

# Hornets stop Chiefs in district final

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Even after Saline had pulled ahead 37-24 midway through the fourth quarter of Friday's Division 1 district final, the Canton Chiefs believed. They believed even more when senior quarterback Jake O'Donnell found senior running back Reid McDonnell in the end zone for a 4-yard TD toss with 1:20 remaining.

But the onside kick everybody knew was coming at Hornet Stadium rolled out of bounds near the midfield stripe and Saline was able to hold on for the 37-31 victory.

"We didn't recover the onside kick," veteran Chiefs head football coach Tim Baechler said. "We worked on every possibility of onside kicks all week. We just didn't get it done."



Canton senior running back Reid McDonnell tries to elude the grasp of a Saline defender Friday night. (Photo: JOHN HEIDER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)

Baechler also lamented missed opportunities that cost the Chiefs — including a would-be interception by sophomore Steven Walker that turned into a long reception that led to a Saline field goal with five seconds to go in the first half, knotting the score at 17-17.

He also shook his head about miscues that led to a 64-yard touchdown catch-and-run by Saline senior tight end Bryce Wolma (five catches for 115 yards) and a 47-yard run on a fake punt by senior running back Connor Hibbard (18 rushes, 183 yards) early in the fourth, when Canton trailed only 27-24.

Hibbard zig-zagged down the field to set up a first down inside the Canton 15. Three snaps later, quarterback Zach Schwartzenberger bootlegged it into the end zone from the 7-yard line to open up a 10-point lead.

“Four big plays they had on offense were mental mistakes,” Baechler said. “We had two potential picks, didn’t make the plays. They have a lot of good players and they’re very well-coached. It is what it is. We had to play near perfect to beat a team like this and we didn’t.”

After the heartwrenching defeat ended Canton's season at 8-3 (Saline improved to 9-2), O'Donnell fought back emotion as he talked about his team leaving it all out on the field.

"The boys played their hearts out," O'Donnell said. "I love our boys; we did all we could. I love them. All I wanted was another week of practice with them."

Baechler praised his team, but stressed that it was going to take a while for the sting of the loss to go away.

"Great season, especially after going 0-2," Baechler said. "They rallied. You get used to winning, it was eight in a row. Losing stinks, it hurts. This is going to stay with us."

"We're all going to be walking around depressed the next couple weeks."

Big games, once again, by Canton senior running backs Markus Sanders (19 carries, 188 yards) and Julian Thornton (14 carries, 146 yards), were not enough to keep the streak alive.

The Chiefs got on the board first, at 4:53 of the opening quarter, on a 31-yard field goal by Ben Tubaro.

Setting up the low-liner that split the uprights was Sanders, who returned the opening kickoff 40 yards to near midfield.

## Wild second

That 3-0 lead carried into the second quarter, which was a wild-and-crazy quarter with 31 points combined between the teams.

Canton enjoyed a 92-yard scoring march that concluded when O'Donnell scrambled and connected with Sanders for a 9-yard scoring pass with 10:15 left in the half.

On the play, the senior quarterback scrambled all over the backfield before finding Sanders open in the left flat. The diminutive running back broke a tackle along the left sideline and took it in from there to make it 10-0.

But the Hornets showed they weren't going to fold on the next snap, as Cole Daniels threw a halfback pass that quarterback Schwartzenberger caught and turned into a 67-yard gain down to Canton's 10.

Schwartzenberger then hit tight end Wolma in the end zone for a 10-yard touchdown, slicing the Chiefs' lead to 10-7 with 9:16 to go in the second.

Saline got the ball right back after the ensuing kickoff was fumbled, giving the Hornets a first down at the Canton 47.

On second down, Hibbard ripped through the line for a 47-yard touchdown run to put Saline up 14-10 with 8:57 remaining in the quarter.

This time, however, the Chiefs responded. Thornton lost his footing before finding it again and, by the time he stopped, he had scored on a 62-yard run — putting Canton back up 17-14 with 6:44 left before the intermission.

Just when it looked as though the Chiefs would add to the lead, however, a pass by O'Donnell was intercepted in the Saline end zone.

The Hornets then moved the ball 46 yards to Canton's 25 with just five seconds left on a play that easily could have been an interception by Steven Walker.

Schwartzenberger's long throw down the left side of the field looked to be picked off, but Emmett Turner came down with the ball instead, wrestling the ball away from the Canton sophomore.

That gave kicker J.T. Turner enough time to launch a 37-yard field goal as the half expired, sending both teams into the break tied at 17-17.



The Chiefs and Hornets go at it Friday night. The back-and-forth game thrilled the large crowd at Saline.