

Rejuvenated Canton Chiefs get 1st win

Evan Paputa, Correspondent 11:13 p.m. EDT September 9, 2016



Canton went back to the drawing board after back-to-back losses to start the high school football season.

That mythological drawing board might have proved to be of some value Friday night as the Chiefs took down host Hartland, 35-21.

“(We) just went back to the drawing board and said we’re going to get better at what we do,” Canton head coach Tim Baechler said. “We needed this bad. This was huge.”

Julian Thornton scored the two touchdowns that pushed Canton (1-2) ahead for good. He extended Canton’s lead from 21-14 to 35-14 on rushing touchdowns from 21 and 48 yards, respectively.

“We just came out with the focus that we need to win this game and play this game like it was the playoffs. We wanted to pick up some momentum. When you practice hard, good things happen,” Thornton said.

Thornton led the Chiefs in rushing with 111 yards on just nine rushes.

Following Thornton's second touchdown of the night with 8:27 remaining in the fourth quarter, Hartland answered back on a 28-yard touchdown pass from Brad Ekonen to Hunter Delanoy.

The Eagles then forced a Canton punt and marched 81 yards on a drive that started at their own 4-yard line to the Canton 15 in only 90 seconds. However, Ekonen's pass to the endzone that appeared to be caught in bounds and a touchdown, was ruled incomplete.

Hartland was then issued a team unsportsmanlike conduct penalty that took them back to 3rd-and-25 from the 30-yard line. Canton got two stops and the victory.

Defense Holds

In the first two games of the season, Canton held a halftime lead before seeing their opponent see success offensively in the second half. Against Hartland, the Canton offense managed the clock and only allowed the Eagles four possessions and the Chiefs got stops on three out of the four. "It was just being tough, playing like Canton: getting four or five yards at a time," Thornton said.

Canton came out and stopped Hartland on their first two possessions of the third quarter. Those two stops paved way for Thornton's two touchdowns to give Canton a three touchdown lead with just over eight minutes left.

Consecutive stops were a point of emphasis in practice during the week of practice leading up to the game, according to linebacker Noah Brown.

"It was big. In the previous games we weren't able to make a lot of stops in a row. This game, we came out trying to do it," Brown (seven solo tackles) said.

Baechler saw improvement on defense. It wasn't as pretty as a shutout, but when stops were needed, the defense collaborated to get them.

Ekonen was able to use his athleticism to extend plays all night long.

Several times he was able to avoid a Canton rush and roll out before finding an open receiver. The Eagles also used Reece Potter as a Wildcat quarterback. Potter ran for 81 yards on ten carries.

"We are making some technical errors against running quarterbacks. We're getting skated on the edge. Still giving up too many big plays on defense. Held them to 21 points which is better. We're playing the inside run game well, I'm pretty happy about that," Baechler said.

Canton will play at Livonia Franklin (1-2) 7 p.m. next Friday.