

Shells Lose State Semifinal Slug Fest To Mt. Carmel, Ending Historic Season

by Bradley Piros, Reporter
November 20 2023 11:59 AM



[Click here to see full game video.](#)

ROXANA – A historic season for the Roxana football team came to an end Saturday night at Charles Raich Field.

The Shells hosted the Mt. Carmel Golden Aces in the IHSA Class 3A state semifinals and fell 63-48 as both teams moved to 12-1 on the season.

Roxana had come into the game undefeated, the first time the program had ever gone 12-0, whereas Mt. Carmel has now won 11 straight after losing in week one.

The Golden Aces will take on Byron (13-0) in the state championship game on Friday, Nov. 24 at 4 p.m. at Illinois State University's Hancock Stadium.

Saturday in Roxana was less of a football game and more of a boxing match.

The teams went blow-for-blow in the first quarter with the game knotted up at 21-21 after a wild eight minutes.

It started off with a bang too.

Mt. Carmel senior tight end Preston Will recovered the opening kickoff at his team's 36-yard line. On the very first snap of the game senior quarterback Blayne Sisson took it 64 yards to the house. The kick was good from senior Shade Loudermilk and the Golden Aces led 7-0 just 10 seconds into the game.

[See Play of the Game video by clicking here.](#)

[See Shells Halftime Show by clicking here.](#)



The Shells had an immediate answer when senior running back Terrel Graves ran one in from the 50-yard line. Senior Joe Newton’s extra point was good and the game was tied right back up with only 1:29 elapsed.

Both Loudermilk and Newton went perfect on extra-point attempts.



The Golden Aces took possession at their 33 before senior running back Asher Knight had a long run to take it to Roxana’s 43. Eventually, Sisson found the endzone again with a 16-yard rushing TD.



After nearly fumbling the kick-off return, Roxana started from its 34. The Shells had to convert on a 4th-and-5 and senior QB Chris Walleck found junior tight end Kael Hester with a quick connection to move the chains. It paid off when Walleck hit senior tight end Aidan Briggs with a 26-yard touchdown pass to tie it up again.

Mt. Carmel senior wide receiver Drew Gillihan returned the kick-off up to his 45-yard line. On the next play, Sisson threw one deep to Knight for a 65-yard catch and run play to regain the lead, but Roxana junior RB Andruw Ellis ran one in from 18 yards out to notch things back up at 21.

The punches just kept coming from both teams, but Roxana was the first to look a little staggered.

Knight ran it in from two yards out before Roxana senior RB Evan Wells answered with a 37-yard rushing touchdown to knot it up at 28-28 in the second quarter. This would be the last time the game was tied.



Mt. Carmel started at its 28-yard line and gained a couple of first downs before Sisson's 18-yard run put the ball on Roxana's 43. Sisson kept it again on the next play, taking it 43 yards to the endzone, making it 35-28.

Graves got wrapped up at his 25-yard line after the kick-off, later picking up a first down after a nine-yard gain.

After a couple of run-action plays didn't get pulled off, Roxana was looking at a 4th-and-6 from its 41-yard line. Down a possession with just over two minutes remaining in the half, the Shells went for it.

Walleck connected with Ellis who got brought down short of the first down. It was the only defensive stop of the first half by either side.

The Golden Aces made them pay after taking the ball back at Roxana's 43-yard line. After managing their timeouts, allowing them to stop the clock when needed, Knight was pushed into the endzone from the one-yard line to go ahead 42-28 at halftime.



Roxana head coach Wade DeVries took full responsibility for the 4th-down play call postgame.

“I felt like I trusted our offense,” he said. “I thought we’d be able to get it. I got away from what we do on multiple occasions today, and it’s something I have to live with.”

DeVries says that they still stuck to what they knew, things just didn’t pan out the right way.

“We never really deviated, we ran stuff that’s in our system,” he said. “I just think it’s really easy when it doesn’t go your way to look back and second guess and that’s probably where I’m at right now.”

By no means was the game over at halftime though. The Shells still received the ball in the third quarter.

And they did exactly what they were supposed to do.

Graves returned the kick-off 49 yards and after an unsportsmanlike conduct for a late hit out of bounds against Mt. Carmel, Roxana took over at the Golden Aces' 14-yard line. Wells had a nine-yard carry before finishing the job and running it in from the one-yard line to make it a one-possession game.

Roxana did step one, but couldn't follow through with step two, getting a stop.

On the next drive, Sisson connected with sophomore wide receiver Jack Webb with a long pass on 4th-and-one to keep the chains moving. Sisson scored again from two yards out to go ahead 49-35 with 5:57 remaining in the third quarter.

After starting from their 10-yard line after a penalty, the Shells had to scratch and claw for a couple of first downs before punting on 4th-and-12 from their own 35. It was just the second time they had been stopped all game.



Mt. Carmel scored back-to-back touchdowns via Knight's one-yard leap over the pile into the endzone and a seven-yard rushing score from Sisson to push the envelope to 63-35, a four-possession game and the biggest lead for the Golden Aces with just over five minutes remaining in the game.

Roxana tried to rally the troops but just didn't have enough time left on the clock.

Wells broke free for a 72-yard rushing touchdown before Roxana senior safety Sean Maberry recovered an on-side kick at his own 44-yard line. Walleck picked up the pace with three quick passes, eventually finding Hester in the endzone with a 15-yard touchdown pass to get to the final scoreline of 63-48.

Walleck ended the night eight of 12 passing for 108 yards and two touchdowns. Wells had 187 yards rushing on 23 carries, Graves had 100 yards on 11 carries and Ellis had 68 yards on 10 carries.

The Shells didn't surrender until the very end.

"We're resilient. We can battle adversity. We've done it multiple times, not just this year, but in previous years. You can't debate that," DeVries said.

In a game of 111 total points of scoring, Sisson was responsible for 36 of them. He finished the day with five rushing touchdowns with runs of 2, 7, 16, 37, and 64 yards.

"He's a great player," DeVries said about the Mt. Carmel QB, a recent University of Illinois commit. "We knew we had to match them score for score, and we weren't able to."

The Shells end what has been the most successful and exciting season in program history.

"I told them, outside of holding up that first-place trophy at ISU, there's no other time we're going to leave together smiling," DeVries said.

"That's not just the expectations I had, but it's the standard the kids set, and standards go well above expectations. Coaches have expectations, players set standards, and the standard was perfection. The standard was to go 14-0, to win the conference, go undefeated, and win the state championship. That's the standard that they set and unfortunately, we fell short tonight."

