pound it out style is nothing new for Canton and is something that Baechler is passionate about, especially in the new age of spread offenses.

“I’m the old school guy I like us coming off and gaining four yards a crack, I love it,” Baechler said. “It’s physicality; we’re here to hit people and block.”

Next week Canton will travel to play the consensus number one team in the state in Saline (11-0) and it will be the third week in a row the Chiefs will face a spread offense.

“Those guys are good at. They get matchups too. While we’re picking on d-linemen they’re picking on DB’s. It’s a big chess match and these spread people are really good at running it,” Baechler said.