

Seesaw scuffle no friend to Hawks

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN

Wednesday, 04 September 2013 15:28

Third-quarter scoring exchange, mistakes saddle team with loss to Plymouth

A football seesaw took the Grafton Black Hawks on a disappointing ride last Friday.

Despite playing Plymouth on even terms for much of the night, the host Hawks fell victim to a third-quarter duel that handed them a 17-14 loss in nonconference play.



After trailing, 7-3, at halftime, Plymouth used a long kickoff return to help set up a 40-yard scoring march on its first possession of the third quarter. Samuel Staehling's 20-yard touchdown run capped a five-play drive as the Panthers grabbed a 10-7 lead.

Grafton answered with a touchdown of its own, reaching the end zone on a six-play, 64-yard drive. Quarterback Choo Weisflog's 31-yard option keeper with 6 minutes, 54 seconds left put the Hawks back ahead, 14-10.

The blow-for-blow pattern continued as Plymouth responded again. This time, Tyler Willeford's 9-yard touchdown run, followed by an extra point from Jack Heginbottom, gave the Panthers the lead for good.

Although there was plenty of time for Grafton to launch a comeback during a scoreless final period, two of its possessions ended in turnovers.

The Hawks were also slowed in the game by nine penalties and a missed field-goal try.

"We had some mistakes at very inopportune times," Hawks coach Ben Chossek said. "We knew that Plymouth would be a very good team and that this was a good opportunity to see where we're at.

"We played well in the first half, but Plymouth came out a little stronger in the second half and took it to us. In a game like this where it was back and forth, it comes down to one or two big

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plays.”

Coming off a season-opening victory at New Berlin West, Grafton was poised to continue its bid for a winning season against Plymouth, a perennial playoff team.

The Panthers struck first with a 35-yard field goal from Heginbottom in the closing seconds of the opening quarter, but Grafton had an answer.

Midway through the second period, the Hawks drove 48 yards in nine plays for a touchdown. Joe Fugate did the honors with a 13-yard scoring run, and Will Birch’s extra point gave Grafton a 7-3 edge that stood up the rest of the half.

“We came out strong and played well on offense and defense,” Chossek said.

Despite Plymouth’s third-quarter resurgence, Chossek was pleased to see his team respond.

“I thought it was really crucial for us to come back and score in the third quarter after Plymouth did,” he said.

“In the past, we might not have responded, but the players we have now are stronger and more experienced. This time, there was never any panic.”

Plymouth outgained the Hawks, 328 to 176, in total yardage. The Panthers’ attack included 256 yards rushing and 72 passing, with quarterback Kollin Neils completing 11 of 17 attempts. Staehling rushed 12 times for 107 yards.

Weisflog was only 1-for-4 passing for six yards but ran for 76 yards on 20 carries in the Hawks’ triple-option offense. Fugate added 56 yards on eight carries.

“Choo made some good decisions on the options, but we also had some mistakes,” Chossek said.

“On offense, we need to protect the football and avoid penalties. You can’t afford to have those problems, especially against good teams.”

Grafton will try to bounce back this Friday when opens North Shore Conference play at Nicolet. Kickoff is at 7 p.m.

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Image Information: GRAFTON'S ALEX TEICH used a stiff arm to fend off a tackler during Friday's nonconference game against Plymouth. Host Grafton held a halftime lead but fell victim to a third-quarter exchange that helped Plymouth secure a 17-14 win. Photo by Sam Arendt