

CLASS 6A WOODBURY 16, WAYZATA 14



Woodbury's Cade Keesling hit the game-winning field goal with about eight minutes left to give the Royals a 16-14 victory over Wayzata in a Class 6A second-round playoff game Friday.

Woodbury's D keeps lid on Wayzata

Kicker Cade Keesling did the rest with three field goals.

By JIM DALLSEN
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On the strength of a never-say-die defense and a strong-legged soccer player who finally got to focus on kicking a football, Woodbury held off Wayzata 16-14 to advance to the Class 6A quarterfinals.

When the brackets for that class came out a little over two weeks ago, many thought the Royals looked like the most vulnerable of the four No. 1 seeds. But defense, it's said, wins championships, and

with the exception of two long touchdowns, the Royals are playing championship-level defense. "We go to the whistle and we don't stop," Woodbury linebacker Joe Rosebo said. "No let-up. That was our motto."

Woodbury took an early 6-0 lead on field goals of 21 and 33 yards by Cade Keesling.

Wayzata answered midway through the second quarter when quarterback Keaton Heide hit tight end Nick Kallarp for a 47-yard touchdown and a 7-6 lead that the Royals took into halftime.

Woodbury regained the lead 13-7 on its first possession of the second half. Running back Brock Rinchart broke free in the middle of the field and outmuscled Wayzata's defenders for a 58-yard touchdown.

Wayzata responded again, this time with a 79-yard scoring gallop by Malik Jackson to retake the lead, 14-13.

While its offense sputtered for much of the game, Woodbury coiled together one last drive, going 36 yards in eight plays. Keesling connected on his third field goal of the game, a 35-yarder that gave Woodbury the lead for good with 8:02 left in the game.

"Yes, it's a hunky-to-hunky kicker like that," Royals coach Andrew Hill said. "It's been a soccer player until last week. This was the first week he practiced with us."

The defense did the rest.

Wayzata had two more possessions. One ended in a punt. The other provided a large helping of late-game tension.

The Royals took over at their own 42-yard line with 1:25 left and drove into Woodbury territory. The key play was a 29-yard completion from Heide to Kallarp on fourth-and-7.

Wayzata's last hope came with 16 seconds left at the Woodbury 25-yard line. Out of timeouts, Heide rolled right but was sacked

by Woodbury's stellar defensive tackle Raphael Orubo.

"This is the last time I'm going to play on this field," Orubo said. "That moment will forever be in my head."

Wayzata fourthly tried to run its clock out before it could get set.

Rosebo said that those final few ticks seemed to last forever.

"It was insane. Your heart drops with every second that it goes down," Rosebo said. "This means so much. We're accomplishing something as a unit, and it doesn't get better than that."

CLASS 6A BLAINE 34, PRIOR LAKE 7

Blaine topples another domino

Rematch of '17 battle goes to Bengals in a runaway.

By HEATHER REULE
Special to the Star Tribune

For Blaine senior quarterback and co-captain Jack Haring, it's all going according to script.

"This is exactly what I wanted," Haring said. "I wanted to come out and beat Tinton-Groce in the first round, because they knocked us out two years ago at the Bank. And then I wanted Prior Lake right after that because obviously they beat us last year."

Haring can check off another box this season. Undejected Blaine put away familiar playoff foe Prior Lake with a 34-7 victory Friday in the second round of the Class 6A football playoffs at Blaine High School.

The Bengals (19-0), ranked second in the Star Tribune's Metro Top 10, used three consecutive touchdown passes from Haring in the second quarter to build a 17 halftime lead. Senior receiver Brandon Wittig caught two of those for 44- and 56-yard scores. All of his unofficial 120 total receiving yards came in the first half on four catches.

Blaine got its mojo going

Blaine's Brandon Wittig broke into the open field on a sweep against Prior Lake. Wittig scored twice in the second quarter.

early after the teams traded three-and-outs to start the game. Senior co-captain Troy Strand returned a punt 79 yards for the first score of the game to set the tone.

"That was huge," first-year Blaine coach Ben Gindler said. "We've had a hard time starting games off. We've been a really good third-quarter team, but first quarter's been a struggle for us this year."

That momentum was really big, and our kids just kind of rallied on it.

Prior Lake (15-5) got within

10-7 in the second quarter on a 5-yard touchdown run from quarterback Collin O'Connor. But the Bengals responded 1 minute, 3 seconds later with the first of the second-quarter touchdowns.

In addition to the two catches from Wittig, junior Danaari Porter caught a 15-yard pass in the endzone after a Lakes turnover.

The game was a role reversal from years ago, when home team Prior Lake defeated Blaine 49-14 in the same playoff round.

CLASS 6A MINNETONKA 13, ROSEMOUNT 10

Wrong uniform, right place

Raheem Brown's pair of picks help Tonka prevail.

By MATT STECHEN
Special to the Star Tribune

Minnetonka's Raheem Brown might want to borrow teammate Garrett Smith's jersey again next week.

Brown accidentally left his No. 28 white and blue top at Minnetonka High School on Friday. He took the field for the Skipper's Class 6A playoff game at Blaine on wearing Smith's No. 15 and proceeded to make two driving interceptions that helped the Skipper's hang on for a 13-10 victory over the Irish.

It's the second consecutive year the Skipper's have put an end to the Irish's season.

Brown secured his first interception of his own yard line late in the third quarter, when Rosemount looked poised to take the lead.

The Irish got the ball back with 5 minutes, 8 seconds to go and drove to the Minnetonka 29-yard line before Brown snuffed away the victory with his second interception.

"They always teach us in the Cover 3 we have to come up hard on the blitz and come up quickly," Brown said. "They tell us to fight for the ball, and I know if I can fight for the ball, it's mine."

Minnetonka (6-4) kept the ball for nearly nine minutes to start the game. Wide receiver Mitch Klans capped off the Skipper's opening 16-play drive with a capped touchdown pass to Trent Hollings to give the Skipper's 7-0 lead.

After recovering a fumble, Minnetonka had to go only 22 yards for its second touchdown. Aaron Sylverson, who completed 10 of 17 passes for 125 yards, closed out the first half by finding backbencher Ovens over the middle for an 8-yard score.

Rosemount got a 45-yard 17 pass from Jake Rantala to Christian Graska late in the first half, and Nathan Whittige

24-yard field goal to open the second half pulled the Irish 7-3 within 13-0.

But Minnetonka's most important drive might have been one that didn't end with any points. After Brown's first interception, the Skipper's drove 90 yards and used up seven minutes, which led to the Irish getting only one fourth-quarter possession.

"I'm proud of our offense for how they were able to keep the ball when we needed them to," coach Dave Nelson said. "Rosemount's a good football team that's well-coached and knows how to win, so it's a big win for us."