

Canton dominates Saline to open playoffs, 42-14

This time it was different. Much different.

Friday night's Division 1 pre-district football game at Plymouth-Canton Educational Park was all Canton, pretty much from the opening kickoff as the Chiefs won 42-14.

The game was by far the most lopsided of the recent string of playoff meetings between Canton and Saline, opponents for the fourth consecutive postseason.

On the second snap of the rainy night, Canton junior running back Steven Walker burst up the middle and kept on going for a 76-yard touchdown. He finished with 172 yards rushing in 17 carries.

The Chiefs (9-1) then went up 13-0 on senior linebacker Lou Baechler's 45-yard interception return. He anticipated where Saline quarterback Cole Daniels might throw the ball, picked it off and took it to the house.



Lou Baechler (1) makes a run for the end zone after an interception. (Photo: Bill Bresler | hometownlife.com)

"I knew that play was coming, I watched a ton of film," said Baechler, still wearing a cast on his arm after fracturing it earlier in the season. "I got out there and just made a play."

Veteran Canton head coach Tim Baechler said the two

early touchdowns set the tone against the Hornets, who finished 7-2.

"It was a huge momentum builder to score on the first play and then come back and score on that (interception)," Tim Baechler said. "It was just a great play by a great player."

Relentless

There was little let-up from that point on, either. The Chiefs were relentless in all departments, enjoying a 432-186 edge in offensive yardage.

The talent and tenacity of senior tight end Noah Brown enabled Canton to carry a 20-7 lead into the intermission.

Brown scored on a 20-yard pass from senior quarterback Connor Engel (3-3, 89 yards). He caught Engel's pass near the 10-yard line, and bulldozed his way through Saline tacklers en route to the end zone.

"We've been looking forward to this point of the season all year," Brown said. "We feel we got a good team that can do something special this year. And we're just working hard and taking them one at a time.

"We had a really great week of practice, probably one of the better weeks of practice we had all year. And we just pound, pound, pound all game. We broke em, put up 42 points on one of the great defenses in the state. We're pretty proud of that."



Canton then really broke the game open in the third quarter, scoring two quick touchdowns to build a 34-7 advantage.

Recovering a fumble in the first minute was junior James Deese and the Chiefs took advantage on senior running back Colin Troup's 16-yard TD run.

Troup gained 111 yards in 20 rushes and scored twice. He also tallied a 61-yard reception.

Then came an onside kick by senior Chase Meredith, which was recovered on a heads-up play by sophomore Tim Pennington.

Canton needed just six plays to find the end zone again, this time on a 1-yard plunge by Troup.

"We finally got some breaks, and got those two things," coach Baechler said. "They weren't planned, obviously, you hope to get those. But they actually worked out. We got that kick, that was big.

"But then the offense came out and took advantage of both of those and kind of opened the game up from there."

Following are several other takeaways from the Canton-Saline playoff matchup:

Familiar foes

It wouldn't be high school football playoff season without Saline and Canton hooking up. Friday's postseason meeting between the teams was the fourth in a row with the Hornets winning two of the previous three matchups.

The 2014-16 matchups were all in the district or regional finals, however. Last year, Saline won 37-31 in a district final; Canton prevailed 27-7 in the 2015 regional final.

Stopping em cold

Canton is renowned for having a prolific offense, but the Chiefs wreaked havoc on defense with big plays by Lou Baechler, Troup and Brown helping Canton take a 20-7 halftime lead.

Baechler picked off a Saline pass and scored on a 45-yard return. Both Troup and Brown broke up dangerous passing attempts by left-handed quarterback Cole Daniels (10-23, 128 yards).

Weather report

Although it was raining virtually the entire game, both teams did not appear to be slowed by the wet weather. The only fumble of the first half was in the final minute of play and it had no impact on the scoreboard.

But then the Hornets coughed the ball up on the first play of the second half.

Study hall

Saline had an extra week to prepare for the game with a Week 9 bye, but the Chiefs did a good job cramming for the playoff test.

“We watched a lot of film this week and really got prepared and focused for them and we all did our job,” Engel said. “We were 100 percent on our reads.”

Coach Baechler added that facing the Hornets in the postseason opener was a bit surprising.

“(Saline) is a game you expect in round two or three,” said Baechler, referring to the Division 1 bracket. “We didn’t sit around fretting about it, we went to work and I’m just so proud of our kids.”

Next up

Canton will move on to face undefeated Belleville (10-0) at 7 p.m. Nov. 3. The Tigers knocked off Salem, 17-7.

“They (Tigers) are a really good team with a lot of talent,” Engel said. “We just got to focus up, we got to be 100 percent on our reads just like this week. It should be a good game.”