

Southern Chester County Sports

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Avon Grove victorious in 'Mushroom Bowl'

By Steve Hoffman
Staff Writer

The Avon Grove High School football team took a big step toward its first winning season ever last Friday night, defeating the rival Blue Demons of Kennett High School, 13-0 in front of an appreciative, but wet, home crowd.

Football games are most often won in the trenches and that was certainly true in this case. The rebuilt Avon Grove offensive line controlled the line of scrimmage most of the night, opening up holes for the Red Devils' ground attack that amassed more than 225 yards. Two early scores by Avon Grove put Kennett on the defensive—pressing them to pass the ball despite the rainy conditions, while the Red Devils could run the ball repeatedly, gaining more than four yards per attempt.

Avon Grove's offense, led by quarterback Kyle Kush, marched 69 yards on its first possession to claim the lead. A 25-yard gain by Kush keyed the drive. Runs by Ryan Ayers and Zach Johnson moved the chains along the way, and Ren Hoilman completed the drive by finding his way into the end zone with 4:59 left in the first quarter. The point-after attempt failed.

Soon, Avon Grove was on the attack again, having stopped Kennett's second drive with a tenacious defensive effort. A 20-yard pass play from Kush to Hoilman moved Avon Grove deep in Kennett territory. Kush finished off this drive with a touchdown run. The extra point by kicker Tyler Wilkinson made it 13-0 just a few seconds into the second quarter.

As the rain intensified, moving the ball became more difficult for both teams.

Kennett quarterback Ben Petrak put the ball in the air 27 times, which would have been a lot even with drier conditions. Avon Grove's defense focused on the run, with linebackers playing up and challenging Kennett's spread offense to try to run the ball.

Ultimately, having to put the ball in the air so often led to Kennett's undoing. The Red Devils picked off three passes; two of them cutting short drives that showed promise.

Kennett had some success offensively, but Avon Grove's defense responded when it was tested. For instance, late in the second quarter, Kennett managed to come up with an interception and a personal foul penalty against Avon Grove gave the Blue Demons the ball in Red Devil territory. But Avon Grove's defense moved Kennett backward from there and soon they were forced to punt. Then, early in third quarter, Kennett's Shawn Jones recovered a fumble at the Avon Grove 30. Petrak then connected with Ty Rochester to move inside the 10. Again, Avon Grove's defense responded. Petrak dropped back and lofted a pass that was tipped by Sam Benson. The ball fell into the waiting hands of Avon Grove's sensational defensive back Jordan Harris. He raced all the way down the sideline for an apparent touchdown. A clipping penalty negated the return, though, and Kennett was still within reasonable striking distance.

The Blue Demon defense played valiantly, holding Avon Grove scoreless for most of the last three quarters.

Big plays helped Avon Grove's defense preserve the shutout. Harris stopped another Kennett drive with his second interception, this one at the 5-yard line.

Late in the fourth quarter, with time running out, Petrak connected with tight end Matt Knight on a beautiful 33-yard pass play. But once again, Avon Grove's defense answered the challenge, coming up with another big turnover, sealing the victory.

Kush, Hoilman, and Ayers combined for more than 200 yards rushing. Credit for that went to the offensive line, the quarterback said.

"Our offensive line is young but they did a good job tonight," said Kush. "They're young, but they're smart guys on that line. They opened up the holes and we pounded the ball. If you come out and score early, you can do that. All the credit goes to the line."

Avon Grove Head Coach Marvin Dooley commented on the offensive game plan and how it was altered by the weather.

"I think we could have done a lot more offensively if it wasn't raining. When it rains, your playbook gets smaller, and when you get an early lead like we did, it gets even smaller.

Dooley was particularly pleased with the defensive effort. "We played hard. We played with emotion. A shutout is hard to come by in high school football."

The coach concluded, "I'm happy with the effort. We played hard on both sides of the ball. A win's a win. I'll take it."

Although the Red Devils were mostly pleased with the strong opening to the 2008 season, Harris said that the team would work hard to improve on some areas.

"I think we can improve catching on defense. We dropped a couple of interceptions. They'll have us working on that in practice this week," he predicted.

The Red Devils will have to work hard if they are going to compete in the tough Ches-Mont League. The mighty Unionville Indians opened the season with a hard-fought win over Interboro, and Oxford narrowly lost to West Chester East. There will be few easy games under the bright Friday night lights.

Kush commented on the burgeoning rivalry between Avon Grove and Kennett, two still-new programs in search of a first winning season.

"Kennett fought us hard. It was a good win. We grew up playing these guys. It's definitely a cross-town rivalry," he said.

With one win already secure, the Red Devils will take on the Oxford Hornets (Friday night, 7 p.m. in Avon Grove) next. The Red Devils are hoping to make a little history as the season unfolds.

Said Harris, "I think we can have our first winning season. We're going to work hard. We're going to be strong."



Avon Grove quarterback Kyle Kush led the Red Devils to two early scores.



Photos (10) by Steve Hoffman



The Blue Demons' offense put together several nice drives, but big defensive plays at crucial times preserved the shutout for Avon Grove.



The bigger Avon Grove team managed to control the game in the trenches.



Avon Grove relied on its running attack to win the first game of the season.



The rain didn't stop fans from showing up to support their team.



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