

LEROY: Bears take Class 2A showdown over Lanett, 28-21

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game to be a defensive struggle as Lanett had been dealing misery to many of the offenses they played this season and had only given up more than seven points in two games this season, including a 37-3 win over GW Long in the second round of the play-offs one week earlier. While the Panthers seemed to be having their way with their opponents this season, apparently no one told the Bears they were going to have trouble with the Panthers. Leroy wasted little time in scoring and taking the lead over the Panthers. As the first quarter moved to 7:40 remaining, Avery Malone put the Bears on the board by connecting with Caleb Moore for a 46-yard touchdown strike. Grant Massey then tacked on the extra point to give Leroy a 7-0 in the opening quarter.

After battling through the remaining minutes of the first and nearly half of the second quarter, Malone stretched the lead out again, this time on the ground. With 7:53 left in the second quarter, Malone called his own number and took the ball into the end zone from one yard out. Massey added the PAT to push the lead to 14-0.

Just as the game seemed to be in hand for a smooth victory for the Bears, Lanett closed the gap by putting seven points on the board. Panther running back Dquez Madden scored just before half ended to cut the Leroy lead to 14-7.

When the teams came back from their locker rooms the Panthers took their first possession of the third and marched it down the field and scored to tie things up at 14-14.

While the momentum seemed to be shifting in favor of the Panthers, the Bears were not willing to roll over and allow the game to slip away. On Leroy's first possession of the third they mounted an 11-play drive to score and retake the lead. Malone also played a role in this go ahead touchdown. After moving inside the five, Malone threw a four yard pass to Brandon Collins that was good for another six points. Massey added his third extra point of the night to give the Bears a 21-14 lead, with 3:36 left in the third quarter.

As the final seconds of the third quarter were ticking off the clock, Lanett knotted the score again when Madden added his second touchdown of the night for the Panthers with seven seconds left in the third quarter. The extra point tied the contest at 21-21 going to the fourth quarter.

With the game positioned in a way that it could go either way, the Bears wasted no time in the final quarter in making a statement and grabbing the lead again. Once again, the ball was in the hands of Malone. Less than one minute into the fourth quarter, Malone connected with Moore for their second touchdown pass and catch of the night. From 35 yards out, Moore hauled in the pass and took it into the end zone for six. Massey put the PAT through once more and extended the Leroy lead to 28-21 with 11:01 remaining in the game.

From that point on the game was in the hands of the Leroy defense. Although the Panthers made a run toward the end zone, the Leroy defense denied any entry. As the final minutes of the game were ticking off the clock, the Panthers closed in on the goal line but the Bears were able to come up with stops with a late goal line stand to hold on to the lead and grab the quarterfinal victory over the Panthers.

Leroy head coach Jason Massey said the win over the Panthers created a great night for his team. Massey said the playing skills of the Panthers were everything that he had expected, making the win even sweeter.

"I am very proud of our guys. They played their tails off and never stopped fighting and clawing," Massey said. "We knew they would make a run at us because they have a good bunch of players so we worked with our guys all week to get ready. We overcame a lot of things throughout the game to get the win and we knew this would be a fourth quarter game. Our offense was doing their job most of the night. These guys hadn't given up this many points all season so I think our offense played a heck of a game. Our defense came up with some big plays all night but none was any bigger than the big stand right at the end. That pretty much sealed it for us and I can't tell you how proud I am of these guys."

Leroy, now 11-1, will host Abbeville (11-1) in the semifinals on Friday night. The Yellow Jackets knocked off Isabella in the quarterfinals to earn the trip to Leroy. This will mark the first time the two teams have played each other.

SARALAND: Spartans roar past Opelika into quarterfinals

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Opelika closed out the year at 9-3. "We didn't play the brand of football we really wanted to play down here and part of that is due to what Saraland did," Opelika coach Erik Speakman said. "We did everything wrong you can possibly do in the first half. In the second half, we'd score and they'd score and we could never catch up."

It was an average kind of night for the Saraland offense, which was averaging 39 points per game.

The Spartans lit up the Opelika defense for 22 first downs and 453 yards of total offense, with 136 yards on the ground on 24 rushes and 317 yards in the air against an opponent that was yielding only 13 points per game.

Quarterback Karson Green was 18-of-25 passing for 317 yards and three touchdowns and rushed for another to pace the victors. Jarel Williams had 160 all-purpose yards, including six receptions for 150 yards, while Jerone York added 122 all-purpose yards with seven receptions for 100 yards. Omarion Crawford had 46 yards on six carries and Corey Darrington 55 on eight totes.

"We played against a really good defense," Kelly said. "That defense doesn't give up much. Our running backs, by committee today, did a great job. We'll take the win, for sure."

The visitors had 19 first downs, 195 rushing yards and 113 passing for 308 total. Malik Finley threw for 113 yards on 11-of-20 passing and rushed for 53 yards on 13 carries, while Eric Watts added 79 rushing yards and 36 receiving and LaJaden Tolbert chipped in 66 yards on the ground.

The Bulldogs were unable to capitalize on excellent field position, even with an average start at their own 47-yard line. The Spartans



Photo by Todd Stacey/Call News

Saraland star receivers Jerone York (1) and Jarel Williams (8) celebrate after a score by Williams against Opelika.

stopped them on downs twice and after an interception was returned to the 16, the defense forced a 36-yard field goal attempt that was wide left at the 8:46 mark of the second quarter. Six of the 12 possessions by the visitors lasted only five plays or less and seven offensive plays went for negative yardage.

Saraland scored on drives of 65, 79, 65, 82,

FAITH: Rams surge by UMS-Wright; St. Paul's next opponent

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Burnette finished the night with 21 carries for 155 yards, while Wood added 35 yards on 12 carries and two touchdowns. Wood also completed 6-of-9 passes for 108 yards and two touchdowns. Three of those receptions were to Shemar James for 57 yards and a score. James also rushed six times for 61 yards, while Smith finished the night with two receptions for 37 yards.

Faith managed to survive a sluggish third quarter and a total of four turnovers to seal the win.

Faith head coach Jack French said when the momentum of the game began to shift in his teams favor, it was time to strike.

"When you get some momentum going, you better take advantage of it," said French. "We sort of bogged down in the second quarter, and it got worse in the third, but our guys held it together. Our defense had some big stops and put them (UMS-Wright) in a hole. Our O-line kept going at them and they finally opened up some holes."

For UMS-Wright (8-5), it marked the end of a long playoff winning streak. The Bulldogs had won 17 straight playoff games, but fell flat against a rejuvenated Faith squad. Cole Blaylock was the offensive workhorse for UMS-Wright, rushing 16 times for 60 yards and catching six passes for 74 yards. Trey Singleton was 7 of 16 passing for 77 yards and an interception. He also rushed 13 times for 23 yards and a touch-



Photo by John O'Dell/Call News

Faith Academy's Shemar James grabs a pass against UMS.

down, but was sacked twice.

"There's really not a lot to say about the game except that they (Faith Academy) were better than we were," said UMS-Wright head coach Terry Curtis. "They were bigger, faster, and No. 5 (James) and No. 23 (Burnette), we had a hard time with them. We had a whole lot of mistakes, but they were just better than we were tonight."

Asked if there was a letdown from the come-from-behind win over Pike Road the week before, Curtis said, "No, this was the third round of the playoffs — you

got to be ready to play."

In the beginning, it appeared UMS-Wright was ready to play.

Grant Carpenter's 26-yard field goal in the first quarter gave the Bulldogs the early advantage, but Wood's first touchdown — a 1-yard run which capped a six-play, 68-yard drive, put the Rams up top 7-3. UMS-Wright, quickly regained momentum and the lead when Colby Stafford returned the ensuing kickoff 90 yards through the middle of the Rams' coverage. The point after was blocked, but the Bulldogs were back up 9-7.

Wood connected with James

on an 18-yard touchdown pass early in the second quarter to put the Rams back up by six. UMS-Wright then took over and maintained possession for nearly seven minutes, but could not get anything out of it. But several miscues by Faith Academy, including a fumble by Burnette at the Rams' 6, got UMS-Wright back in the game. It was Burnette's fumble that set up Singleton's third-quarter 1-yard touchdown run to give the Bulldogs a 16-15 lead. In fact, the rash of turnovers would cause the Rams to resort to designed runs by Wood.

"I don't know if we meant to do it that much, but we started to have a little fumbleitis, so it seemed like those helped us out," French said.

The one-point lead held up until the fourth quarter, when the Rams scored their three touchdowns. The last Faith touchdown, in fact, came with 1:32 left in the game when Burnette's 28-yard touchdown run was set up by McGarrity's interception.

"That interception sealed the deal for us," said French. "That guy (McGarrity) plays hard, and he's a smart opportunistic player."

Now, the Rams get to face St. Paul's again — a team which beat them at home 20-6 during the regular season.

"They took it to us right here during the regular season, but we're glad to get the chance to play somebody, somewhere," French said.



Photo by Brad McPherson/Call News

St. Paul's head coach Steve Mask reacts to a play during the Saints' quarterfinals win over Central-Clay County. It was his 200th career win and 100th as coach of the Saints.

SAINTS: St. Paul's has balanced attack to get Mask his 200th career victory

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and Baldwin counties in both 5A and 6A," Mask said about both classifications being in position to send contenders to the title games. "It's as good as anywhere in the state."

On a personal note, Mask earned his 200th career victory and 100th at St. Paul's with the win.

"I am just fortunate to have 200 wins, and 100 here at St. Paul's is really special," Mask said. "Really, I am just trying to get to 201. I am appreciative of our people making it a special night."

The Saints finished with 347 total yards of offense, with 174 in the air and 173 on the ground. Senior quarterback Bestor McFadden was 11-of-21 passing, throwing for one score and rushing for another, while senior Javonte Graves-Billips rushed 23 times for 81 yards to pace the victors.

"We were very balanced," Mask said. "Bestor and the running backs had a good game, but it is all based on the strength of the offensive line. They are big, athletic and good. It all starts up front."

Junior Hayden O'Dell picked off a pass on Central's first possession, setting up a 1-yard scoring sneak by McFadden on a fourth down play. The Saints next drove 59 yards where junior Grayson Myles booted a 37-yard field goal through the uprights to make the score 10-0.

Junior Bo Carrington nabbed an interception to set up a 22-yard field goal by Myles to give St. Paul's a 13-0 advantage heading into the intermission.

"I think the interception by Bo Carrington was big," Mask insisted. "It set the tone of the game. The entire first half was a great defensive effort. We held them to

only 47 yards."

Late in the third quarter, McFadden fired a 36-yard scoring strike to senior Vinnie Bosio to make it 20-0 with 4:40 showing on the clock.

The Volunteers got back into the game when senior quarterback Boyd Ogles hooked up with senior receiver Davion Thomas on a 48-yard TD pass, but senior Zack Gray snuffed out the momentum by returning the ensuing kickoff 99 yards for a touchdown that put St. Paul's in command at 27-7.

Central tried for a late rally in the fourth quarter, scoring a touchdown to close the gap to 27-13, but on its final possession senior linebacker Tray Nunn picked off a pass to end the final threat.

"The defense is just a very unselfish bunch," Mask said. "They have great leadership with the seniors. They are fun to watch and play very physical."