

Piasa Birds Get Revenge On Hillsboro, Become Playoff Eligible After Dominant Win

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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PIASA – The Piasa Birds weren't going to let the Hilltoppers ruin their fun again. Not this year.

It was Hillsboro who ended Southwestern's playoff chase a season ago in a week-six matchup. The Birds needed to win their final two games over Hillsboro on the road and Gillespie in the season finale.

But the Hilltoppers won the meeting 28-14, dropping Southwestern to 3-5 on the season, and ineligible for the postseason. The Birds won over Gillespie to finish 4-5.

This year, Piasa, 4-4 at the time, hosted Hillsboro in week nine. The Hilltoppers came in 3-5, and all they could do was try and spoil the party again. Piasa had to win to get in.

Thanks to some solid defense that only allowed Hillsboro a single first down in the first half and three straight scores, the Piasa Birds went on to win 35-7, finishing the season at 5-4 and becoming playoff eligible.



After winning their first two games, Southwestern dropped three straight before winning the next two to improve to 4-3. Last week's loss to Greenville made the game against Hillsboro do-or-die.

“I’m very proud of our guys,” Piasa head coach Pat Keith said. “This is a good Hillsboro team, and our guys came ready to play tonight. Our guys answered the bell tonight. It’s a great win for us.”

Southwestern got things going early on their first drive.

Starting out on their 38-yard line, the Birds only picked up three yards before deciding to go for a fourth-and-inches play. Logan Keith plowed his way through to move the chains and keep the drive alive. Another big run from Keith set up first-and-goal from the one-yard line. Rocky Darr carried it in, and the kick was good from Ian Brantley to make it 7-0.

Brantley was a perfect 5-5 on extra-point kicks on the night.



Hillsboro tried to keep their drive alive by going for fourth-and-three from their own 36 and were stopped short. The Birds couldn’t take advantage of the great field position and ended up punting on fourth-and-19.

To open the second quarter, Piasa started their drive from their own 30. They marched downfield before quarterback Blake Rimbey was sacked for a loss of yards.

Unexpectedly, the Birds decided to go for it on fourth-and-11 and it ended up working wonders.

Rimbey found Brantley for a 27-yard reception to move the chains. Rimbey carried it in from 10 yards away before Brantley's extra point made it 14-0.

Hillsboro got the ball back but went on a quick three-and-out.

Rimbey went back to work with a 22-yard run before hitting Darr with a 21-yard touchdown throw.

Rimbey finished the night with 92 yards rushing. He only threw the ball four times, two of those for touchdowns and one that clutch fourth-and-11 play. Darr ended the night with 81 yards rushing on 20 carries.

The game went into halftime with the Piasa Birds leading 21-0.

After a lengthy halftime ceremony and band performance, Southwestern was hit with a delay of game penalty to open the second half. The halftime show went a little longer than usual because long-time Southwestern track and cross-country coach Gary Bowker was recognized and had the track at Knapp Field named after him. The band still went on after him leading to about a half-hour-long halftime intermission.



This did not phase the Piasa Birds. They still took it out from their 40-yard line thanks to a 29-yard run from Rimbey in the second half's first action. He later ran it in from four yards out to make it 28-0.

Hillsboro would score, but it would just end up being consolation. Treyton Kuhl found some holes in the Piasa defense and scored a 53-yard rushing touchdown to cut the deficit to 28-7.

The Piasa Birds answered right back though. They started off at the 50 after the Hilltoppers failed to recover an on-side kick. From there, they went all the way down to the one-yard line where Keith was able to run it in to get to the eventual scoreline of 35-7. He finished with 58 yards rushing on 10 carries.

According to coach Keith, his kids weren't that nervous, just ready for the occasion.

"Obviously, with a situation like this, where you've got to win to get in, but I think they were excited about the opportunity, and they took advantage of it," he said.

Rimbey said he wasn't nervous at all after the game. Darr said he was a little.

"It feels really good," Darr said about earning playoff eligibility. "I'm proud to get that accomplished with my team."

"I knew we'd get here," Rimbey added.



Before this game, Hillsboro had won eight of the last 10 games against Southwestern, including the last two seasons. The Hilltoppers made the playoffs last season before losing 13-7 to Roxana in the first round.

Southwestern will head back to the postseason after missing last year but making the season before that. In 2021 the Birds lost to Benton 42-0 in week 10. They've never won a playoff football game in school history. They'd like to change that.

"Playoffs are the best of the best," coach Keith said. "We got in there, but we'll probably have to face a team that's 9-0 or 8-1. We'll prepare all week for it and give it our best effort this Friday or Saturday."

The IHSA announces playoff matchups beginning Saturday night at 8 p.m. working from Class 1A up to 8A. Times and locations won't be fully determined until Monday.

