

SPORTS

Fourth down play hurts Arcola in 21-14 loss to Villa Grove

By Mike Monahan

ARCOLA - In a key Lincoln Prairie Conference football game and the 75th meeting between the two Douglas County schools, Villa Grove and Arcola, a big fourth down play for the Blue Devils was the key in Villa Grove's 21-14 victory at Thomas-Bradford Field.

The game was deadlocked at 14 with 9:46 left in regulation after an Arcola score. Villa Grove faced a fourth and five from its own 45 with seven minutes left. Arcola dropped back to receive the punt, but the Blue Devils quickly snapped the ball to Layne Rund the quarterback and he completed a 48 yard pass to Kyler Williams, who got behind the defense, down to the seven yard line.

"I think it caught them (Arcola) off guard a little bit," said Villa Grove coach Heath Wilson. "We were trying to hurry up and run the play. Their punt returner was back and he had to get back into position. Luckily that play worked and we connected."

Villa Grove went on to win 21-14 and their defense held the Purple Riders to just 36 yards in the second half as Arcola had just one first down.

"Fourth down and every one lines up on the wrong side of the field and I don't call a

time-out and they get another first down," said Snider. "You can't blame it all on them as I am the one that didn't call a time-out. We have to be ready for those things together."

It was the Ghery Bowl and there will be a trophy made with all of the scores on it and given to Villa Grove and it will be a traveling trophy.

"It was a great atmosphere tonight," said Wilson. "I thank Nick (Lindsey, the athletics director) and others for doing a heck of a job of putting it on. We have family members who are here and it was great to see the fans come out. It is a great little rivalry."

Arcola's goal was to keep possession of the ball as long as they could.

"We wanted to keep them off the field as much as possible," said Snider. "Everybody on our schedule is beatable and this was another example of a one score game that we were in. What are we going to do to make sure we are on the winning side of close ones. We are now on the wrong end of those (1-2 in games decided by nine points or less and it was the last three games)."

Arcola started off the scoring of the game in dramatic fashion as Oden Barron, a descendant of the Ghery family, raced 70 yards in for the



Freshman Brody Phillips (12) Photos by Nancy Rairden.

touchdown. Gael Elizondo booted the extra point for a 7-0 Purple Rider lead.

Villa Grove answered on its ensuing drive, going 82 yards in 12 plays. The big plays for the Blue Devils, who improved to 2-3 overall, the same record as Arcola, were a 10-yard pass play from Rund to Gunner Cline, a 15-yard penalty on Arcola and an offside penalty on a fourth and five from the Blue Devils 48. Hunter Butts had a 12-yard run to the two where Cline punched it in. Sophia Shaw booted her first of three extra points to tie the game early in the second quarter.

"If we don't jump offside, they punt," said Snider. "We eliminate those penalties and you might be looking at a different ball game."

Villa Grove's defense didn't allow Arcola more than 26 yards on any drive after the first touchdown.

"We are not scoring points very quickly," said Wilson. "We can move the ball quickly, but we are not finding a way to get it. Our defense was very good tonight and that is something we stressed all week. We had to find a way to stop their run and I think we did it pretty

well (39 carries, 174 yards and two touchdowns). There is still some stuff we have to work on. Hats off to Arcola. They are a heck of a team and have got a lot of fight in them. This was a good win for us."

The Blue Devils stopped Arcola on two fourth down plays in the third quarter.

"We gave them a short field two times on some poor decisions on punts," said Snider. "Gael Elizondo had a little bit of a hip problem. So we saved him to limit his flexion in this hp as much as possible. Brody Phillips stepped and his first two punts were 40 yards. Villa Grove made more plays than we did tonight."

Phillips would run some and then punt the ball away.

Villa Grove scored on a seven play, 38-yard scoring drive, set up by stopping Arcola on a fourth down. Butts scored from one yard out and Shaw's extra point gave the Blue Devils their first lead 14-7 midway through the third.

Arcola's final touchdown occurred after Ryan Lindstrom blocked a punt and Ryder Wilcox-Rich returned it to the six. Villa Grove's defense tightened and forced Arcola to

a fourth and goal from the five. Brody Phillips connected with his brother Braden Phillips for the touchdown and Elizondo booted the extra point to tie the contest.

"In the first three games we gave up 44 points in the third quarter," said Wilson. "It was big to stop them on their first drive (3 and out). We have to win the third quarter and we did (7-0)."

Snider was happy with the defensive performance, but not so much with the offense.

"Our defense has played lights out and they have gotten so much better as the year has progressed," said Snider. "Offensively, I don't want to say we regressed, but we still made too many mistakes. But the real positive thing is we didn't put the ball on the ground (no fumbles) and that is a step in the right direction. We can move forward after that. I think I have talked about little mistakes for weeks and weeks. This week probably takes the cake on the smallest mistakes adding up to bite us in the butt as hard as it possibly could."

Snider was happy with the play offensively and defensively for Barron and Tyson Lewis.

"They really shouldered the load for us on offense and defense and that is great to see," said Snider. "You never know who is going to step up and have the big game. You never know what kind of a game it is going to end up being. Both stepped up big again."

Villa Grove	0	7	7	7-21
Arcola	7	0	0	7-14

First quarter
A-Oden Barron 70 run (Gael Elizondo kick) 4:06

Second quarter
V-Gunner Cline 2 run (Sophia Shaw kick) 10:24

Third quarter
V-Hunter Butts 1 run (Shaw kick) 3:09

Fourth quarter
A-Braden Phillips 5 pass from Brody Phillips (Elizondo kick) 9:46
V-Noah Wilcoxon 9 pass from Layne Rund (Shaw kick) 6:08

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

Rushing
V-Kyle Williams 1-27, Gunner Cline 20-58, TD; Hunter Butts 15-58, TD; Layne Rund 4-8; Totals 40-151, 2 TDs

A-Jayden Henson-Stice 13-31; Tyson Lewis 15-41; Oden Barron 6-91, TD; Brody Phillips 5-11; Totals 39-174, 2 TDs

Passing
V-Rund 11-19-139, TD

A-Brody Phillips 1-7-0-5, TD

Receiving
V-Wilcoxon 4-59 TD; Cline 3-19; Braydon Dowler 2-12; Williams 2-58

A-Braden Phillips 1-5, TD

Total yards
V-59-290
A-46-179



Senior Tyson Lewis (9)

Arcola faces strong running team in Cumberland Friday

By Mike Monahan

ARCOLA - The 2-3 Purple Rider football team hits the road Friday as they travel to Cumberland, who is tied with Nokomis for third place in the Lincoln Prairie Conference.

The Pirates are led by senior Blake McMechan, who has 107 carries for 850 yards and 14 touchdowns. He is averaging 170 yards per game.

"They have a really good athlete in McMechan that they try and get the ball to," said Arcola coach Steve Snider. "He is a special athlete and they give the ball anyway they possibly can., inside, outside, short passes, all kinds of different runs such as jet sweeps. He is going to be our key defensively. We have to match him and find creative ways to match him because they find creative ways to get him the gumball in all kinds of different spots. We have to make sure he is not the guy that beats us."

Cumberland beat Arcola 38-28 last season and won the LPC title going 7-0. The Pirates have defeated the Purple Riders three of the last five meetings.

Snider has been to Cumberland before as an assistant coach of Orangeville in 2018 and he thinks that helps.

"They ran a 4-4 in 2018

when I traveled here and it looks like a lot of the same stuff," said Snider. "You look at their offense and defense (4-4) and it is the same coaches (Cumberland is coached by Lucas Watson, who did his student teaching at Arcola) and they are going to do a lot of the same things. They do a lot of things really well. I am not trying to say they should not be doing the same things, but they are doing the same things. Hopefully my background helps a little bit because I was running the same offense that we are running now (wing T)."

Grant Keyser is the No.2 runner for the Pirates with 34 carries for 300 yards and three touchdowns.

Cumberland averages 24.3 points per game and has the second best defense in terms of points allowed in the conference at 13.6. Owen McGinnes, Zach Harmon and Keyser average 7.4, 7.0 and 6.8 tackles per game for the Pirates, who have made the playoffs six straight years (no playoffs in the COVID-19 year of 2020).

The teams have two common opponents in Sullivan and Villa Grove. Arcola lost to Sullivan, who is 5-0, 54-6 and Cumberland fell 33-12. Against Villa Grove, Arcola lost

21-14 last Friday, while the Pirates won 18-7.

Arcola is led in rushing by Jayden Henson-Stice who had 352 yards on 48 carries for an average of 70.4 yards per game. He has three touchdowns. The top receiver is Braden Phillips, who has 10 receptions for 163 yards and three touchdowns.

Snider liked what he saw in the classroom Monday with no film watching.

"I think that (talking in the classroom) might be the best thing for this group," said Snider. "Right now we kind of banged up and giving them a night off in the classroom was great. I don't ever remember having a group as focused as

they were Monday when we were going through things. We show them exactly what we think are going to be their weaknesses and how we think we are going to exploit those and they really seem to do a good job of it. We show them how they should line up and how we are going to run it by drawing it and telling them this is the key. This is how we are going to have to make this block. I have the guards stand up and we talk for five minutes about how this is exactly how this block is going to have to take place. To get that detail is different than being outside and talking to them as a group is a nice thing to be able to do."

Arcola averages 19 points

per game and allows 24.8 per contest.

"When we execute on special teams we are really good," said Snider. "Making sure that we execute on every snap is going to be the main importance and I think that is more important than what Cumberland is necessarily going to try

to do to us. I think what we are going to have to do ourselves on special teams, a third of the game is the most important. Special teams is more control what you can control and not make mistakes and if we get an opportunity to block the kick or punt we are going to go after it."



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