

Southern Chester County Sports

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Avon Grove loses a heartbreaker to Great Valley

By Steve Hoffman
Staff Writer

Jordan Harris and Kyle Kush stood together near midfield, the receiver trying to console his quarterback—his friend—as the rest of Avon Grove's defensive unit took the field one final time.

Kush's pass had just been intercepted by Seth Houston, his counterpart on Great Valley, and the Avon Grove quarterback didn't want to accept his team's fate after a hard-fought battle that saw the two teams trade the lead seven times. The Red Devils played well, but a susceptibility to the big play allowed Great Valley to escape with a win on a night when Avon Grove honored its seniors during the final home game of the season.

There was plenty for the home crowd to cheer about early. Just a few minutes into the game, Harris intercepted a pass in Great Valley territory. Two plays later, Brendan McGlaughlin rumbled 33 yards to the 6. Kush capped the drive when he found Ren Hoilman open in the end zone. The point-after by Tyler Wilkinson made it 7-0.

Great Valley boasts a dangerous running game, led by Brian Pommerer, but Avon Grove was able to keep the Patriots bottled up early, with strong efforts from Wes Shoap, Geoff Melendez and others. The Red Devils' defense produced another interception, this time by Hoilman. An uncharacteristic unsportsmanlike conduct penalty after the play, however, pushed Avon Grove back into its own territory. Penalties hindered Avon Grove throughout the contest, including another unsportsmanlike on the next drive. Still, the Red Devils maintained control until the quick-strike Patriots scored midway through the first quarter when Pommerer ran 61 yards up the left sideline for a score. Great Valley went for two points, but it failed, leaving the score at 7-6.

The next big play for Great Valley came a few minutes later when Houston connected with Chris Campbell on a 58-yard play that set up another Pommerer TD run.

Great Valley held the lead until Avon Grove embarked on an impressive 70-yard drive late in the second quarter.

Kush had three nice pass plays, to Ryan Ayers, Hoilman, and Brandon Monk to move

the ball deep into Great Valley territory. With 26 seconds left in the half, the Red Devils were 11 yards out. A penalty backed Avon Grove up, but on the next play Harris plucked a tipped pass out of the air and raced to the one. Kush ran it in from there, and the extra point gave Avon Grove the 14-12 lead heading to the half.

Both teams had long, time-consuming drives to start the third quarter—but neither team could reach the end zone. Then, late in the third, Great Valley capitalized on a fumble and marched 43 yards for a score. Casey Haines finished the drive off with a 23-yard run.

Avon Grove fired right back. On first down, Harris took the toss from Kush, rolled right, and fired a strike to Aaron Keinema. The speedy receiver raced along the right sideline to give the Red Devils a 21-18 lead.

The Great Valley offensive line started opening up some holes for the running backs in the next series. John Nurthen had back-to-back big gains, followed by a 22-yard gain by Pommerer, who kept spinning away from would-be tacklers until Harris dragged him down at the 18. Next Pommerer exploded up the middle and carried the ball all the way to the 3. Two plays later, Nurthen marched into the end zone, allowing Great Valley to reclaim the lead, 25-21.

It was the Red Devils' turn to counterstrike. Nine plays covering 66 yards put Avon Grove in a position to reclaim the lead. A 20-yard pass play from Kush to Monk was sandwiched between productive carries by Harris and McGlaughlin. It was the latter who found the end zone. Avon Grove led, 28-25 with 6:23 remaining.

In a blink, the lead was gone. Mike Praplaski took the opening kickoff, found running room on the left side, and raced 85 yards for the score.

Now trailing 32-28, the Red Devils took the ball in a game that seemed destined to be won by the team that had the ball last. Monk set the team up with a 35-yard return. McGlaughlin had another nice run, moving the Red Devils to midfield. Kush followed the good blocking up front and carried the Red Devils to a first down. The drive stalled, though, and Avon Grove had to punt the ball away with 2:30 left.

Great Valley's next drive went nowhere fast: Three runs right

into the line with the Red Devils calling a timeout after each. Pommerer did manage to plow ahead for six yards on one play, so the Patriots opted to go for it on fourth down. It was a risky move, especially after the Avon Grove defense held and gave the offense the ball back at the 40 with 1:35 to play.

Kush looked to Harris on first down, finding him in a crowd. Harris moved close to midfield, but was tackled in the middle of the field. The clock should have kept ticking, but Avon Grove caught a little bit of a break when the referees had to congregate to decide how much time was left on the clock. Kush dropped back to pass on the next play and lofted a pass along the right sideline. Great Valley's Houston leaped and pulled the ball in along Avon Grove's sideline. The Red Devils thought that Houston came down out of bounds, but the referees did not agree.

All that remained was for Great Valley to run out the clock, which they did. The victory improved Great Valley's record to 7-1, while the Red Devils' record now stands at 3-5. After coming so close to beating one of the league's best teams, the Red Devils were understandably upset. But many of the team's key contributors are still young and have more time to work and grow together. They won't always lose the close ones.

Next week, the Red Devils travel to West Chester Henderson.

In other football action during Week Eight, Unionville trounced Oxford, 38-6, and Kennett fell to Bayard Rustin.

Kennett and Unionville have a showdown on Friday night in Unionville, while the Hornets travel to Sun Valley.



Photos (8) by C Perry

This interception ruined the Red Devils' chances for a last-minute win.



Ren Hoilman makes a tackle.



Jordan Harris rolls out to throw the touchdown pass.



The Avon Grove offensive line did a good job opening up holes.



Brandon Monk had several nice receptions.



Avon Grove's running attack allowed the Red Devils to outgain the Patriots.



Brendan McGlaughlin led the Avon Grove Red Devils in rushing.

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