

Hawks come through in the clutch

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Benzschawel's TD catch, Teich's interception make overtime pay for Grafton in 7-0 conference win at Port

A thing of beauty it wasn't.

But for the Grafton football team, last Friday's 7-0 win in an overtime tussle at Port Washington couldn't have been more satisfying.

Not only did the Black Hawks emerge on top in a game where mistakes outnumbered big plays, they did so with dramatic flair.



After the teams stumbled through four scoreless quarters on a foggy night, tight end Beau Benzschawel gave the Hawks all the points they needed on their lone overtime possession.

On third down, the 6-foot-6 senior outleaped a Port defender and snared a 13-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Choo Weisflog in the right rear corner of the end zone.

"I made a move to the inside and cut outside. Choo put the ball up there for me just right," Benzschawel said.

Port still had a chance to tie or win on its possession. However, when quarterback Ben Schueller tried a similar third-down pass for receiver Darius Will at the same spot in the end zone, Grafton defensive back Alex Teich was waiting.

With the ball slightly underthrown, Teich managed to outwrestle Will for the ball and cradle it as he hit the ground with a game-ending interception.

Smiles all around for the Hawks, who snapped a three-game losing streak with their most rewarding win of the season, one that spoiled Port's homecoming.

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"It wasn't pretty, but we'll take it," Grafton coach Ben Chossek said.

"Both teams made a lot of mistakes, but they both played very hard. Whenever Grafton and Port play, you expect a close, hard-fought game."

Those mistakes included a combined nine turnovers and 12 penalties, which regularly derailed the teams' offensive plans. Port committed five turnovers, including three lost fumbles, and Grafton served up two interceptions and two fumbles.

Neither team was able to penetrate the opponent's red zone in regulation.

Grafton reached the Pirates' 27-yard line with a drive after recovering a mishandled pitch-out early in the second quarter but turned the ball over on a fumble.

Late in the first half, Port appeared ready to break through when defensive back Sam Lepak intercepted Weisflog and returned the ball to the Hawks' 30. But Grafton's defense stiffened, forcing Schueller to throw incomplete on fourth down.

Grafton managed only 216 yards of total offense for the game, including 25 on its final possession. Matt Pfannerstill led the Hawks with 49 rushing yards, and Weisflog added 41.

Weisflog was 7-for-20 passing for 93 yards, with Alex Gall making two catches for 49 yards.

The Hawks had plenty of answers defensively, limiting Port to 132 yards. The Pirates' rushing attack, their strong suit this season, was held to 40 yards on 35 carries.

Schueller completed five of 11 passes for 92 yards. His top target was Will with two receptions for 49 yards.

"We really thought we would be able to run the ball against Grafton, but they didn't give us much," Port coach John Bunyan said.

"They changed things up against us. We expected to see a 5-3 defense, and they went to a 4-4, which made it tough to run the ball inside.

"Grafton was physical. I was really proud of our defense, too, but we couldn't get any momentum going offensively."

Benzschawel, a hard-hitting defensive end, wasn't surprised by his team's staunch defense, which recorded its second shutout of the season.

"We turned the ball over, but our defense kept us in the game," he said. "We've played pretty well defensively all season."

Teich had two interceptions to lead the Hawks' turnover collection, which also included fumble recoveries by Will Birch, Alex Marshall and Brandon Steen.

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Besides Lepak's theft, Port got an interception from Dylan Scharnweber and fumble recoveries by Lepak and Kyle Brock.

Leading the Pirates' defensive front was senior lineman Andy Fidler, who had 12 tackles.

Chossek was pleased to see two of his steadiest players take the spotlight in overtime.

"We needed some big plays, and it was great to have two seniors (Benzschawel and Teich) come through at the end for us," he said.

The game left both teams 2-3 in conference play and clinging to WIAA playoff hopes. Each must win its final two games to reach the post-season, starting with tough road tests this week.

In 7 p.m. conference games Friday, Grafton will face Cedarburg while Port takes on Whitefish Bay.

"We've still got a shot. I think we have a good football team, and Grafton has a good team, too," Bunyan said.

"We just have to go out there, execute our game plan and eliminate the mistakes."

Image Information: GRAFTON PLAYERS celebrated after their final defensive stand secured a victory over Port Washington. Photo by Sam Arendt