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Muskego's 2nd-half rally spoils encouraging start by new-look Port football team

No one expected the Port Washington High School football team to become a powerhouse overnight this season under first-year coach John Bunyan.

But after seeing the Pirates take command early in their 2012 debut last Friday, fans probably didn't expect them to bow in a nail-biting finish, either.

After dominating the first half and building a 20-0 lead, host Port faltered just enough the rest of the way to be handed a 28-27 loss by a resilient Muskego team.

Quarterback Peter Roy was the biggest thorn in the Pirates' side down the stretch, scoring the final eight points in a decisive comeback.

After seeing the Warriors rally to tie the game at 20-20 early in the fourth quarter, Port responded with a 75-yard scoring drive. Marty Franzkowiak's 31-yard touchdown run and Sam Davel's extra point gave the Pirates a 27-20 lead with 3 minutes, 50 seconds left.

True to form in a seesaw second half, Muskego found an answer. Roy led the Warriors on a 79-yard scoring drive with three key plays.

After keeping the march alive by scrambling for a first down on fourth-and-7, Roy turned the trick again with a 5-yard touchdown run with 20 seconds left that pulled Muskego within 27-26.

The Warriors used a timeout to set up a two-point try from the left hash mark. Roy kept the ball on a bootleg run to the right side, outracing defenders before diving into the end zone.

A desperation drive by the Pirates followed, reaching the Muskego 39 with seconds left. However, quarterback Aidan Wojciehowski's last-ditch pass for Derek Haley fell incomplete as time expired.

"It was a tough game to lose, but I was really proud of the way our kids hung in there," said Bunyan, whose team appeared headed for a solid win at intermission.

"We had a great first half but came out a little flat in the third quarter, and it cost us. Their quarterback made some plays we never expected from them."

Nearly everything went right for Port in the first half.

Franzkowiak, who rushed for a game-high 108 yards and three touchdowns on just seven carries, put the Pirates up early with a 56-yard scoring sprint. In the closing seconds of the first quarter, Wojciehowski threw a 27-yard touchdown pass to Darius Will that gave Port a 12-0 lead.

The margin grew to 20-0 with 2:39 left in the half when Franzkowiak capped a 76-yard drive with a 5-yard touchdown burst.

"We had a great game plan, and our players executed it really well in the first half," Bunyan said. "We felt good at halftime, but then Muskego made some big plays that we didn't stop. They were 3-for-4 on fourth-down conversions, which was huge."

Besides Roy's contributions, which included 128 yards and a touchdown passing, the Warriors got big games from two running backs. David Kucharski and Tyler Thomka rushed for 108 and 103 yards, respectively.

Robert Sindic caught a 54-yard scoring pass from Roy and had the game's lone interception.

But the biggest key for Muskego was its third-quarter charge. Besides scoring two touchdowns, the Warriors held Port to just one first down and forced three punts in the period.

Mick Clarke had 91 rushing yards on 14 carries for Port, which finished with 332 yards in total offense to Muskego's 355.

"We had a ton of positive things come out of this game," Bunyan said. "It was disappointing to lose, but the kids competed and gave it their all.

"We learned a lot about our strengths and weaknesses as players and coaches. We're going to keep getting better."

The Pirates will open North Shore Conference play this Friday when they travel to Milwaukee

Lutheran for a 7 p.m. game.

Image Information: A PAIR OF tacklers closed in on Port Washington quarterback Aidan Wojciehowski during his team's season opener against Muskego last Friday. Photo by Sam Arendt