

Whippets start strong, outlast Avon Grove

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By BRYAN DAVIS Assistant Sports Editor

WEST GROVE — Downingtown West High scored two touchdowns in the the first minute and it looked as though Avon Grove was headed for a long afternoon. But what started as a possible rout ended as a struggle as the Whippets outlasted the game Red Devils, 28-14, in a Ches-Mont League American Division contest Saturday afternoon.

Before fans had a chance to digest the pre-game French fries and funnel cake being sold outside, the Whippets struck twice. On the second offensive play, fullback Brendon McLaughlin was hit and the ball popped loose. Kevin Hipp scooped it up and raced 40 yards untouched into the end zone.

The misery was piled on for the Red Devils when just after the ensuing kickoff, another fumble was recovered by the Whippets, this time on the Avon Grove 43.

Downingtown West and coach Mike Milano threw conservatism out the window, when running back Jared Heller looked like he was going to run up the middle, but stopped and pitched back to quarterback Brett Gillespie, who found a wide open Michael Goodrich for a 43-yard score.

"That's not a bad way to start," said Milano.

For Avon Grove coach Marvin Dooley, the task was to keep his kids into the game after the two early thunderbolts.

"I gathered them over and told them 'You can roll over and quit or you can fight. There's a lot of football to play.' And the kids didn't give up."

Indeed, the Red Devils found themselves after Ren Hoilman returned a short kickoff 42 yards into Downingtown West territory at the 22. Jordan Harris capped the short drive off by bouncing out to the left side and scampering in from 15 yards out to cut the deficit to 14-7.

"That was huge," Dooley said of the score. "Sometimes kids' morale slips real fast and we got great field position and punched it in."

But the Whippets had one more huge explosion in their arsenal in Heller, and the senior provided a moment worthy of being sought out on YouTube.

On a second-and-13 from the West 17, Gillespie connected with Heller on a flair pass and off he went. He was seemingly cornered at the 10, but Heller stumbled while making a cut and somehow put his hand on the turf to steady himself and waltzed in for an electrifying 83-yard catch and run to make it three scores in the first four minutes of play.

"I slipped trying to come out of the play and I was surprised I was able to stay up," said Heller. "It felt great scoring and getting everybody pumped up."

Avon Grove brought the game back to a one touchdown margin late in the second, taking advantage of an interception. The Red Devils marched 70 yards for the score, the big play coming on a 28-yard pass from Kyle Kush to Brendon Monk to the Whippets' one. Harris dove in for his second score and once again brought hope to the Homecoming Day crowd.

The hope almost turned into a delirious reality for the home crowd shortly after the break. Avon Grove looked to have forced an improbable tie on a touchdown run by Monk, but it was called back due to a hold.

Instead West got the ball back and put the finishing touches on the victory. Heller took a screen pass, ran behind some excellent blocking, and scampered 56 yards for the score.

"I got two great blocks," said Heller. "One from Ryan Kendra and the other from Michael Conway. I can always count on them to get me some room."

Milano later stated the obvious that was on display in the brilliant sunshine.

"Jared Heller is a great player," he said.

Avon Grove's defense provided yeoman's work for Dooley, sacking Gillespie four times, but the offense couldn't sustain any drives. The Red Devils were held to 21 total yards of offense from the end of the third quarter until late in the fourth.

"Our defense is playing great," said Milano.

Downingtown West moved to 2-1 in the American and 6-1 overall, ahead of its big game next Friday against cross-town Downingtown East. Milano sees a week where a lot of work will be put in.

"We've haven't played very well for two weeks and that's a huge concern," said Milano.

For Avon Grove (1-3, 3-4) a victory over an established Ches-Mont League power didn't come, but it wasn't for a lack of effort, although three lost fumbles and two interceptions definitely impeded the process.

"We made mistakes and they didn't," said Dooley. "But I'm proud of my kids, except for the first two minutes of the game, I thought we outplayed them. We're close to where we want to be, but I told the kids moral victories won't do."

Downingtown West 28, Avon Grove 14

Downingtown West 21 0 7 0 — 28

Avon Grove 7 7 0 0 — 14

Scoring

DW -- Hipp 40 fumble return (Benventano kick)

DW -- Goodrich 43 pass from Gillespie (Benventano kick)

AG -- Harris 15 run (Wilkinson kick)

DW -- Heller 83 pass from Gillespie (Benventano kick)

AG--Harris 1 run (Wilkinson kick)

DW--Heller 56 pass from Gillespie (Yanella kick)

Team Totals

DW AG

First downs 14 13

Yards rushing 79 131

Yards passing 214 91

Total yards 293 222

Passing 8-18-1 6-19-2

Fumbles-Lost 2-2 4-3

Penalties 5-51 6-50

Punts-Avg. 5-31.0 40.2

Individual Statistics

RUSHING - Downingtown West: Heller 18-61; Moore 4-26; Scott 1-2; Gillespie 9-(-10); Avon Grove: Harris 15-54-2; McLaughlin 4-24; Monk 5-27; Kush 7-23; Ayres 2-3.

PASSING - Downingtown West: Gillespie 8-18-1-3 214 yds; Avon Grove: Kush 6-18-1-0 91 yds; Harris 0-1-1-0 0 yds.

RECEIVING - Downingtown West: Goodrich 3-58-1; Heller 2-139-2; Scott 1-5; Moore 1-17; Kendra 1-(-5). Avon Grove: McLaughlin 3-32; Monk 2-41; Ayres1-18.

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