

Canton run game corrals Mustangs for Kensington title

Brad Emons , hometownlife.com 12:07 p.m. EDT October 23, 2016



Tom Holzer Field suffered carpet burn Friday night, courtesy of Canton's vaunted running attack.



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Canton Chief Reid McDonnell is tackled by Mustang Ryan Nelson. JOHN HEIDER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The Chiefs, who have perfected the wing-T over the years, didn't attempt a pass and didn't need to as they wore a hole in Northville's artificial turf with a total of 448 yards rushing in a 42-27 win.

It was Canton's first Kensington Conference championship since 2010, something Canton coach Tim Baechler would savor.

"We haven't won a league championship in a while, so that's big," he said. "I like winning that and my son (Lou) is on the team and he had a hell of a game today, both sides of the ball. That's what really makes it sweet. He played great."

The Chiefs, who have won seven straight after losing their first two games of the season, built a 28-6 lead in the third quarter before Northville (7-2) made a valiant comeback, pulling to within 35-27 on a 16-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Jack Burke to Stephen Ernst with 10:53 left in the game.

The Mustangs' Trenton Guthrie then pounced on a pooch kick that Canton fumbled on the ensuing play at the Chiefs' 27. But Northville couldn't

convert on the turnover as Jake Moody's 50-yard field-goal attempt sailed wide right.

"We had the momentum going, had them on their heels and we felt really good about the situation we were in," Northville coach Matt Ladach said. "Unfortunately, we sputtered there."



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Northville quarterback Jack Burke (left) tries to avoid the grasp of Canton's Lou Baechler. (Photo: JOHN HEIDER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)

Canton then put the game away with one of its patented time-consuming drives, going 80 yards in 10 plays as senior Julian Thornton scored on a 1-yard TD with only 3:20 left.

The Chiefs were able to spread the wealth with their running attack, led by Markus Sanders (21 carries for 217 yards), Reid McDonnell (24 carries, 141 yards) and Thornton (16 carries, 97 yards).

"We like to share the ball," said McDonnell, a 5-foot-11, 180-pound senior. "All of our backs are really good. The linemen just open up all the holes. They make it easy for us and anybody can run the ball."

Northville, meanwhile, did just the opposite of the Chiefs offensively as Burke completed 21-of-33 passes for 355 yards, with over half the completions going to speedy junior wide receiver A.J. Abbott, who had 11 catches for 238 yards.

But the Mustangs mustered only 28 total yards on the ground.



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Canton's Steven Walker (right) breaks up a pass intended for Northville's A.J. Abbott. (Photo: JOHN HEIDER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)

Baechler's objective against the quick-strike Mustangs was control the ball and the clock.

"Keeping their offense off the field as much as possible and trying to score as slowly as possible, but score without turning it over," he said.

Canton took the opening kickoff, going 80 yards in 14 plays and eating 6:48 of the clock, resulting in a 1-yard TD run by McDonnell.

Northville came back on a 25-yard field goal by Moody, but the Chiefs scored again, going 80 yards on eight plays as McDonnell scored on a 3-yard run, fighting his way into the end zone with 8:23 left in the first half to make it 14-3.

Moody came back with a 32-yard field goal with 4:30 remaining in the half to cut the deficit to 14-6.



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Northville's Tim Wojciechowski (left) and Trenton Guthrie double-team Canton's Ronald Fenderson. (Photo: JOHN HEIDER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)

But Canton made it three TDs on three possessions as Steven Walker's 44-yard kickoff return, after it was spotted back by a 15-yard penalty, put the ball on the Canton 44. Nine plays later, Thornton ran in from 2 yards out to make it 21-6 with only 16 seconds left until intermission following Ben Tubaro's extra point.

After Northville went three-and-out on its first possession of the third quarter, Canton drove 74 yards in 12 plays, capped by a Sanders 9-yard TD run with 4:36 left.

Burke, who was 9-of-11 passing for 63 yards in the first half, then got red-hot in the third quarter, completing 9-of-14 for 217 yards while throwing TD passes of 81 and 19 yards to Abbott in the quarter to cut the deficit to 28-20. (Another 83-yard scoring pass to Abbott had been called back because of a personal foul penalty.)

"You get up by three (touchdowns) on these guys and (Ladach) brings out his tackle box ... big-time fishing trip," Baechler said. "I mean, different formations, different stuff that we hadn't seen and you're at their mercy. That quarterback (Burke) and (Abbott) were excellent. They just kept chipping back and we made a couple of mistakes with the fumbles and

gave them momentum. And luckily our defense stopped them and our offense answered."

After Northville unsuccessfully tried to recover its second onside kick (recovered by Lou Baechler) at the Northville 34, Sanders took the next hand-off and raced 34 yards to make it 35-20 with 1:25 to go in the third. "It was the O-line's toughness, their blocking, everybody was mentally ready and we try and go every day in practice and be tough, run it down their throats all day," Thornton said. "We tried to stay calm, composed. Coach Baechler preaches about it all the time and the offense just got to run our stuff just as we always do."

Northville simply could not stop Canton's run game.

"They are really good at what they do and they're well-coached," Ladach said of the Chiefs. "And their kids give great effort. Their kids play hard. Their kids do a very nice job of faking on every single play and they take advantage of little mistakes by our defense, by everybody's defense, for that matter. It's just tough."

But despite the loss, Northville showed no quit.

"Our kids have been tough all year and they don't know what it means to give up," Ladach said. "I'm so proud of their effort tonight. Obviously, I'm disappointed in the result, but I can't fault our kids' effort one bit. They played their hearts out."