

Dexter Tops Lincoln

By Don Richter, Sports Editor

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Dexter football rebounded nicely after its Week One loss to Adrian, with a hard-fought 21-20 victory over visiting Ypsilanti Lincoln last Friday night at Al Ritt Field.

"Coming off a heartbreaking performance against a good team (Adrian), we were riding an emotional rollercoaster," said Dexter coach Tom Barbieri. "The kids were able to handle it. The thing I was most proud of was that we kept our composure. We kept playing and believing in one another and that's what we've been talking about."

Despite the close loss, Lincoln coach Chris Westfall remained upbeat.

"We're trying to build a program," he said. "I'm proud that we stuck together on the sidelines. We're still a team and we're still a family."

The Dreadnaughts (1-1) pounced on the Railsplitters (1-1) early. After a Lincoln three and out punt to begin the game, Dexter needed only five plays before senior Andy Whitaker ran 40 yards for a touchdown on a quarterback draw. With the point after touchdown kick by senior Steve Muchmore, the Dreadnaughts led 7-0 with 7:20 left in the first quarter.

On the ensuing kickoff, Dexter executed a successful onside kick, recovering the ball at the Railsplitters' 31-yard line. Lincoln's defense held, however, as senior defensive tackle Terrence Radcliff sacked Whitaker on a third and long forcing a Dreadnaught punt.

The Rails answered on their next possession, driving 89 yards in nine plays scoring on a 15-yard pass from junior quarterback Andrew Dillon (6-foot-4, 195 pounds) to junior receiver Latwan Wesley (6-3, 185). Dillon, who was being dragged down from behind, was able to find Wesley, who worked his way open along the back line of the end zone, for the score. Senior Brandon Boyle added the PAT tying the game at 7-7 with 1:11 remaining in the first quarter.

Dexter, however, responded on the following kickoff as sophomore Sequohay Burke-Combs found a crease and ran untouched 73 yards for a touchdown. Muchmore split the uprights and the Dreadnaughts regained the lead 14-7 with 1:01 left in the opening quarter.

"That kickoff return was huge," Barbieri said. "He (Burke-Combs) played really well."

After a Lincoln punt, Dexter took over at its own 30-yard line. The Rails stiffened forcing a Dreadnaught punt after six plays. Dexter junior punter and back-up quarterback Alex McMurray, however, faked the kick and threw the ball downfield to senior captain Mike Swantek (6-3, 210) forcing a pass interference call on the Lincoln defender.

With the penalty, the Dreadnaughts regained control of the ball at their own 43-yard line. Two plays later, senior halfback Tate Sanders scored on a 43-yard reverse run. With Muchmore's kick, Dexter increased its advantage to 21-7 with 5:40 left in the second quarter.

With 1:19 remaining in the first half, Railsplitter defensive back Brandon Farrell intercepted a pass, giving Lincoln the ball at its own 39-yard line. With time winding down, Dillon dropped back to pass on a third and long play and under duress, fired a pass just over the outstretched fingertips of Wesley, who was all alone behind Dreadnaught defenders. With the incompletion, the first half came to a close with Dexter leading 21-7.

After a Dreadnaught punt to begin the third quarter, the Railsplitters needed only two plays to score as Boyle hauled in an 83-yard touchdown bomb from Dillon. With Boyle's PAT, Lincoln trimmed Dexter's lead to 21-14 with 7:00 left in the third quarter.

The Dreads' following drive stalled forcing a punt. The snap was high and Dexter was unable to get off a kick, instead falling on the loose ball at its own 40-yard line.

With the ball at the Dreadnaughts' 40-yard line, the Rails struck quickly as Dillon tossed a short pass to Wesley in the left flat. The lanky speedster outran Dexter defenders to the end zone for a 39-yard TD score. In what would turn out to be a game-winning play, Dreadnaught junior linebacker Mason Mabry (6-1, 190) darted through the line blocking Boyle's extra point kick. With the block, Dexter continued leading 21-20 with 2:32 left in the third quarter.

"My (pre-game) speech tonight was about every play matters," Barbieri said. "It (game) comes down to an extra point that we worked on all week to block. Tonight we did it and that was the difference in the game. The kids did a great job."

Despite a fumble on the Dreadnaughts' following possession, Lincoln was unable to capitalize as Dexter's defense rose to the occasion stopping the Rails and forcing a punt.

With 7:50 left in the game, and the Railsplitters driving, Dreadnaught Travis Rize (6-1, 185) intercepted a Dillon pass in the end zone. The senior returning All-Southeastern Conference safety out-jumped the Lincoln receiver for the ball.

With 1:49 remaining in the fourth quarter, the Rails lined up at their own 15-yard line for a possible game-winning drive. With Dillon split out wide as a receiver, Lincoln rolled out to throw, but the pass, intended for the standout junior, was underthrown and intercepted ending the contest.

"They (Dexter) were just playing us in halves," Westfall said, of the final interception. "He (Dillon) is honestly our best receiver even though he's our quarterback. We were trying to throw the ball down the middle and we missed the protection."

With no timeouts left, Whitaker took three consecutive knees running out the clock and recording the night's final 21-20 margin.

Whitaker said the offensive line was the key to the Dreadnaughts' victory.

"They worked their butts off tonight," he said. "The quarterback draw worked because the (Lincoln) defense gave us the opportunity. Also, our defense came up big."

Westfall said he was pleased with his squad's overall effort.

"The first half got away from us a little," he said. "We just have to stop making mistakes. We gave up a kick return for a score and had a pass interference on a fake punt. We turned the ball over. We made some mistakes. But we'll get better.

"We've obviously taken a lot of steps from where Lincoln football used to be, but we're not where we want to be yet. But we're making strides."

Whitaker finished 8-of-20 for 77 yards with one interception. Dillon was 15-of-25 for 213 yards and two interceptions.

Whitaker led the Dreadnaughts' rushing attack with 105 yards on 27 carries. Burke-Combs added 101 yards on 12 attempts, while Sanders had 62 yards on two tries.

Senior Josh Abbott had three receptions for 41 yards to spark Dexter. Sanders had two catches for 17 yards, while Muchmore had one grab for eight yards and senior Steve Zalucha one reception for six yards for the Dreadnaughts.

Defensively, Mabry led the way with seven tackles, while senior linebacker Chris Kotsones had five stops for Dexter.

The Dreadnaughts next travel to Ann Arbor Huron (0-2) for a game Friday at 7 p.m. The River Rats, led by junior wide receiver Jeremy Jackson (6-3, 185), who's being recruited by Michigan, Florida and LSU to name a few major Division I schools after his services, are competing in the Southeastern Conference for the first time this season.

Last Friday, Huron lost to Tecumseh 42-34. In Week One, Tecumseh lost to Lincoln 38-22.

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