

Bitter ending for Chiefs, as Catholic Central hangs on for 27-26 win

One extra point would have sent Friday night's Division 1 regional final to overtime. A successful two-point conversion would have given the Canton Chiefs a ticket to march on to the semifinals.

Veteran Canton head coach Tim Baechler opted to go for the win with 40 seconds to go and the Chiefs down 27-26 to Novi Detroit Catholic Central following a clutch, 3-yard TD pass from quarterback Connor Engel to Noah Brown.

But Labar Morgan of the Shamrocks had other ideas. He plugged the gap in the line of scrimmage, stopping junior running back Luke Jouppi inches short of the goal line and preserving the regional championship.

"We called a timeout, we figured they were going to run off-tackle," Catholic Central head coach Dan Anderson said. "They'd been having a lot of success off tackle. And so we just slanted our end inside to stuff up the hole and it worked.

"It's a battle every time we play them. I was defensive coordinator in '09 when we beat them in overtime. In 2011, it was 21-14 (and) it was back and forth. It's just a battle every time and I don't blame them for going for two there, you're going for the win. I'd probably do the same."

Baechler said he was not going to let an extra point decide matters when he had the chance to run it in for the victory. An apparent injury suffered in the fourth quarter by kicker Chase Meredith had no bearing on his decision, he emphasized.

"Not at all, I was not going to win or lose a game, or tie a game, based on a bad snap, a bad hold or a bad kick," Baechler said. "I've seen enough bad holds and missed kicks through the last 12 games. I could not live with

myself if we screwed this up. I'm going to live with my call and it was the right call. We just missed it."



The refs called pass interference on CC's Liam Cunningham (12) as he breaks up a pass intended for Colin Troup (3). (Photo: Bill Bresler | hometownlife.com)

The Chiefs (who finished with a 10-2 record) outgained Catholic Central (8-4) by a 369-299 margin, yet chased the Shamrocks much of the night after letting an early 7-0 lead slip away.

Workhorse

A big reason for that struggle was the running of Shamrocks' senior Cam Ryan. He was tough to bring down, gaining 202 yards in 25 rushes and scoring three touchdowns.

Ryan really put Canton in a tough spot when he broke a 59-yard TD run up the middle on the first snap of the second half. That padded a 14-13 halftime lead.

"They were opening up holes," said Ryan, about his linemen. "On that long one honestly no one touched me. They're a great offensive line, they're really jelling at the right time. It's perfect."

Anderson said Ryan "runs with an attitude. And he doesn't let one guy bring him down, he's going to fight every step of the way. He's been our go-to guy all year."

Meanwhile, with Canton junior running back Steven Walker out of the game in the first half due to an injury and the passing game not clicking, Baechler relied on Jouppi (91 yards rushing) and seniors Nick Polydoros and Colin Troup to spark the offense.

Polydoros had a great night, gaining 179 yards in 10 carries and giving the Chiefs hope late in the first half when he scored on a 41-yard dash with just 17 seconds left. Troup registered 60 yards and scored on two 11-yard touchdown runs (one per half).

“We got caught banged up, we didn’t have our best squad out there,” Baechler said. “We had to switch around. But the kids played their butts off. that’s playoffs, you got to stay healthy and you got to get some breaks.” Canton bounced back on the frigid night, tying the game 20-20 before the end of the third on Troup's second TD and Meredith’s extra point. But back came Catholic Central, taking a 27-20 lead on yet another Ryan score.

That set up the late TD toss to Brown, deep in the end zone. It wasn’t enough.

“When you want to win you’ll do anything,” said Brown, choking back emotion. “I’d do anything for these guys. I just wish I would have made more plays earlier in the game. I don’t know. It’s tough.”

Following are several takeaways from the game:

CAN’T GET A GRIP

With temperatures in the 20s, Engel and his receivers could not connect. A couple catchable throws were not reeled in to stall the Chiefs in the first half.

Canton running back Jawuan Frazier fumbled near midfield to keep the Chiefs from building on an early 7-0 lead. The Shamrocks quickly made him pay with Ryan accounting for all 51 yards in a four-play drive. He scored from the 16 with 11:54 left in the first half to put Catholic Central on the board.

NICK OF TIME

Polydoras had already broken loose for big runs of 53 and 25 yards in the first half, but this third big-gainer of the frigid night was a 41-yard gallop for an important TD. That came with just 26 seconds left before intermission to pull the Chiefs to within 14-13. The extra point was blocked, however.

LET IT ROLL

Early in the second quarter, Catholic Central punter Kevin Korte's boot rolled all the way to the Chiefs 1-yard line to put Canton in a big hole. Three snaps later, it was CC's turn to receive a punt.

TOUGH SENDOFF

Canton coach Baechler had words of praise for his team's "great senior class. I love them. They're tough kids, they compete their butts off. And a lot of multi-sport athletes, too."

The dream of making it to Ford Field came to a bitter end for that group of seniors led by linebacker Lou Baechler, linemen Max Mulvaney and Ronald Fenderson, Brown, Troup, Engel, Polydoras and Meredith.



Canton Chiefs Steven Walker (4) and Max Mulvaney (72) mourn the end of their season with a loss to Catholic Central, 27-26.

Other seniors included Robert Laird, Danny Lanava, Jack Perry, Winston Stanford, Aaron Garbarino, Brandon Mehl, Joe Vespaziani, Siddarth Nath, Evan Kernosek, Shawn Courtney, Patrick Lenczewski, Matt English and Zion Weathersby.