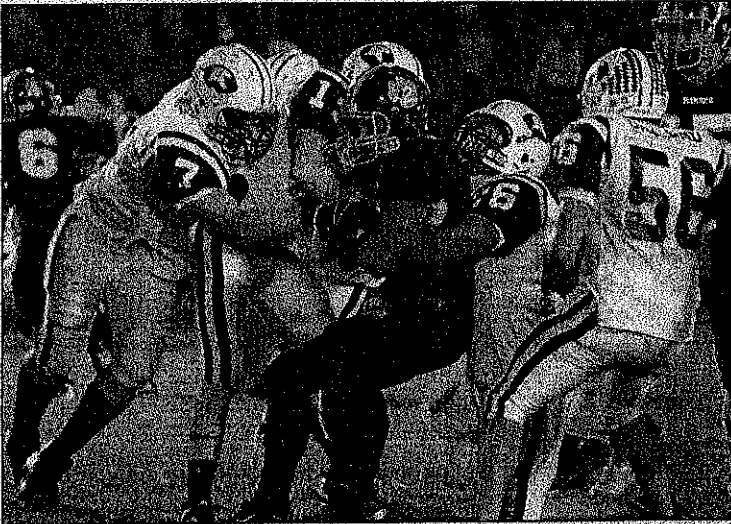


Panthers stop Indians once again



Kewaskum's defense smothers Plymouth quarterback Mitch Unger for a 1-yard gain in the second quarter of last Friday's 14-6 loss at Plymouth.

By Mitch Maersch

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PLYMOUTH - Remember last year's Kewaskum-Plymouth football game?

The Indians and Panthers basically replayed it last Friday. Plymouth beat Kewaskum, 14-6, the same score as last year's game, in much the same fashion - by running the ball well and shutting down the Indians' running game. The Panthers outrushed the Indians 199-67, a year after outgaining them 207-62 on the ground.

This year's version did include a little more drama at the end, with the Indians converting three fourth downs on their final drive.

With 4:13 to go and down eight, Kewaskum held the Panthers on fourth and nine and took over on their own 33. A couple of passes from senior quarterback Cody Nuernberg moved the Indians to their 44, but a sack moved them back nine.

Kewaskum called its first timeout, facing third and 16. Nuernberg threw incomplete and it was fourth down with little hope left.

Nuernberg scanned the field and found Tony Goring across the middle. Goring slid to a knee in catching a 24-yard pass to keep the drive alive.

Two more incompletions and it was third and 10 with less than two minutes to play at Plymouth's 36. Nuernberg scrambled left for nine and faced a fourth and one. The game was on the line again.

Another scramble, this time up the middle, gained another nine yards. Kewaskum was down to the 21 with 1:45 to play.

Nuernberg hit Eric Perkins for eight yards and then ran up the middle for no gain. A third down pass was incomplete and here it was again, fourth

down. Kewaskum called its last timeout with 59 seconds left. Nuernberg ran up the middle for five yards and reached Plymouth's 7.

Tension reached full tilt on both sides of the field as Kewaskum was fighting for its life and Plymouth was trying to not get pushed into overtime. Even with two conference games left, the general belief is the winner of this game takes the Eastern Wisconsin title, the same game that decided last year's champ.

Nuernberg spiked the ball on first down, stopping the clock at 44 seconds.

One pass fell incomplete to Perkins, another sailed over the head of a receiver in the end zone.

On fourth and seven with 36 seconds left, Nuernberg moved around in the pocket, looking for a target. He threw to a diving Brad Boegel in the end zone but the two couldn't connect.

The Panthers sent up their arms and screamed in jubilant celebration. The Indians hung their heads in silence.

Plymouth remained undefeated in the EWC at 5-0. Kewaskum went to 4-1.

"Hey, we gutted it out. It was a tough ball game. Two very good football teams," said Coach Jason Plittmann. "We learn and we've got to get ready for Sheboygan Falls. It's that simple. We have two more games to play plus the playoffs."

Last year's game had the Indians driving for the tying score and falling one yard short on a fourth-down scramble by Nuernberg at the Plymouth 30. This year's game was a tale of two halves as Kewaskum went into the break up 6-0. The teams combined for about 150 yards of offense in the first half, about 100 by Kewaskum, and half of that coming on two plays - a 32-yard touchdown

Mitch Maersch photo
pass from Nuernberg to Perkins and a 22-yard run by Bo Selbel.

The two star running backs, Eric Perkins and Hayden Potts, didn't get going. Neither actually got out of the garage. Perkins had five carries for 10 yards and Potts four for five. Perkins did some damage through the air. With 2:19 to play in the first half, Nuernberg floated a ball down the right sideline to a streaking Perkins who dove and fell forward into the end zone. The 32-yard score capped a 61-yard, seven-play drive.

"It was a great call, great play," Plittmann said. "We leaked Eric to the outside and tried to suck their d-backs in and it worked. Cody put the ball there for Eric to make the play."

The extra point was blocked but the Indians had the lead at half in a game in which scoring points was like winning the lottery.

Potts got going in the second half, finding daylight cutting against the grain. Quarterback Mitch Unger scored from two yards out on Plymouth's first possession, capping a 77-yard, 13-play drive that took five minutes. Potts ran for nearly 40 yards on the drive.

On the ensuing drive, Nuernberg threw an interception on third and eight that served as a 35-yard punt. Plymouth took over on its own 39.

It was Potts for nine, then 12. Three plays later, on third and five from the Indian's 35, Unger ran a sweep right, made a cut and flew down the sideline for his second score.

Kewaskum went three and out again, and the Panthers took the clock from 11:41 to 4:13 in amassing 44 yards before the Indians held on downs and set up their last chance.

Perkins finished with 15 yards on eight carries.

"They bottled him up well," Plittmann said. He hardly remembers a team slamming such a door on his running game.

Their defense is stifling. It's a different look defense. Dan (Knaus, head coach, defensive coordinator) put it in. They're running it very well. They've been shutting teams down, dominating them. We didn't have a lot for yards," he said. "We did find where we can move the ball against a defense like that through the air a little bit and spread things out. We'll learn from it and get better too."

Perkins caught three balls for 46 yards and a score, all season highs.

He's a good athlete. Anytime you can get an athlete his hands on the ball, that's big," Plittmann said.

Potts finished with 102 yards on 23 carries. Unger had 72 on 13.

Plittmann said the Panthers' offensive line doubled down on the Indians in the second half and we over-pursued too much. Potts cut back a little bit. One gap, one hole - that made all the difference.

Nuernberg ended up 8-22 for 114 yards with one touchdown and one interception. Unger was 4-11 for 34 yards.

The Indians had squandered chances to go up early as the entire first quarter was played on Plymouth's side of the field. On their first possession of the game, Kewaskum faced fourth and one from the 39 and chose to punt, pinning Plymouth on its own 4.

On fourth and six from the Plymouth 40, another punt went into the end zone,

putting the Panthers at their own 20. On fourth and five from the 17, a Nuernberg pass fell incomplete.

"That was big. In retrospect I probably should have taken the field goal. I guess I just wanted to make sure we played the field position and had a chance to try to go up six early," Plittmann said. "I thought that would be big momentum for us, but in retrospect, I screwed that up. It's my bad, it's all mine."

After losing at Waterford, 21-7, in the season opener, Plymouth has now won six straight games, including three shutouts and averaging allowing less than four points per game. They average scoring 28 points per game.

The Panthers have Two Rivers (3-2 EWC) and Sheboygan Falls (3-4) left to play. Kewaskum has Falls this Friday and New Holstein (3-2) the next.

NOTES

Eric Perkins now has 1,009 yards rushing on 105 carries this season, for a 9.6-per-rush average. He has scored 15 touchdowns.

Friday night was a lousy ending to a great week for Plittmann. On Wednesday, Dane Christian was born. Mother and baby are doing well. No doubt Dane will someday exact revenge on Plymouth for the gall to do such a thing to his father the week his first son was born.

Both punters shined. Indian Mike Schladweiler punted five times for 164 yards, for a 32.8 average, with a long of 45. He sent one to the Panthers' 4-yard line. Plymouth's Brock Reichardt punted six times for 287 yards, a 34.5 average with a long of 54 that reached the Indians' 2.

"Mike did a good job," Plittmann said.