

Granite City captures homecoming game 41-27 over Alton

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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GRANITE CITY — High school football can be very much a game of momentum swings at times, For example, take the game between **Alton and Granite City** Friday night.

The Warriors jumped to an early 21-0 lead in the first quarter, then saw the Redbirds cut the advantage to 21-14 by the end of the term, tie it before halftime, but got the momentum back in the second half as Granite went on to win their homecoming game 41-27 at Kevin Greene Field.

The most important thing to **Warrior coach Carl Luehmann** is that the Warriors are now 4-3 overall, and have a shot to make the Illinois High School Association playoffs.

“We jumped out to a 21-0 lead in the first quarter, they tied it up on the last play of the half,” Luehmann said. “You know, we had some knucklehead mistakes there in the second quarter, but I’m proud of the kids; they came out in the second half, and we’re 4-3, we’re still in the hunt for the playoffs, so we got some work to do this week.”

Redbird coach Eric Dickerson was very pleased with his side’s fightback after being in the 21-0 hole.

“Oh, definitely,” Dickerson said. “I was proud of them the way they fought back after being down 21 with a little more than four minutes left in the first quarter, and we were able to claw our way back and tie it up at halftime, so that was great.”

It all started with the game’s opening possession, as the Warriors took the ball with **freshman quarterback Freddie Edwards**, who has quickly become one of the area’s most exciting players, accounting for much of the yardage. He capped off a four-play, 63-yard drive with a 49-yard touchdown run that made it 7-0 only 1:58 into the game.

After an Alton punt, the Warriors only needed two plays to increase the advantage. Edwards hit Kendrick Williba, playing in his first game after injury, with a pass covering 44 yards for a second touchdown. Brandon Bettag’s convert made it 14-0.

The next Warrior possession only took three plays, as Edwards Brennan Haddix took the ball to the Redbird 14, where Richard Graham went around end for the third touchdown in 6:55. The convert made it 21-0.

It’s a total team effort for coordinator **Brad Hasquin’s offense**, as Luehmann was quick to point out.

“You know what? It’s our whole offense that’s doing a real good job right now.” Luehmann said. “Not just Freddie. Our line’s who produces holes for him It’s our team that’s doing it right now.”

The Redbirds stated their comeback in a big way, when quarterback **Taylor Price**, who also had a very good game, hit **Kevin Caldwell** on a 73-yard bomb, then scored himself three plays later from the one. **Johnathan Bumpers** added the convert to make it 21-7.

The Alton defense got the ball back on an interception with a minute left in the term, and it took the Redbirds only 25 seconds to turn it into points. Price and Caldwell connected twice, first for a 42-yard pickup to midfield, and again on a nifty catch and run by Caldwell for a 50-yard touchdown. The kick made it 21-14 after a very entertaining first quarter.

“It went back and forth,” Dickerson said. “We seem to have a few of those games here lately.”

In the second quarter, mistakes plagued the Warriors. A 85-yard punt return for a touchdown was cancelled out because of a penalty, and the ensuing drive was stalled because of another penalty. Alton took advantage with an 11-play, 97-yard drive that took 3:55. Darrell Smith made some nice runs, while Price completed passes to Ahmad Sanders, and Bumpers, while making a nice run of his own. It was Price who hit tight end Morris Adams with a five-yard TD pass with 11.0 seconds left in the half to tie the game at 21-21, and the Redbirds seemingly with the momentum.

On the first possession of the second half, Alton caught a big break after a punt deflected off a Warrior player; the Redbirds recovering on the Granite 18. But the Redbirds couldn't cash in, as the defense held on four plays, giving the Warriors the ball for the first time in the half.

It only took the Warriors seven plays to to score, Graham and Edwards getting key first downs, then Edwards and Williba teaming up for a 33-yard reception to put the ball at the Alton one. Edwards hit Eugene Williba with the TD pass. Bettag's convert game Granite a 28021 lead, one it would never relinquish.

Later on, a Redbird punt took a huge bounce before being downed at the Warriors 21. On the next play, Edwards took a low snap, then got by a tackle and was off on a 79 yard touchdown run. The convert was wide right, but the Warriors took a 34-21 lead.

The Warrior defense held on the next Redbird possession, and Graham, himself enjoying a good game, carried the ball to start the drive. Edwards gained 22 on a broken play, then Graham did the rest, scoring on a seven-yard run, upping the Granite lead to 41-21 with 6:40 remaining in the fourth.

The Redbirds weren't done yet, and they kept clawing, Charles Miller, in at quarterback after an injury to Price, connected with Smith, who came back for an under-thrown pass, beat a defender and sprinted in for a 70 yard touchdown with 4:54 left in regulation. The convert dinged off the left upright no good, leaving the score at 41-27.

The Redbirds had one last chance, but a fumbled snap on fourth down was recovered by the Warriors, who ran the clock out to preserve their win.

Dickerson agreed that the homecoming crowd got their money's worth from the game.

"Definitely," Dickerson said with a smile. "Big plays for us, they answered back with some big plays of their own. It's just one of those that almost came down to who had the ball last."

The Redbirds host Edwardsville and travel to Belleville West for their final two games, and Dickerson is ready to start planning for the Tigers.

"We'll get film, start game planning, and get ready to go." Dickerson said.

The Warriors play their finals two games on the road, at West and Edwardsville, and will bring much confidence into those two games.

"We have two games left, we want to win both games, get to six wins and control our own destiny," Luehmann said. "We can't get to five and then hope to get in. We want to win both games, the kids are believing that they can, and that's what we're going on. We're going in one game at a time."

