

High school football roundup: Canton smokes Saline



Canton — Two heavyweight powers took the field to open the state football playoffs Friday night and No. 14 Canton came away with a dominating 42-14 victory over No. 15 Saline in a Division 1 pre-district game.

The teams are used to playing each other in the postseason. with Saline (7-2)

winning two of the previous three years, including 37-31 last season. Canton (9-1) jumped out to a 13-0 lead four minutes into the game, then recovered a pair of fumbles to start the second half, scoring touchdowns off both to open up a 34-7 cushion midway through the third quarter. Canton put the running clock into play with 9:56 left when senior quarterback Connor Engel scored on a 10-yard TD run, then found Noah Brown for the 2-point conversion for a 35-point lead, 42-7.

After Engel's TD run, Canton held a 394-139 advantage in total yards, piling up 300 on the ground. Steven Walker finished with 170 yards on 16 carries and Colin Troup 115 yards on 21.

It was Troup who scored the two early TDs in the second half, scoring on a 16-yard run on a third-and-3, then scoring on a 1-yard run on a fourth-down play after Canton had recovered an onside kick at the Saline 35.

"I would have never had those two touchdowns (to start the second half) if it wasn't for my offensive line," Troup said. "It was a huge momentum boost, and when we recovered that first fumble I really think we wanted to

step on the jugular like Coach B (head coach Tim Baechler) has expressed. And that's what we did."

Things couldn't have started for better Canton, when Walker broke loose for a 76-yard TD run on the second play from scrimmage for a 7-0 lead. Saline senior Cole Daniels wasn't about to let the rainy conditions prevent him from throwing the ball. But Canton's Noah Brown pressured Daniels and linebacker Lou Baechler intercepted his pass and returned it 45 yards for a TD and 13-0 lead less than four minutes in.

"The ball was thrown right to me and my defense did a heck of a job blocking for me," said Baechler, son of Canton's longtime head coach. Daniels brought Saline back, pump faking left, then finding Andrew Diuble over the middle for a 32-yard TD pass to cut the deficit to 13-7 with 1:59 left in the opening quarter.

Canton responded, driving 80 yards with Walker again coming up with a big run of 42 yards to set up Engel's 21-yard TD pass to Brown for a 20-7 lead early in the second quarter.



The teams each came up with big fourth-down stops to end drives in the second.

Canton had a chance to enter the locker room with a 20-plus point lead, but Walker fumbled at the Saline 3 with six seconds left in the half. Walker's

miscue didn't prove costly, as Canton dominated the third quarter to put the game away.

First, Canton recovered a fumble on the first play from scrimmage in the second half, with James Deese pouncing on the ball at the Saline 38. After Troup's 16-yard run, Canton executed the onside kick when the ball bounced off of multiple Saline players before Canton recovered at the 35 to set up another Troup TD.

“James Deese made a heck of a play, heads-up play. We knew we had to corral them because they’re a very good team on offense,” Lou Baechler said of big plays to start the second half.

