

# Firestone puts up a fight, but can't keep up with Tigers

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Turnovers can be a great equalizer in football. At the very least, they can give teams many might think have little chance an opportunity to stay with a more talented opponent.

So it was Friday night in front of 7,003 at Paul Brown Tiger Stadium, as the Massillon Tigers helped Firestone hang around for the better part of three quarters in part to four Tiger turnovers.

But in the end, Massillon's superior talent was able to prevail as the Tigers improved to 4-0 with a 42-21 victory over the Falcons. "We muffed a punt return, two interceptions and another fumble," Tiger coach Jason Hall lamented afterwards. "Turnovers kill momentum and drives. And you have to take your hat off to coach (Tim) Flossie and Firestone. They came in and those kids laid it on the line. I keep saying, that's something I think this team of coaches and players have to get better at understanding that every team, every week, we're going to get their best game."

The Tigers led just 21-14 at halftime, and had just a 28-14 lead late in the third quarter. Sophomore Alex Winters rushed for a career-high 211 yards on 18 carries and scored three touchdowns. Of those, 132 yards and two scores came on nine second-half carries.

"He's maturing and he's seeing stuff better," Hall said. "He has a better understanding of what's going on and the whole scheme of things. ... It just comes with experience."

Massillon was 2-for-2 in first-quarter drives reaching the end zone. The Tigers scored on a 1-yard run by Winters - who set up the score with a 48-yard run on the previous play - for a 7-0 lead following the point-after kick with 7:34 left in the quarter.

Bo Grunder set the Tigers up with great field position on their second possession with a 32-yard punt return to the Firestone 29. On the second play of the drive, Grunder gave Massillon a 14-0 lead - following the PAT - when he went 25 yard on an end-around with 3:36 remaining in the first quarter.

But the Tigers would help put Firestone right back into the game, fumbling a punt on their own 14. Three plays later, Damon Easson hit a diving Darren McGinnis for an 11-yard score just 11 seconds into the second quarter.

Alana Gaither's PAT cut the Massillon lead in half at 14-7. Massillon appeared to regain control when Robert Partridge hit Justin Olack for a 34-yard touchdown just a minute later for a 21-7 Tiger lead. But another Tiger turnover - this one an interception at the Massillon 42 - would give momentum right back to Firestone.

The Falcons would turn that turnover into another touchdown, this one a 27-yard pass from Easson to Conner Mathis. Suddenly, the crowd at Paul Brown Tiger Stadium was silent as Firestone had sliced it to 21-14 with 4:19 left until intermission. "That's what football is all about, turnovers," Flossie said. "Unfortunately, we didn't get enough of them."

Firestone was able to control the ball for much of the first half. The Falcons actually had an edge in time of possession (17:27-6:33), first downs (9-7) and passing yards (45-39).

On the first possession of the second half, Firestone picked up its third takeaway as Jeremy Mingo intercepted a pass and returned it to the Tiger 35. Firestone got a 27-yard pass to the Massillon 6, but the play was negated by a holding call. Another Falcon penalty, followed by a sack by Brian Robinson forced the Falcons to punt from their own 44.

The Tigers regained some control on the first play of their next drive as Winters ripped off a 61-yard touchdown run. Jeremy Geier's PAT made it 28-14 Tigers, 6:19 left in the third.

After a block in the back penalty against the Tigers on a punt pushed the ball back to their own 9 with just over four minutes left in the third, Winters ripped off runs of 25 and 32 yards on the first two plays of the drive to put the ball on the Firestone 34. Massillon would eventually reach the Falcon 4, but coughed the ball up for its fourth turnover of the game.

The Falcon drive went nowhere and they had to punt from their own end zone. Devin Smith caught the punt at the Firestone 43, hit the right sideline and ran untouched into the end zone for the score as time expired in the third quarter for a 35-14 Tiger lead.

"We have several athletes, and every time they get their hands on the ball, they have a chance for a big play," Hall said.

Winters' 10-yard run with 8:01 remaining was the final nail in the coffin for Firestone. The Falcons did get a 1-yard plunge by Cody Grice with 3:25 left to close out the scoring.

Firestone	00	14	00	07	21
<b>Massillon</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>07</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>07</b>	<b>42</b>

**SCORING SUMMARY**

- M** - Winters 1 run (Geier kick)
- M** - Grunder 25 run (Geier kick)
- F - McGinnis 11 pass from Easson (Gaither kick)
- M** - Olack 34 pass from Partridge (Geier kick)
- F - Mathis 27 pass from Easson (Gaither kick)
- M** - Winters 61 run (Geier kick)
- M** - Smith 43 punt return (Geier kick)
- M** - Winters 10 run (Geier kick)
- F - Grice 1 run (Gaither kick)

	Fire	<b>Mass</b>
First downs	14	<b>13</b>
Rushes-yards	46-130	<b>29-271</b>
Comp-Att-Int	7-17-0	<b>3-12-2</b>
Passing yards	110	<b>50</b>
Fumbles-lost	0-0	<b>3-2</b>
Penalty yards	9-56	<b>6-40</b>
Records	1-3	<b>4-0</b>

**INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS**

**Rushing:**

**Massillon** - Winters 18-211 3 TDs.  
Firestone - Grice 26-95 TD.

**Passing:**

**Massillon** - Partridge 3-11-50 TD, 2 INTs; Litman 0-1-0.  
Firestone - Easson 7-17-110 2 TDs.

**Receiving:**

**Massillon** - Olack 2-45 TD; Grunder 1-5.  
Firestone - Mingo 3-79; McGinnis 2-9 TD.