

Knights hang tough, but succumb to Mt. Olive ground game

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EDWARDSVILLE - The **Metro East Lutheran-Madison Knights** football team have played hard and tough all season. A combination of mistake, bad breaks and missed opportunities have prevented them from breaking into the win column.

It occurred again on Friday night at Knights Field, where that combination, along with a powerful Mt. Olive ground game, helped deal the Knights a 26-8 loss to the Wildcats on MEL's homecoming and Senior Night.

The Knights trailed Mt. Olive 14-8 and played well. But two missed scoring opportunities, one on an untimely penalty after along kickoff return and the other after recovering a fumble deep in Wildcat territory, helped to swing the game in Mt. Olive's favor.

"There's some penalties and some mistakes that we made, in that we did shoot ourselves in the foot," said **Knights coach Matt Tschudy**. "But you know, that's football. There's always gonna be some mistakes and stuff like that in a game, and at the end of the day, we just gotta stay more disciplined, stay with what we know. If we can eliminate those mistakes — yeah, I think we're in this game."

Even with the mistakes, the Knights took many positives away from the game as well.

"We were able to move the ball," Tschudy said. "This is the first game in a while we actually felt confident, semi-confident in moving the football offensively, so that was good to see. I think there's some positives we can build on."

The Wildcats got the ball first, and wasted no time establishing their ground attack. Jonathon Darrah was the go to man for Mt. Olive in the five play, 47-yard drive, ending with a 32-yard touchdown run off a direct snap only 1:58 into the game. Darrah kicked the convert to give Mt. Olive the early 7-0 lead.

Cartez Cook took the ensuing kickoff back deep into Mt. Olive territory on a very nifty run, but a holding penalty cancelled out the return. MEL had to start at their own 37, and the drive went nowhere, forcing the Knights to punt. The Mt. Olive running game asserted itself on the next drive, as Darrah and Andrew Jones did most of the work. The 13-play drive ended with Darrah scoring from nine yards out, then adding the convert to make it 14-0. The drive took 84 yards and 5:48 to finish.

The Knights had another chance later on after Kam Williams picked up a Mt. Olive fumble and returned it to the Wildcat seven. But a false start penalty on the first play after the recovery, a fumbled snap and three incomplete passes stalled the drive.

Undaunted, the Knights kept plugging away, and in the second quarter, Earl Green, who played a great game, ripped off a 69-yard run on a pitch from Damien James to put the

Knights in business. Two plays later, Vince Wilson took a pitch and scored from seven yards out. Wilson added a two-point conversion run off tackle to cut the Wildcat lead to 14-8 at halftime, giving MEL a shot of confidence .

“The first half of football wasn’t bad.”Tschudy said. “We actually went into halftime feeling pretty positive about the second half”

Unfortunately, the second half belonged mainly to the Wildcats, as their ground game, which accounted for all of their 376 yards with only one pass attempt that was incomplete, began to wear on the Knights.

“I’m not really sure what happened,” Tschudy said. “We couldn’t move the ball offensively. In the first half, we did a OK job doing that, then in the second half, we even came up with a lot of enthusiasm and stuff, but I’m not exactly sure what happened. We just kind of fell flat, and Mt. Olive just kinda wore us down with their running game.”

That the Wildcats did, as they were able to take time off the clock five to seven minutes at a time, a fact Tschudy alluded to.

“Just little bit by little big,” he said. “They just kinda play smash-mouth football, they just kinda go yard-by-yard and gradually wear you down. One of the advantages to what they do is they eat up so much time on the clock, that it leaves us little room to fight back.”

And it was Darrah who lead the charge for the Wildcats in the second half. On Mt. Olive’s first possession of the half, he broke away for a 38-yard run that helped set up a 13-yard run by Ethan Swenson that put the Wildcats up 20-8 after the conversion kick was missed.

The big backbreaker came on the ensuing kickoff, when on an onside kick, the ball deflected off a Knights player into the arms of a Wildcat player .That started a 51-yard drive which took 11 plays and 5:45 to conclude with Darrah going up the middle for a three yard touchdown burst. The kick was blocked, making the score 26-8 for Mt. Olive.

“Yeah, that ticked me off too,” Tschudy said with a laugh. “It was a good call on their end, and we were actually waiting for it, we were ready for it, and you know, an onside kick is an onside kick. Half the time you get it, and half the time, you don’t.”

The Knights host Alton Marquette next Saturday at Sam Dymas Memorial Field in Madison, and despite its 0-6 record, Tschudy is very pleased with the fan support from both schools .

“I’m very, very appreciative of all the fans that came out,” Tschudy said. “A lot of support from both schools, and we’re very appreciative of that even though we’re 0-6. There’s still a big fan base, and we love all the fans who come out and support us.”