

# McCabe: Canton comes back from 0-2 start to make playoffs

**The Chiefs win seven straight to earn playoff spot after 0-2 start**

By **Mick McCabe, Detroit Free Press** October 23, 2016



Canton tight end Jake Dattillio

Tim Baechler had a plan for attacking Canton's football season. He divided the nine games into three distinct groups.

"All off-season I was looking at our first six games and there were six playoff teams right there," Baechler said. "I was thinking, OK,

we need to go 2-1, 2-1 and be sitting at 4-2 going into our last three and we'll be OK."

Plans are a wonderful thing, but they have a way of blowing up in your face.

Canton opened the season with a heart-breaking 40-35 loss to Dearborn Fordson and then an equally painful 33-30 loss to Walled Lake Western.

"We had the lead and lost by long bombs with under a minute left in each game," Baechler said. "It sucked. You go out and go 0-2 and that's not exactly how I had it planned."

The last time Canton began a season 0-2 was 1998 and two games into this season it appeared the Chiefs were going to miss the state playoffs for only the second time since the turn of the century.

But Sunday night Baechler was in front of the TV watching Canton's name appear in the Division 1 playoffs.

The Chiefs are 7-2 and getting to this point was not easy after the 0-2 debacle.

"So then it was must-win from there," Baechler said. "I remember driving up to Hartland thinking we have to have this and going to Franklin and thinking we had to have this. It was a real desperate feeling, and I think our kids felt that desperation, too, and they started playing."

After beating Hartland, 35-21, and Franklin, 34-21, Canton survived a 21-14 game against arch-rival Plymouth.

Then it was on to 4-1 Livonia Churchill and the Chiefs responded with a resounding 51-7 victory.

"Midway through the second quarter of Churchill the dam broke," Baechler said. "We let loose. Our kids played angry, fast, mean; played without fear of making mistakes and wow, it just popped, and we haven't looked back since."

Canton put an exclamation point on its season Friday when it beat Northville, 42-27, to claim the Kensington Conference championship. Ironically, Canton will open the Division 1 playoffs back at Northville.

The Chiefs were at the best offensively against Northville. The tight T-formation full-house backfield was so effective running the ball, Canton didn't have to attempt a single pass.

As usual, Markus Sanders led the way with 196 yards on 18 carries and was helped by Reid McDonnell's 147 yards on 24 carries and Julian Thornton's 98 yards on 18 carries. The Chiefs ran for 466 yards and the three backs each scored twice.

One of the reasons for Canton's poor start was McDonnell, who also starts at outside linebacker, missed the first two games.

McDonnell and Thornton are valuable because they do more than gain yards in a Canton offense that puts premium on carrying out fakes well past the line of scrimmage.

"So many times you get just a running back," said Baechler. "No, we don't want just a running back. You've got to block and fake and do all of the little boring things. Those two guys have really stepped it up."