

McCabe: Canton uses effective offense, tenacious defense to dominate

Reaction on backup's touchdown run may have been the real highlight in Canton's blowout win



With 3:01 left in the game, Canton's Cameron Dixon took a handoff and scored on a 5-yard run.

On the Canton sidelines, Markus Sanders leaped into the air and began screaming as if he had walked downstairs on Christmas morning and found a pony under the tree.

Dixon's touchdown didn't clinch a state playoff berth or wrap up a league championship. All Dixon's touchdown did was put an exclamation point on Canton's dominating 51-7 victory over Livonia Churchill Friday night, but the Canton players responded as if they were headed to Ford Field.

“He’s one of our scout team running backs and he takes a lot of hits by our starting defense in practice,” Sanders said. “It was just a good moment for him because he finally got his time to shine.”

Dixon is a senior and this was his first varsity touchdown.

“I’ve been looking forward to this my whole life, and doing it with my boys on Canton made it that much better,” said Dixon, who led the state in pats-on-the-back-after his TD. “I think the boys just like me because I work hard. I try my best every day at practice. I love my team. I’ll do anything for my team.”

So would Sanders, and he did in this key KLAA South Division game, gaining 229 yards on 19 carries and scoring on runs of 65 and 29 yards in the Chiefs’ fourth straight victory.

Like Canton (4-2, 3-0), Sanders started slowly this season, trying to recover from a strained PCL. This effort against the Chargers (4-2, 3-1) was crucial for the back who ran for 2,495 yards as a junior.

“It took a couple of weeks to recover,” he said. “I’m back and I’m better.”

So was the Canton line, which also helped Reid McDonnell gain 118 yards on 18 carries as the Chiefs, who lost to Churchill, 33-14 last season, gained 454 yards — all on the ground.

“I was just reading my keys and my linemen helped me,” Sanders said.

“We practiced a lot on what they were doing last year. They were doing a lot of slanting last year, and we didn’t come out the way we wanted last year. So we had to have redemption this year.”

The offensive explosion was made possible by a tenacious defense that limited a potent Churchill offense to 176 yards.

“We all just read our keys, did what we needed to do and at the end of the day we won the game,” said defensive tackle/offensive guard Jake Warner.

“We just shut them down.”

In the first game of the season, Canton led Dearborn Fordson, 28-7 at halftime, before losing 40-35. The next week the Chiefs allowed Walled Lake Western to come from behind and hand them a 33-30 loss.

Those are top 10 teams in the state, and Canton learned some valuable lessons.

“It was very tough because we really didn’t expect that to happen,” Sanders said. “The second half against Fordson, we got smacked in the mouth and we didn’t come out the way we were supposed to.”

The Chiefs came out for this one the way they were supposed to. After punting on its first possession, Canton scored the next five times it had the ball and led, 31-7, at halftime.

Like his players, Canton coach Tim Baechler might have been most excited about Dixon’s touchdown and the reaction it caused.

“He’s our scout-team running back and gets pounded,” Baechler said. “He has a great attitude, and we all love that kid and have so much respect for him. The way our kids responded to that means they get it.”