

Pilots' late TD sends Highlanders packing early from playoffs, 13-10

BY JIM TOTH
STAFF WRITER

FOOTBALL

The playoff disappointment continues. For the third straight year, Rochester Adams' stay in the Michigan High School Athletic Association football post-season has been a short one.

Friday, the Highlanders watched a hard-nosed Warren De La Salle team rally for 10 points in the fourth quarter, including the decisive six-point play with 2:24 seconds remaining, to post a 13-10 MHSAA Division 2 pre-district victory over a stunned crowd at Adams.

"Even a blind squirrel can find a nut now and then," voiced an ecstatic De La Salle coach Paul Verska after the game. "Our kids battled hard and played hard. The kids are always working hard, playing hard. We're not very good, but we're trying."

That effort was good enough to once again keep the Highlanders from advancing out of district play. In each of the last two playoff seasons, the Highlanders were eliminated by Utica Eisenhower following an opening-game triumph.

"These kids worked real hard. I could say they're heartbroken, but they'll bounce

back," DeLaeger said inside a somber Adams locker room. "I'm really proud of what they accomplished."

Coming off a regular-season that included eight wins in nine tries and a share of the Oakland Activities Association Division 1 crown, the Highlanders were viewed as a serious threat to capture the Division 2 state championship. And the way they came out in the first quarter in cold and blustery weather conditions, it looked like they just might live up to those expectations.

A pair of three-and-outs gave quarterback Mike Jones and the offense great field position at the Adams 38. Backed by the power running of senior Mike LePage, the Highlanders struck first when LePage carried a host of would-be tacklers five yards and into the end zone for a touchdown. LePage followed with the PAT and the Highlanders staked themselves to a 7-0 advantage.

The Adams defense again showed its prowess midway through the second period when the Pilots were forced to settle for a field goal following a turnover deep in Highlander territory. With first-and-goal at

the 10, the Pilots failed to move the ball and drew closer on a 28-yard field goal off the foot of Robert Miller.

"After our guys held in the first half - when we mishandled the punt - on the goal line stand, I thought this is just what we needed," DeLaeger said. "It was a shot in the arm for our defense. I thought we could do anything we wanted to at that point."

That feeling carried over to the early part of the third quarter as the Highlanders took the kick-off and moved the ball down to the De La Salle 3-yard line. But a stop of a LePage carry forced the Highlanders to settle for a 20-yard field goal and 10-3 lead.

From that point on, the game seemed to shift De La Salle's way as the Pilots' offense sputtered. The Highlanders to set up solid field position. Determined running by senior Joe Novak helped Miller nail a 35-yard field goal with 6:40 remaining, and more of the same accounted for 31 yards on the winning drive. Taking over at their own 30 with 3:06 showing, the Pilots engineered their only march of the game. A 34-yard reception by Joseph Konrad off a flea-flicker and runs of 15 and 7 yards by Novak were the key plays in setting up a first-

and-goal at the Adams 6. Two plays later, QB Matthew Lewis lofted a pass to the left corner of the end zone where Konrad stepped in front of Adams defender Marcus McNamara for the winning score.

"As long as we got into the fourth quarter, we had a chance because our kids won't quit," said Verska, whose squad will take its 7-3 ledger into next week's playoff clash with Warren Cousino. "We battled and battled all year long. We played a tremendous schedule."

"You don't play (Birmingham) Brother Rice, (Detroit) Country Day, (Redford) Catholic Central, U-D (Jesuit) and Orchard Lake St. Mary's and not get prepared. We're mentally tough and physically tough for the playoff drive. And that is what's most important of the second season. We get to play again and we're excited."

The same can't be said for the Highlanders. In losing for the second time in 10 games this season, the Highlanders held a decisive edge in yards rushing, 204-86, but fell short in the passing game, 102-39.

"I thought we ran the ball very well, but we just couldn't punch it in," DeLaeger said. "And we couldn't make key plays when we wanted to on offense. They're a solid football team."

LePage, playing his final varsity game, collected 95 yards in 21 carries. Jones, meanwhile, finished 4-18 passing.

TRIATHLON

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thing," Scheidies said.

"Sometimes it slows me down. A couple times while swimming I've gotten separated from the pack and been in the middle of nowhere. But I fare pretty well. Usually, I'm in the top three in my age group."

"At most events, I can't see the potholes on the bike or the buoys in the water. The day before I have somebody drive over the bike course, so I know where the potholes are."

"I'm a really good swimmer, but there's always at least one person ahead me and somebody I can follow."

For the ITU competition, Scheidies is required to compete with a guide. Matt West, a former track and cross country runner at Eastern Michigan, will fill that role. Balance Bar, one of Scheidies' sponsors, gave him a \$3,500 grant to purchase a tandem bicycle that is required for the physically-challenged division. His other sponsor is Running Fit.

"This is the first big race doing it like this," Scheidies said. "It's taken some adjustment. My guide and I have gotten together to work out."

"I had to find somebody as good or better than me in all three aspects, and that took me a little while."

Scheidies, who has a hereditary eye disease he said is similar to macular degeneration that causes the central vision to deteriorate, will compete against other triathletes with vision impairment. Scheidies expects there to be about 25 Americans in his physically-challenged division and numerous other athletes from around the world.

"My goal is to win the gold medal in the PC division," Scheidies said. "I think I defi-

nately have a chance at that. "Lately, I've been having some hip trouble; hopefully, it doesn't hinder my running, because I haven't been able to run much lately. If the hip doesn't bother me, I'm looking at going around 2 hours and 6 minutes. I think that would win the PC division if I did that."

"In most races around here, the really good guys are around 2 hours, 5 minutes, and they're not physically challenged. I don't really expect that many people to have low a time in the PC division."

Scheidies qualified by winning the physically-challenged division June 9 at Lake Placid, N.Y. Guides were not required for the event, however. Scheidies finished in 2:30:43.

"It was not like a summer day; it was really cold," Scheidies said. "It was 60 degrees and raining. The conditions were bad, and I had to take it slow on the bike."

Scheidies' best overall time is 2 hours and 13 minutes, which he ran in August at the Sylvania (Ohio) Triathlon. His favorite event is swimming. He'll swim a mile, bike 25 miles and run 6.2 miles in Mexico, the standard distances for international triathlons. His best times are 21 minutes, 7 seconds in swimming, 01:09:50 in biking and 40:32 in running at those distances. Scheidies, who is the president of the MSU Triathlon Club and a 4.0 student studying kinesiology, trains six days a week, doing what he calls "brick workouts" in which he does two of the events back-to-back.

"It's really important to do bike-to-run to get used to that transition," he said. "I'm endurance everything; I have no speed work at all."

But a fast time could result in Scheidies winning a world championship.

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