



(Photo: MICHAEL VASILNEK)

The Canton Chiefs have played plenty of big games in recent seasons, but not at University of Michigan's "Big House," which they did Saturday afternoon against Muskegon Mona Shores in their season opener.

Canton had flashes of excellence throughout the "Battle at the Big House," but fell short 41-23.

Sparking Mona Shores to victory were Damari Roberson (92-yard kickoff return TD), D'Anthony Davis (13-104 yards rushing, two TDs) and quarterback Tristan Robbins (219 combined yards).

Playing a strong two-way game for the Chiefs was senior Nick Polydoros, who scored two rushing touchdowns and was a defensive

force all day. Junior running back Steven Walker was another bright spot for Canton, with 20 carries for 158 yards. Senior quarterback Conner Engel connected on five of 13 passes for 92 yards. Canton coach Tim Baechler said the Sailors were a formidable opponent, mixing up formations and showing they will be a team to be reckoned with this season.

"They run a tricky mid-line option, and an outside veer option," Baechler noted. "... Scrimmages were all we had to go on. But we just four or five different formations and it really took a lot to adjust. A couple of our kids just weren't doing what we wanted to do. Plus when we did they were just good.

"They were big, strong, fast, they broke tackles. We got too many kids going both ways and it kind of caught up to us at the end."

Takeaways

Following are five takeaways from the game.



Canton's Aaron Garbarino (32) and Chase Meredith (14) team up to tackle Mona Shores running back Sincere Dent (44). (Photo: MICHAEL VASILNEK)

UNANSWERED

After the Chiefs went up 7-0 on a Colin Troup touchdown run, the Sailors roared back with three unanswered scores to go up 21-7 with about three minutes to go in the half.

BACK AND FORTH

The teams then traded touchdowns in the next two minutes, with Canton's 12-yard TD run by Polydoros immediately answered by Roberson, who raced down the field for a 92-yard kickoff return TD. Canton then added a 30-yard field goal by Chase Meredith with two seconds remaining to get to within 28-17 at halftime.



Launching a throw with a defender in his face is Canton quarterback Conner Engel (7). (Photo: MICHAEL VASILNEK)

BIG OPENERS

Last year, the Chiefs opened the season at the Prep Kick-off Classic at Wayne State University. This year's appearance at the Big House

was the team's first.

Baechler and players said it still was a positive learning experience, despite the loss.

"Our starters got to play four tough quarters and we're going to get hardened up from this," Baechler said. "We're going to improve an awful lot from now until next Friday. We'll be fired up, believe me." According to senior Noah Brown, "It was a good experience for the team. I wish we could have come out with a win, but I feel we just made a lot of mental mistakes, a lot of people didn't do their jobs today. I messed up a couple times. I just feel like it was on us, it wasn't on them."

Polydoras said playing at Michigan Stadium "was really exciting, a once in a lifetime opportunity for us. I thought it was really cool that they put this together for us. We have a lot of things to improve on, and we'll just improve upon them and get better throughout the season."

PERSISTENCE PAYS OFF

A penalty against Mona Shores cost the Sailors a touchdown in the second quarter, but only briefly. After being pushed back to the Canton 39, a straight-ahead running attack sparked a 2-yard rushing TD by Davis.

GOOD RESPONSE

Canton came out strong in the third quarter, in an attempt to get back into the game. The defense stopped the Sailors and then the Chiefs marched 89 yards in 13 plays, with Polydoras punching it in from the three. That made it 28-23.



Mona Shores defender Matt Martin (23) tries in vain to pull down Canton's Lou Baechler (1). (Photo: MICHAEL VASILNEK)



Despite a strong defensive effort from Canton's Steven Walker (4), Muskegon Mona Shores wide receiver Damari Roberson makes a spectacular catch.; (Photo: MICHAEL VASILNEK)



Securing the football for Canton is Nick Polydoros (12). (Photo: MICHAEL VASILNEK)