

Dexter Clashes with Chelsea

By Don Richter, Sports Editor

PUBLISHED: October 2, 2008

It didn't take long for the Chelsea-Dexter football rivalry to heat up last Friday night at Jerry Niehaus Field.

In fact, all it took was the opening kickoff to fan the flames. With enough drama to garner Emmy nomination, Bulldog junior Nick Hill returned the opening boot 92 yards for a touchdown.

While Hill's return was enough to raise the proverbial roof at Niehaus Field, it was how he accomplished the feat that was most impressive. After bobbling the initial kickoff and fumbling with the ball between his legs, Hill appeared ready to be buried under a rushing onslaught of Dreadnaught defenders. In an eye blink, however, the 5-foot-8, 185-pound speedster sidestepped the Dexter tacklers turning on his 4.4 40-yard dash afterburners to sprint to daylight and six points.

Senior Michael Roberts kicked the point after touchdown giving the Bulldogs (4-1) a 7-0 lead before most in the stadium had even found their seats.

Many in attendance assumed Hill would be tackled, including Dexter longtime manager and Michigan High School Football Coaches Association Hall-of-Famer Henry Thurston, who prematurely ran out onto the field of play to retrieve the kicking tee.

"I didn't even notice him during the game," said Dexter coach Tom Barbieri. "It was only after I watched the film that I saw Henry out there in the middle of everything. Players were trying not to run him over."

While Thurston made it off the field alive and in good health, the same couldn't be said for the visiting Dreadnaughts who lost to Chelsea 47-12.

"We came to play," said Chelsea coach Brad Bush. "It's been an issue for us. I was concerned since we have Adrian next week. I didn't want them looking ahead."

Bush said Hill's return for a touchdown was a combination of two things.

"He made two guys miss and we also had guys stay on their blocks downfield which helped us take it to the house," he said. "It was a great play."

After Hill's touchdown, Dexter (1-4) mustered only three plays on its opening drive before punting.

On their ensuing possession, the Bulldogs began Act II of the Emmy-worthy contest, turning a blocked field goal attempt into a touchdown as senior Jake Mantel was Johnny-on-the-spot scooping up the ball and running 20 yards untouched into the end zone for the score. The 2-point conversion run was stopped, giving Chelsea a 13-0 lead with 7:44 remaining in the first quarter.

"If the ball is blocked behind the line of scrimmage, it's a live ball," Bush said. "We had a breakdown up front and they clearly blocked the kick, but it came right back to us."

Barbieri said the blocked field goal run in for a touchdown was a strange play.

"We block a field goal and they pick it up and run it in," he said. "Our kids were wondering what the heck happened. They didn't even see it."

Barbieri said everything Dexter could do, they did wrong.

"We have Hill surrounded on the kickoff and we don't wrap him up and he runs it back for a touchdown," he said. "Chelsea's good, but we made them look even better. I'm disappointed in the result."

After a second Dexter punt, junior Alex Frost recovered a Bulldog fumble, giving the Dreadnaughts the ball at their own 24-yard line. Despite having momentum, Dexter could not advance the ball, punting after three plays.

Seven plays later, Hill scored his second TD of the night on a 1-yard dive. Roberts' PAT split the uprights increasing Chelsea's lead to 20-0 with 1:44 left in the first quarter.

On the following kickoff, Bulldog senior Kevin Rosentreter recovered a Dreadnaught fumble at the Dexter 2-yard line. One play later, Hill scored TD No. 3 on a 1-yard run. Roberts connected for the extra point giving Chelsea a 27-0 margin with 1:32 remaining in the first quarter.

The Dreadnaughts fumbled on their opening drive of the second quarter. Once again, Rosentreter was there to pounce on the ball recovering his second fumble of the game at the Dexter 30-yard line.

Two plays later, senior Brett Everding caught a 9-yard pass from senior quarterback Randy Cox for a touchdown, upping the Bulldogs' lead to 33-0 with 9:45 left in the first half.

With 5:37 remaining in the second quarter, Mantel leaped high to catch a 5-yard fade pass from Cox in the left corner of the end zone for a touchdown. Roberts hit the extra point for a 40-0 Chelsea lead at halftime.

Despite being down, the Dreadnaughts refused to quit. On the first play of the second half, Dexter junior quarterback Alex McMurray hooked up with senior receiver Steve Muchmore for a 73-yard touchdown pass. The 2-point run attempt was stymied cutting the Bulldogs' lead to 40-6 with 11:02 on the third quarter clock.

Later in the third frame, the McMurray to Muchmore combination struck again, this time from 45 yards away for a touchdown. The 2-point run was, again, stopped short, trimming the Chelsea advantage to 40-12 with 6:29 remaining in the third quarter.

On the Bulldogs' following drive, senior Steve O'Keefe scored on a 7-yard run around left end. Junior Andrew LeVanseler's PAT was successful for the night's final 47-12 margin.

Chelsea finished with 390 total yards of offense, including 242 yards rushing. Dexter ended up with 244 total yards, with 172 yards through the air.

Cox finished 6-of-6 for 98 yards and two TDs, while Roberts was 5-of-5 for 109 yards. Junior Dakota Cooley was 4-of-4 for 35 yards. Combined, Bulldog quarterbacks ended up 15-of-15 passing. McMurray was 7-of-13 for 142 yards and two touchdowns. Junior Henry Haley was 3-of-5 for 30 yards.

Everding had three receptions for 63 yards, while Mantel had three catches for 41 yards. Senior Josh Abbott had three catches for five yards, while Muchmore had two receptions for 118 yards and senior Tate Sanders two catches for 42 yards.

Hill finished with 45 yards rushing on 13 carries, while O'Keefe had 27 yards on two tries. Senior Scott Crompton had 73 yards on eight carries for Dexter.

Defensively, seniors Early McGowan and Tyler Fischhaber each recorded four tackles for the Bulldogs. Senior Chris Kotsones led Dexter with 16 tackles, while junior Dillon Kipke had nine tackles and junior Mason Mabry eight tackles, including a blocked kick.

Chelsea next travels to Adrian (5-0) for a game Friday at 7 p.m.

Dexter next hosts Ann Arbor Pioneer (4-1) Friday at 7 p.m.

Sports Editor Don Richter can be reached at 475-1371 or at drichter@heritage.com.