

Darrell Smith erupts for 259 yards, five TDs as Redbirds clip Warriors 56-14

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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GRANITE CITY—It's been an incredible turnaround season for Alton High School's football team. Winless in nine games in 2016, the Redbirds have had one of the area's most explosive offenses this season.

And on Friday night at Granite City's Memorial Stadium/Kevin Greene Field, Alton, behind Darrell Smith's 259 yards rushing and five touchdowns, put up at least 50 points for the third consecutive game — and fourth this season — as the Redbirds defeated the Warriors 56-14. It's Alton's fifth win of the season, putting them in position for a berth in the upcoming Illinois High School Association playoffs.

Alton head coach Eric Dickerson was quick to give credit to his players for his side's great turnaround.

"You know, it's the kids," Dickerson said. "That's what I feel so great for. These seniors have worked their tails off this offseason... and then now, they can reap the rewards of their hard work."

Dickerson, of course, was very pleased with Smith's effort, and he also gave credit to the Redbirds' offensive line, who opened up the holes for Smith to run through.

"Oh, always," Dickerson said. "Each week, we're pleased with all our kids' effort, and tonight, our O-line wanted to come out, and we wanted to run the ball. And they showed up, and Darrell did a good job of reading his blocks, and then followed through."

It was a very close first half, in which Granite played well and trailed only 21-7 at the long break. The lack of depth, however, caught up with the Warriors once again.

"The kids played good in the first half," said Granite City coach Carl Luehmann, "but the same old thing, no depth hurts us. They've got a lot of good athletes, same old thing. Depth hurts us when the game gets going in the long run, and that's what happens."

Warrior junior running back Jerry Watson had an equally impressive game himself, running for over 200 yards.

"Jerry had a good game," Luehmann said. "But the offensive line's got to get better. They're young, but keep working hard in practice, take a little pride in what you do. Offense, defense, and tackling. Some of those kids need a gut check on that part."

The Warriors are still playing hard, which is encouraging to Luehmann.

"The kids play hard," Luehmann said, "but being able to get them a break here and there. They're young, they're playing in the Southwestern Conference as freshmen and

sophomores. It's just a tough situation for some of these kids. We keep trying to stress to them 'You guys are young, you've got two more years to be in their position as juniors and seniors.' That's when it all changes, so we're hoping that changes in the next couple of years."

The Redbirds got on the board first with 3:50 left in the first quarter, as Smith took and handoff and swept 48 yards for his first touchdown of the game. Colin Lombardi's convert gave Alton a 7-0 lead, but that was equalized by an 80-yard touchdown run by Watson 47 seconds later to tie the game at 7-7. The Redbirds went into the lead for good in the second term, finishing a seven play, 67 yard drive with Taylor Price's 30-yard touchdown pass to Terrance Walker, who made a nice juggling catch in the end zone to give Alton a 14-7 lead.

Smith struck again 3:04 from halftime when he made a nice move at the line and raced 54 yards for the touchdown to give the Redbirds their 21-7 lead at the long break. And on Alton's first play of the second half, Smith went off-tackle 52 yards for his third major of the game, making the score 28-7 after the convert.

Undaunted, the Warriors launched an 80-yard drive on their first possession of the half, taking seven plays and 3:22 to score. The key play of the drive was Austin Bonvicino's 31-yard pass to Reide Wilson over the middle to the Alton six, where Watson took it into the end zone on the next play. Chase Reeves' convert cut the lead to 28-14.

The Redbirds answered back on the next drive, going 49 yards in five plays, ending with Smith sweeping left 21 yards for his fourth touchdown, making the score 35-14 at the start of the fourth quarter. Alton scored again three minutes later when quarterback Andrew Jones completed a pass to Kevin Caldwell, Jr., who made a great diving catch in the end zone for the touchdown. Lombardi's kick hit off the upright to keep the score 48-14. The game's final score occurred with 6:59 left, when Jones' shovel pass to Dyllon Proudie went 19 yards for the touchdown. Proudie swept around the right side for a two-point conversion to make the final 56-14.

That the Redbirds are now playoff-eligible means a lot to Dickerson and his players.

"Hey, it's a goal to start the year," a proud Dickerson said. "We've kept that in mind all year, and each week, we've fought for that, and here we are."

The Redbirds conclude the regular season next week at powerful East St. Louis. Dickerson and his team will approach that game the same as they have all season,

“It’s the same thing we’ve expected for the previous eight weeks,” Dickerson said. “We’ve got an opponent to play, and that’s the way it’s going to be. We’re going to show up and play, and do the best that we can.”

For the Warriors, their season finale is at home against O’Fallon, where the team’s seven seniors will be honored in pregame ceremonies. Luehmann does have high hopes for his team’s last game.

“The seniors, you always hope that the last game of the year, you go out with a win on Senior Night,” Luehmann said. “We only have seven of them, so hopefully, the underclass come and play for them.”

The Redbirds will enjoy the win, and then start getting ready for the Flyers.

“Hey, we’ll get on that tomorrow,” Dickerson said with a smile. “Right now, we’re going to enjoy our victory tonight, and have a little fun.”





[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)