

Cat Special Teams

Rise Up And Shine

When the Mulvane High School football team lost its season opener at Augusta, Wildcat head coach Dave Fennewald pointed out that his special teams gave up some big plays that contributed to the loss.

Three weeks later, the 'Cats traveled to Iola Friday night, Sept. 23, and the special teams made some plays that were more, well...special. Not only that, but they may have made the biggest plays of the game.

A blocked punt and a blocked extra point were among the little things that meant a lot as Mulvane held off a late rally for a 21-19 win over the host Mustangs, who had defeated Mulvane 22-21 in Mulvane last year. The 'Cats evened their overall record at 2-2 on the season.

Speaking of last year's game, this year's end-of-game drama was very similar. "Last year, they scored a touchdown and two-

Mulvane	14	0	7	0-21
Iola	0	13	0	6-19

Scoring

Touchdowns—Mulvane: John Knight 2 (2, run, 12, pass from Ryan Herrig), Sage Swaney (2, run); Iola: Tyler Ringwald (54, run), Mueller (8, pass from Ringwald), Honeycutt (22, pass from Ringwald).

Points after touchdowns—Mulvane: Brit Ericson 3 (kicks); Iola: John Sigg (kick).

TEAM STATISTICS

	Mulvane	Iola
First Downs	9	4
Rushing Yards	250	162
Passing Yards	23	90
Total Offense	273	252
Pass Completions	3	7
Pass Attempts	7	21
Passes Intercepted	1	0
Fumbles Lost	1	2
Punts/Average	3/36.5	3/21.3
Penalties/Yards	10/70	6/40

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

Rushing

Mulvane—John Knight 12 carries-87 yards, Sage Swaney 14-85, Caleb NeSmith 14-64, Ryan Herrig 12-14. **Iola**—Tyler Ringwald 12-75, Daugharthy 13-50, Hillbrant 8-37.

Passing

Mulvane—Ryan Herrig 3 completion-7 attempts-23 yards-1 INT-1 TD. **Iola**—Tyler Ringwald 7-21-90-0-2.

Receiving

Mulvane—John Knight 2 receptions-18 yards, Tyler Oblinger 1-5. **Iola**—Honeycutt 3-46, Mueller 3-36, Smith 1-8.

DEFENSIVE STATISTICS

Brit Ericson 4 tackles-13 assists, **Huldon Tharp** 3-12, **Caleb NeSmith** 1-11, **John Knight** 2-8, **Syler Swaney** 2-5, **Sage Swaney** 0-6, **Tyler Oblinger** 1-4, **Chad Blackwell** 2-2, **Kyle Womacks** 0-4, **Andrew Myers** 1-3, **Matt Carden** 0-4, **David Kraft** 0-2.

Fumble recovery—Chad Blackwell, Tyler Oblinger.

Blocked punt—Syler Swaney.

Blocked kick—Caleb NeSmith.

QB Sacks—Chad Blackwell, Brit Ericson, Kyle Womacks.

point conversion with about 15 seconds left to win the game," said Fennewald. "This time, they needed the two to tie the game, and we were prepared for the same kind of play they ran last year on the conversion."

More on that later.

The 'Cats started out very well, scoring on their first two drives, both of which lasted at least 10 plays, for an early 14-0 lead. John Knight scored both touchdowns, starting with a two-yard plunge, followed by a 12-yard reception from quarterback Ryan Herrig. "We were moving the ball so well to start the game," said Fennewald. "We were mixing things up well, and our defense started out well, too."

On Mulvane's third possession, however, Herrig was intercepted, setting up Iola's first touchdown, cutting the lead to 14-7. "After that, I think we got a little shaky," said Fennewald. "Our offense was a bit inconsistent after that turnover. I think we got scared of making mistakes, and we made more mistakes because of that. We really started losing our confidence."

It didn't help that the Mustangs scored again before halftime. The Wildcats kept a one-point halftime lead, however, thanks to

a blocked extra point by Caleb NeSmith. Then, in the third quarter, Mulvane got another big play on special teams, this one a blocked punt by Syler Swaney, which set up a two-yard touchdown run by Sage Swaney three plays later to put the 'Cats up, 21-13.

"Syler has been making big plays all season for us," said Fennewald. "He had interceptions against Augusta and Buhler, he recovered a fumble against Andale, and he blocked the punt and forced another fumble against Iola. He's good in pass coverage. He's not a big guy, but he'll still run up and hit you hard."

Mulvane's defense, meanwhile, had completely shut down the Mustang offense in the second half...that is, until Iola QB Tyler Ringwald, one of the key culprits in last year's game, broke free for a 54-yard TD run to cut the lead to two points with 2:04 remaining.

"Until that play, we had played so well defensively in the second half," said Fennewald. "Most of their second-half possessions had been three-and-outs. The defensive line played very tough, including Matt Carden and Chad Blackwell. We had made one defensive stand inside our 20 after a turnover, and we held them to negative yardage and got the ball back. I give the defensive coaches all the credit. They helped prepare the guys for sudden changes in the game."

Which leads us to the conversion play, which Fennewald had seen before. "It was the same play they beat us with last year," said Fennewald. "They were trying to find the fullback in the flat, and Caleb NeSmith came up and knocked the ball away. We held them without a completion in the second half, including that conversion attempt."

Fennewald was quick to praise his special teams this time around. "Those two blocked kicks were huge," said Fennewald. "Everybody was making plays on special teams. Huldon Tharp returned kicks well, Brit Ericson was 3-for-3 on his PAT's and punted the ball well, and we allowed zero yards on punt returns. Albert Hixson stepped in for Kyle Womacks as the long snapper and had a great game. Kyle's got an injured elbow, and Albert doesn't play much on offense or defense, so he was usually coming in cold when he came in to snap, and he just did a great job."

Knight led a balanced running attack with 87 yards on 12 carries, Sage Swaney had 85 yards on 14 carries, and NeSmith carried 14 times for 64 yards. Herrig completed three of seven passes for 23 yards, two of them to Knight for 18 yards. On defense, linebackers Ericson (17 tackles) and Tharp (15) led the way in stops, followed by NeSmith (12) and Knight (10). Blackwell and Tyler Oblinger both recovered fumbles. Blackwell also added a sack, as did Ericson and Womacks.

It's Homecoming Week for the Wildcats. Spirit Week will end Friday night, Sept. 30, with the Wildcats' Homecoming game against Circle. The opening kickoff is set for 7 p.m. at Lyle Couch Field.