

Roxana Looks To Get Past Final Hurdle – Host Mt. Carmel In State Semifinals On Saturday

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
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ROXANA – One big test stands in the way between the Shells football team and its second-ever championship game appearance.

That test would be the Mt. Carmel Golden Aces, Roxana's IHSA Class 3A state semifinal opponent.

Roxana hosts the big game on Saturday, Nov. 18 at 3 p.m. from Charles Raich Field. Riverbender.com will be [live-streaming](#) the game for those unable to attend.

The Golden Aces have been to the playoffs 41 times now, more than any other team in this season's 3A bracket. This will be their 12th semifinal, having won five of them. Mt. Carmel has one state title to its name in 1981.

"It's a storied program," Roxana head coach Wade DeVries said of Mt. Carmel's continued success.

The Shells are in the semifinals for just the sixth time, only making one championship game appearance when the school was Class 4A in 1987, a 14-7 loss to New Lenox Providence Catholic.

The No. 4-seeded Golden Aces come into this game with an 11-1 record and haven't lost a game since week one. This postseason Mt. Carmel beat Benton (5-4) 24-17, Sullivan-Okaw Valley (9-1) 42-21, and Tolono Unity (9-2) 56-46.

Mt. Carmel's best player is undoubtedly their senior quarterback, No. 2 Blayne Sisson.

"Offensively, everything runs through the QB. He's a really, really talented runner," DeVries said.

Sisson has amassed 1,766 yards rushing on 182 carries for 31 touchdowns. He averages 147 yards per game, more than any player on Roxana. In comparison, the Shells' top rusher, senior running back Evan Wells, has 1,526 yards on 172 carries for 26 TDs and averages 127 yards per game.

Mt. Carmel's next best rushers are senior RB Asher Knight with 729 yards on 81 carries for 11 TDs and sophomore linebacker Elliott Acree with 468 yards on 74 carries for eight scores.

But Sisson can also sling it with the best in the state.

With another 1,581 yards passing on 108 completions for 14 more touchdowns, he will be hard to handle on Saturday. Sisson has a 58-percent completion rate and has only thrown three interceptions on 194 total passing attempts.

Last game against Tolono Unity he threw for 146 yards and two touchdowns and had another four rushing touchdowns with 230 yards on the run. Knight had two rushing TDs and a receiving score. Sisson was responsible for 376 of Mt. Carmel's 554 yards last Saturday.

Roxana, seemingly unphased by Stanford Olympia last week in a 56-30 win, one they were never in any real danger, improved to 12-0 on the season for the first time in school history.

Junior RB Andruw Ellis had 147 total yards and two touchdowns last game while senior QB Chris Walleck has proved himself in the air as of late, with a 75-percent completion rate last Saturday, 135 yards passing, and three touchdown passes.

Dating back to last season, it was Roxana's seventh straight win on the road.

This time around they will be at home, with Roxana Athletic Director Mark Briggs expecting a crowd surpassing 5,000 people for Saturday's semifinal.

"I think it'll be fun," DeVries said.

"It's cool to be able to see everybody there, but once it's kick-off, it's got to be business as usual. We just got to go out there, do our job, and execute."