



Redbirds never quit: Alton's season ends with great effort in loss to Warriors in playoffs

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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ALTON – An incredible season for the Alton High School football team came to an end on Saturday afternoon in the Redbirds’ 42-13 loss to New Lenox Lincoln-Way West in their second-round game of the IHSA Class 7A football playoffs. But the accomplishments of the team and its senior class will long be remembered by the team’s fans and Alton community.

“You know, those guys, 1-8 in their sophomore year, 0-9 their junior year,” said a very proud Redbird coach Eric Dickerson. “And they come out, we go 0-1 against a very good Highland team, and they just took it upon themselves that this was not going to be the same old same old. And those guys changed a lot for this program, and I’m so proud of them. There was no quit in them at all this year, definitely not today.”

As far as the game itself went, the Warriors were able to use short fields to score three straight touchdowns in building a 21-0 lead, and never looked back. A powerful running attack lead by sophomore Caleb Marconi and junior Anthony Izzarelli gave Alton trouble all afternoon. Marconi had 20 carries for 123 yards and four touchdowns, while Izzarelli added 57 yards on 16 carries and another touchdown.

“It’s a good team, a very good team,” said Dickerson. “We knew that coming in, and we prepared the best that we could, and they had their way with us up front. And that’s hard to overcome, give them short fields on their first four possessions. It happened, but these kids got to experience something that no other Alton High team in 25 years has been around.”

And Dickerson had high praise for the Alton fans who packed Public School Stadium for the game.

“To see the community out here and show their support for these boys is amazing,” Dickerson said.

After the Redbirds went three-and-out on their opening possession, the Warriors drove down the field, with Marconi carrying most of the load. Ahmad Sanders intercepted a pass at the Redbird eight to stop the drive, but two plays later, a pass from Redbird quarterback Andrew Jones was intercepted and returned to the two. Marconi scored on the next play to put the Warriors up 7-0.

West extended its lead to 21-0 on their next two possessions, going 48 yards on 11 plays, the drive climaxing with Izzarelli’s four-yard touchdown run. Another short field created by a bad snap on a punt lead to a drive that Marconi finished with a five-yard run up the middle with 10:24 left in the second quarter.

Later in the period, a Redbird interception in the end zone gave Alton the ball on its 20, and on the first ruled complete on dual possession that put the ball on the West 43. Smith then made a nice catch in traffic on the next play, and four plays later, Jones found Kevin Caldwell, Jr. in the end zone from 28 yards out to cut the Warrior lead to 21-7. Undaunted, West went on a drive on its next possession, with both Marconi and Izzarelli taking turns running the ball. The drive ended with Marconi scoring from one yard out, making the halftime score 28-7, Warriors.

The Warriors took only five plays in its initial second half possession to extend the lead, thanks to Marconi's running and quarterback Anthony Senerchia completing passes to Alex Croft and Egann Wydajewski. Marconi finished the drive with a nine-yard run up the middle to make it 35-7.

Later in the third, the Redbirds recovered a bad snap on a punt, and immediately cashed in, with Caldwell making an incredible one-handed catch of a Jones pass, racing 16 yards into the end zone for the touchdown. A pass attempt after a bad snap on the convert was incomplete, making the score 35-13.

The game's final touchdown occurred early in the fourth quarter, as Greyson Grimm finished a 28-yard drive with a one-yard run up the middle to make the final 42-13 in favor of the Warriors.

As the game ended, the packed crowd of Alton supporters saluted their team with a very loud standing ovation.

"It's awesome," Dickerson said. "It's something that, you know, this is not just a one-and-done for this program. This is what we're going to strive to do year after year, is to make the playoffs, and those seniors have shown us the way of what it takes to do that. We've been losing at halftime, and we've come back. We've been tied at halftime, and we've come back, so we've won it many different ways this year."

And the Redbirds weren't just satisfied with making the playoffs.

"This team was never satisfied with anything," Dickerson said. "They had goals they had set at the beginning of the year, and each week, we got to check off one. And we went to 5-4, we knew we qualified for the playoffs, but they weren't done with that. They wanted to win. And we went up to Chicago last week, we played a good game, got a victory, and we got what we wanted, a second-round home game. And you know, that's a very good team over there. A very good team."

For the Redbirds, who finished the season at 6-5, there's still plenty to look forward to for the 2018 campaign. But for now, Alton will just relax and celebrate the season's accomplishments.

"It is," Dickerson said. "I'm not going to start thinking about that right now. I kind of want to sit back and enjoy what took place this year. It's been a special season for this team and this program and this community."

“I haven’t had time to catch my breath, really,” Dickerson also said with a smile. “Not that I’m complaining about it, but you know, it’s been a fun ride. And unfortunately, it came to an end.”















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