

Greenfield-Northwestern captures must win over Pleasant Hill 34-30

by John Hough, Sports Writer
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GREENFIELD - The Greenfield-Northwestern Tigers needed 11 yards.

Who do they call on?

Freshman Jacob Lansaw was that man, despite his lack of experience and age. On fourth down and 11 with just over five minutes to play in the game, Lansaw caught a screen-pass from Zane Thomson and then fired a bomb to Cody Brown, for a 42-yard pickup to keep the Tigers hopes alive. On the very next play, Jacob Foiles rushed into the end zone from five yards out, which proved to be the game-winning score.

“It’s just like we worked on in practice,” Lansaw said.

The Tigers, in a must-win game, defeated the Pleasant Hill Wolves 34-30 at Northwestern High School in Palmyra on Friday night.

Lansaw was needed one last time as he picked off Wolves quarterback Dalton Crane in double coverage that effectively sealed the victory for the Tigers.

After running for a season-low of rushing yards last week, Foiles and the offensive line were much better as a unit. The senior running back rushed for 193 yards on 22 carries with three touchdowns.

"I was thinking we had to pick it up. It was hard," Foiles said. I was trying to get the offense pumped up. It was definitely difficult to play, but I feel that we toughed it out and our line made holes."

Despite his blood pressure boiling up the entire game, Greenfield-Northwestern head coach Joe Pembroke is overjoyed about the final result.

"It's pretty stressful when it's back and forth like that, but we were prepared for that," Pembroke said. Pleasant Hill is a very good football team. We knew it would be a back and forth type battle and it would take four solid quarters to get the job done. They pushed us to our limits. We feel very fortunate to get the victory tonight."

A week ago, the Tigers managed just 66 yards of total offense against Carrollton, but last night was a much different story mainly because of a solid week of practice.

"We were able to move the football, sustain drives, and get third downs to keep drives alive," Pembroke said. "They put in a good hard work of practice this week. They've become unified and gotten together more."

However, the beginning of the game was a poor start for the Tigers as Pleasant Hill marched downfield and Justin Shireman scored on a three-yard run that capped a five-play drive that took 69 seconds. Greenfield-Northwestern answered on the ensuing drive with a 39-yard run by Foiles that set up a Blake Steckel eight-yard touchdown run that knotted things up at 6-6.

For the next 18 minutes of game time, there was a power struggle. The Wolves fumbled away the ball on two straight possessions inside the Tigers 20-yard line, but Greenfield-Northwestern never took advantage of either turnover.

Late in the first half, the Tigers put together a good drive with a couple of big runs by Foiles. Then, with just under two minutes to go until halftime, Steckel, lined up as the

quarterback, found room to his left, cut up field and found the end zone on a 27-yard run to give the Tigers a 14-6 lead. However, the Wolves used their two-minute offense to great effect. After two consecutive 36-yard passes Isaiah Rogers, Crane, on a third down connected with Rogers again for an 11-yard touchdown pass with no time left to even the score at 14 all.

Crane would finish with 371 total yards. Through the air, he accumulated 256 passing yards, was 16-for-28 with 256 passing yards and two touchdowns. On the ground, he rushed for 115 yards on 18 carries and scored a touchdown. With those numbers, he received high praise from Pembroke.

“He’s extremely elusive. We knew that we were going to have a difficult job containing him not only as a great throwing quarterback, but he’s very elusive with his legs. He’s a dual-threat type kid. We haven’t seen a kid with his ability at this point in the season to break a defense down in multiple ways. We were fortunate enough to wrap him up in key situations and keep him in the pocket so that we could get stops.”

It took less than a minute for the Tigers to retake the lead with a Foiles two-yard touchdown run that gave them the lead at 22-14. Just under six minutes later, Crane scored on a dazzling 29-yard touchdown run and scored on the two-point conversion to level things up again at 22-22.

Once again, Greenfield-Northwestern swiftly replied in the form of another freshman.

Before Lansaw stepped up there was Denver Davenport. He took a jet-sweep handoff, found some space, cut up field and off he went 65-yards to the house showing off his speed. His touchdown gave the lead back to the Tigers at 28-22 midway through the third quarter.

“We’ve asked those two to grow up in a hurry,” Pembroke said. “They’ve gotten valuable varsity experience over the last few weeks. We’ve kind of tried to spoon feed them a little bit and teach them certain aspects of the game. They’re extremely competitive, athletic kids. We know they can help us and tonight was a great example of that.”

After a couple of scoreless possessions, the Wolves took their first lead since they led 6-0 when Crane hooked up with Rogers again on a 47-yard strike and successfully converted the two-point conversion with just over seven minutes to play. That was a blow for the Tigers, but they would persevere.

“It means a lot just moving on and trying to get to the playoffs. We gotta win out from here on out,” Lansaw said.

“The one thing I take away from tonight is our ability to bounce back,” Pembroke said. “There were multiple times when we could’ve just folded especially late in the game. They answered the bell, and I’m very proud of how they rallied around one another.”

