

HUGE WIN: Alton comes from behind, topples Belleville East 50-26

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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BELLEVILLE – You name it, Alton found a way to do it Friday night.

The Redbirds scored on touchdown runs. Scored on touchdown passes. Even a kickoff return.

And not just one, but two pick-sixes.

Every one of those scores helped the Redbirds take a come-from-behind 50-26 win over Belleville East in a Southwestern Conference game at East's newly named Charlie Woodford Field; the field was dedicated to Woodford, a World War II veteran who was the first president of the Lancer Booster Club.

The win put Alton at 3-3 on the season, 2-2 in the SWC, while the Lancers fell to 1-5 overall, 1-3 in the league.

The Redbirds had taken the lead early on thanks to touchdown runs from Darrell Smith and Izeal Terrell and a touchdown reception from Kevin Caldwell, but the Lancers rallied back on a pair of TD catches and a eight-yard pick-six from defensive lineman Nick Cole, who stepped in front of a Andrew Jones pass and went in to give the Lancers a 26-21 lead at the half.

“We had to make some adjustments in the second half,” said AHS coach Eric Dickerson. “That's what we needed to do; I knew coming into the game that quarterback (Kieren Wade) is very good; he puts the ball on the money. You can't simulate what he does throughout the week, but we were able to make the adjustments we did for the second half and it worked out for us.”

That the Redbirds were able to adjust and come roaring back in the second half was because of the players, Dickerson felt. “That's on our kids,” Dickerson said. “We just talked to them; they've got to believe and they've got to want it – it's getting over that hump and turning the corner for this team and this program – more importantly, for these seniors who have put in so much work. It's great and I'm just happy for those kids in the locker room right now.”

Alton answered the Lancers' taking of the lead at the half when Smith took the second-half kickoff, found an opening and took it down 80 yards for a touchdown to give the lead back to the Redbirds at 27-26; Jonathan Bumpers then extended the lead with a 23-yard catch-and-run of a Jones pass that extended the lead to 33-26.

A 32-yard field goal from Colin Lombardi put the Redbirds up 36-26 before what became one of the game's defining moments – back-to-back pick-sixes for Alton, one a 48-yard interception return from Terrell and the other a 23-yard return from Bumpers that put the game out of reach.

Of the pick-sixes, Dickerson said “they were huge; we haven't had too many turnovers on defense this year and it happened to come at the right time for us.

With the Redbirds going to 3-3 on the year, the playoffs are still a possibility for Alton. “That's our goal every week, to play the best we can,” Dickerson said. “For the past two weeks we've played well; it came together tonight.

“It's been a ride this year, starting out with Highland and the next two, then following up with Belleville West and Edwardsville; in this conference, there's no easy game. We've had confidence; they came out. You know, that quarterback they have, he's good, and they've got some good receivers. We made some adjustments in the second half and our secondary answered the bell when it was called to them; we challenged them in the locker room, we said 'it's on you guys', and they stepped up.”

Next up for the Redbirds is their home finale against O'Fallon Oct. 6 before they finish the season out at Granite City Oct. 13 and at East St. Louis Oct. 20.

