

WELLINGTON 30
OBERLIN 6

Dukes finish strong

Tim Gebhardt
The Chronicle-Telegram

WELLINGTON — Jerry Herman couldn't help but wish the season was just starting rather than ending.

The Wellington senior tailback led the Dukes to a 30-6 victory over Oberlin on Friday to close out the year with three straight wins to take the sting out of an otherwise disappointing 4-6 season.

"It's a hard pill to swallow," said Herman, knowing the season is over. "We've had a good attitude all along. This is my last year of playing high school football. I just had to go out and show what I could do."

What Herman did to start the second half pretty much decided the outcome. Nursing a 7-0 lead, Herman took the second-half kickoff at his own 11-yard line and bobbed and weaved his way for a 30-yard return. On the first play from scrimmage, he broke open at the line of scrimmage and raced 59 yards for a touchdown to put the Dukes in front 14-0 with only 18 seconds gone in the half.

From that point, Wellington's front line dominated play. Herman finished the night with 146 yards on 19 carries and junior sidekick Austen Gray added 155 on 16 trips, including his best rendition of a battering ram on a 36-yard TD where he literally bounced off the Phoenix defense. Wellington's senior-dominated offensive line — Ken Wulffhoop, Matt Flynn, Aaron Grimmer and Neil Switzer along with junior Greg Knapp — ended the year on a positive note.

"The losses we had were very, very tough losses," said Matt Stoll, Wellington's coach. "The kids could have easily hung their head and quit. The whole season could have been a disaster. None of us are pleased being 4-6 — we aren't — but you have to keep playing. There was a lot of exciting football. Offensively, we were one of the more exciting teams around."

Wellington outscored its last three opponents, 117-13. After starting 1-6 and with three straight undefeated freshman teams, things are looking up for the Dukes.

"There were a lot of good things," Stoll said. "We have some good teams coming up."

For Oberlin coach Dave McFarland, the loss was hard to take but the building continues for the Phoenix. Oberlin finished 6-4, its best year since 1997. Junior Aaron James rushed for 131 yards and junior Timothy Hill caught four passes, including a 55-yard touchdown from junior quarterback Gilbert Harris.

The Phoenix had its opportunities — particularly in the first half. Oberlin drove to the Wellington 6-yard line for a first down late in the first half but came away empty. Grimmer and Gray combined to stop James on fourth down from the 4.

"We have to learn from it," McFarland said of the season. "The whole team comes back. It'll be an exciting year. That has to be the message. These kids need to feel good about themselves."

GOODBYE TO YOU: Longtime assistant coach Tom Roth hung up his headset after 26 years as Wellington's defensive coordinator. Roth, who is retiring, led the Lady Dukes to a runner-up finish in softball in the spring.

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From D1

final game for Elyria Catholic. The one-sided score wasn't important, just that we came out with a win."

There were a number of impressive offensive stars for the Panthers, who jumped out to a 21-0 first-quarter lead and were never threatened by the Ironmen (3-7, 0-4).

Tailback Alex Alicea, a 155-pound junior in his first year on the varsity, scored three touchdowns and rushed for 119 yards as the Panthers demonstrated a balanced attack, not always present in earlier games this year.

They finished with 157 yards

CLEARVIEW 32

COLUMBIA 14



STEVE MANHEIM / CHRONICLE PHOTOS

Clearview's James Washington is pulled down by Columbia's Anthony Jaeger, and, below, breaks free for yardage.

Clearview perfection

Jim Jablonski
The Chronicle-Telegram

COLUMBIA STATION — The conditions and the performance may have been imperfect, but Clearview overcame both to record a spotless regular season after defeating the Columbia Raiders 32-14 Friday night. The victory left the Clippers atop the Patriot Athletic Conference's Stripes Division.

But their conference title and 10-0 record don't seem to satisfy many of the Clipper players, who were chanting "Five More, Five More" following their win. Of course, that refers to the number of wins necessary to post a Division IV state championship. Clearview will host a playoff game Friday night.

"Five more — that's our goal," said junior running back Anthony Hitchens, who scored the Clippers' first four touchdowns. "But we have to take it one at a time to get there."

The Clippers were outgained by the young Raiders 276-183 and totaled only 10 first downs compared to the home team's 14, but the explosiveness of Hitchens, who scored four touchdowns, helped them overcome their problems.

"The conditions were not to our liking," Clearview coach Mike Collier said. "But you have to be able to play in anything if you want to win in October and November in Ohio. And Columbia came out with a

great game plan."

Still, the game started quickly for the Clippers.

Despite kicking off, they scored just 26 seconds in. Senior lineman Miguel Couvertier recovered a fumble at the Raider 22-yard line. Two plays later, Hitchens broke over left tackle for a 5-yard score. The conversion was blocked.

After a Raider three-and-out, Clearview took a more traditional route to its second score, putting together a nine-play 48-yard drive capped by Hitchens' 26-yard burst over the right side. Collin Owen's kick raised the margin to 13-0 with 5:04 to play in the first quarter.

At that point, the Raiders showed they would not go quietly into the miserable night. With freshman tailback Brandon Heidinger carrying tacklers repeatedly, Columbia marched 65 yards in 13 plays to score with 8:51 to play in the half. Heidinger finished off the drive with a 6-yard plunge, cutting the margin to 13-7 following Ethan Garafolo's kick.

The second quarter was a contrast in styles. Hitchens followed up Heidinger's score by running back the kickoff 65 yards, but following an exchange of fumbles, the workmanlike Raiders again went on the march.

Heidinger, proving himself a freshman workhorse, carried seven times on a nine-

play, 67-yard drive finished by his 5-yard run over the right side. The score was narrowed to 19-14 following the conversion. Heidinger finished with 124 yards on 23 carries.

Again Hitchens responded. With the Raiders moving through the air to the Clearview 15 late in the half, Hitchens, who also plays linebacker, picked off a John Banyasz pass and returned it 80 yards for a touchdown and a 25-14 margin.

Clearview scored quickly in the third period on Zach Anderson's 30-yard completion to James Washington for the final margin. Except for two long gains by the Raiders' Cody Dean, the Clipper defense controlled the game the rest of the way.

Collier sees the Clippers' key in the play-offs to be "at the point of attack. We're going to have to get it done in the trenches on both sides of the ball from this point on."

"I'm proud of the way our kids played," said Jason Ward after Columbia finished 1-9. "They never gave up and fought all the way. We're a young team and there's a very bright future here for us."

COME ON, REF: No Fun League rules definitely apply in high school football as shown by the penalty called on Hitchens following his 80-yard interception return. Hitchens was penalized for pumping his arm as he reached the goal line.

"He definitely wasn't taunting anyone," Collier said. "But you have to be careful about that sort of thing. He apologized to the team for it."

AVON LAKE

From D1

stopped on fourth down on the next two.

"(The Shoremen) are too good of a football team for us to keep turning the ball over like that," Comets coach Kevin Fell said. "That was pretty much our shot. From then on, it seemed like they made the plays when they had to."

The Shoremen broke through when senior fullback Cody Bennington slid through a hole in the line and sprinted 42 yards to the end zone. Mares added a short touchdown run.

"I thought during the first half we played really good defense, yet we were still down 17-0," Fell said. "We got beat because we just couldn't move the ball."

Mares added another score with a cutback move that earned him 25 yards and the Shoremen a 24-0 lead early in the third quarter. The play was

run out of Avon Lake's stacked-I formation — where Bennington, Mares and tailback Mike Mansnerus line up in a row behind quarterback Pete Hart — but with Mares coming in motion out of the middle, a new twist for Week 10.

"The coaches put that in against Amherst because they thought we were going to sweep out of that and instead we ran a counter to the other side and it worked great," Mares said. "There were huge holes."

The Comets ended the shutout bid when quarterback Andrew Eliopoulos capped an 11-play, 48-yard drive with a 1-yard plunge.

"We were 2-2 at one point in the season and all nicked up with injuries," Dlugosz said. "Our kids really pulled together hard. Now, we're starting to get healthy at the end of the year. It's not only an SWC championship but hopefully good things are going to happen for us in the playoffs as well."

Further adding to Amherst's

miserable Friday night was a steady downpour that helped take away what could have been one of its advantages. Eliopoulos had several solid passing games during the season, and the Shoremen consistently had problems defending the pass. But the rain made throwing difficult, and the Comets were victims of several dropped passes.

The night wasn't all bad for the Comets. They later learned that, despite losses the past two weeks, they had earned a playoff spot in Division I's Region 2.

BIG TIME: The Avon Lake pressbox was packed with four radio stations — two were broadcasting the game — a television station and four newspapers. But the most noticeable media member was Cleveland Indians broadcaster Tom Hamilton, who stopped by to serve as WEOL 930-AM's spotter. Hamilton's son Nick was a standout baseball player for the Shoremen.

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ROUNDUP

Longhorns blank 'Canes

BROOKLYN — Lutheran West's Paul Fackler completed 8 of 15 passes for 167 yards and three touchdowns to lead the Longhorns to a 19-0 victory over Brooklyn in Patriot Athletic Conference Stripes Division action Friday night.

Sam Lempke of the Longhorns (7-3, 5-2 PAC) caught five of Fackler's passes and had touchdown catches of 9 and 52 yards.

Buckeye 47, Brookside 0

MALLET CREEK — Cory Reiser scored five touchdowns for the Patriot Athletic Conference Stars Division champions (6-4, 4-1 PAC), who won their last six games after losing their first four.

The Cardinals (0-10, 0-7 PAC) suffered their third shutout of the season.

Vermilion 27, Firelands 0

VERMILION — The Sailors (6-4, 6-1 WSC) shut out Firelands as they won their last four games of the season after losing to West Shore Conference champion Avon on Sept. 26. The Falcons (2-8, 0-7) finished in last place in the WSC standings after winning two of their three non-conference games.

Rocky River 26, Fairview 7

ROCKY RIVER — The Pirates (6-4, 4-3 WSC) led 19-7 at halftime as they closed the season with their third straight win.

Berea 17, Midpark 14

BEREA — The Braves (5-5, 3-4 SWC), who snapped a three-game losing streak, made a 17-7 halftime lead stand up.

Brecksville 21, Westlake 0

WESTLAKE — The Bees (7-3, 6-1 SWC) won their fourth straight game to tie for the SWC championship with Avon Lake.

BLACK RIVER 33
KEYSTONE 7

Pirates pound 'Cats

John Taylor
The Chronicle-Telegram

SULLIVAN — On a night more suited for waterfowl than humans, Black River walked, talked and looked like the stronger football team as they rolled over Keystone 33-7 in the season finale for both schools.

The host's fifth win of the season came courtesy of a powerful and punishing rushing attack, keyed mainly by brilliant tailback Matt Joppeck.

The sophomore ran for 150 of the Pirates' 260 rushing yards, and also became just the fifth player in school history to crack the 1,000-yard barrier.

His running, as well as the play of the offensive line, left Pirates coach Al Young pleased with how his club closed out the season.

"He really opened a lot of things up," Young said of Joppeck. "You know, Matt, he's a hard runner. I'm sure he's well over a thousand yards for the year. It not only speaks highly of the doggone offensive line, but the whole offense in general."

Keystone coach Rob Clarico lamented his team's inability to stop the bruising rushing attack with any type of consistency.

"It pretty much went the way a lot of the season went," Clarico said. "We started out (the season) strong, and probably our best games were our scrimmages and our first game. We lost too many people and I don't think we worked hard enough in the off-season. We just got man-handled by a lot of teams this season."

The Pirates (5-5, 5-2 Patriot Athletic Conference) opened the scoring with 5:25 left in the first quarter on a 1-yard keeper by quarterback Anthony O'Connor. The nine-play, 65-yard drive featured seven runs by Joppeck and a spectacular one-handed, 27-yard catch by Jake O'Connor.

Keystone (3-7, 2-5) responded on the ensuing possession with its most sustained drive of the night, a 14-play, 74-yard drive that ended with a missed field goal.

A fumble recovered by Jake Wright led to the Pirates' second score, a 6-yard run by Anthony O'Connor to push the lead to 13-0 in the middle of the second quarter.

Less than three minutes later, the lead was 19-0 as Joppeck broke several tackles en route to a 26-yard touchdown.

"It comes down to what happens in the trenches," Clarico said of the three first-half rushing touchdowns. "When they're that much stronger than you, you're not going to stop them."

On the first drive of the second half, the Wildcats got themselves right back into the game as 5-foot-5, 120-pound freshman Ryan Clement — who finished with a team-high 94 yards on 16 carries — raced 35 yards to cut the lead to 19-7.

On the next possession, though, the home team answered in resounding fashion with a backbreaking drive that chewed up 5:37 of clock. The 11-play, 64-yard drive was capped by Joppeck's second touchdown — this one from a yard out — and gave Black River a 20-point lead with 2:59 left in the third.

For Young, that drive was the key to the win.

"I thought the turning point was probably us coming right back and answering that," he said. "I thought that was probably bigger than their turnovers."

With 11:21 left in the game, a botched pitch between senior quarterback Tyler Minnich and Clement deep in Wildcats territory gave the Pirates prime field position at Keystone's 14-yard line. Four plays later, on a fourth-and-5 from the 9, Anthony O'Connor connected with Jake O'Connor on a touchdown pass to close out both the scoring and the Wildcats.

"That hurts," Clarico said of his team's three turnovers. "Like I said, when you're younger and weaker than the other team, you have to play perfect football and we didn't."

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