

Steubenville rules first meeting with Massillon since 1978

CHRIS EASTERLING
The Independent

It was the irresistible force against the immovable object on a soggy Friday night in Steubenville.

On one hand, you had the Massillon Tigers, who were looking to bounce back from last week's loss at St. Ignatius. On the other hand, you had the Steubenville Big Red, who were looking to extend their regular-season win streak to 67 games and their home win streak to 59 games.

And when push came to shove in front of an overflow crowd approaching 11,000 inside Harding Stadium, it was Big Red who shoved the hardest, handing Massillon a 13-3 defeat in the first game between the two programs since 1978.

The difference in the game came on the ground, where Steubenville outrushed Massillon 208-35, led by Dwight Macon's 81 yards rushing. That helped Big Red put together drives of 17, 13, 13 and 11 plays on four of their seven possessions.

"Obviously, they have some athletes and we wanted them to march the field, and they did," said Tiger coach Jason Hall, whose team will take a 5-2 record and a two-game losing streak into next week's home game against Warren Harding. "They had success. Their third-down conversion rate, it had to be up there. It seemed like every time they needed seven yards, they got seven-and-a-half yards. Their kids executed tonight."

It marked the first win for Big Red over Massillon since 1962. It was also just the fourth win ever for Steubenville over the Tigers, who hold a 37-4-2 edge in the series.

"It was a beautiful night," said Steubenville coach Reno Saccoccia, whose team is 7-0. "The win made it beautiful, but it

was a great night other than that. ... (Massillon is) a good football team."

Steubenville controlled the line of scrimmage throughout the first half - a precursor for things to come - and a big reason why Big Red took a 7-3 lead into the locker room. Big Red was able to amass 135 yards of offense to Massillon's 72 in the initial 12, and a big portion of those yards - 108, to be exact - came on the ground.

The first 26 plays Steubenville ran were running plays, with six different Big Red players carrying the ball.

"I felt that our kids played physical and they were persistent," Saccoccia said. "Not everything went our way, but we were persistent. In a game like this, a three-yard gain isn't bad."

Massillon's defense continued its recent struggles to stop the run, which helped Steubenville - after an initial three-and-out - put together a pair of double-digit-play drives. The initial one, which started at the Big Red 36, took 17 plays.

However, with the Massillon defense backed up on its own 1, facing third down, the Tigers managed to get a push up front, disrupting a handoff and causing a fumble, which Massillon recovered in the end zone for a touchback two plays into the second quarter.

The next time Steubenville got the ball, Massillon wasn't so fortunate. Starting from their own 44, Big Red marched 13 plays down and after 26-straight runs to start the game, Steubenville All-Ohio quarterback Dwight Macon showed off his arm. He completed 4-of-6 passes over the final seven plays of the drive for 28 yards. The final play was a 7-yard strike to Trey Wiggins, who walked into the end zone untouched with 3:15 left in the half and a 7-0 Big Red lead after the point after.

"You have to read your keys," Hall said. "I guess every kid is trying to get up there to make a big play. They had some play-action stuff. They did a good job."

Massillon's offense, meanwhile, struggled to get any sort of consistency going. After getting 12 yards on their first two plays, the Tigers would net 16 yards on their next two possessions - both three-and-outs.

The Tigers, however, got some life on their final drive of the half after Big Red's pooch kick went out of bounds, giving them the ball at their own 46. Massillon would pick up a fourth-and-1 play when Clayton Mattox rumbled for four yards, and Robert Partridge hit Bo Grunder on a sliding 19-yard grab down to the Big Red 4.

But Massillon - which was called for a false start with just over three seconds remaining - would have to settle for a 26-yard Jeremy Geier field goal as the first half expired to cut the deficit to 7-3.

"Anytime you have to settle for a field goal instead of a touchdown, it's disappointing," Hall said. "It is huge. One thing I can promise, we're going to work on our red-zone offense this week."

Steubenville's control of the game's pace continued after the break. Big Red marched 62 yards in 13 plays, with Macon hitting Anthony Pierro for an 11-yard touchdown and a 13-3 lead with 1:37 left in the third.

Massillon would have one final try to get back into the game as the Tigers drove to the Big Red 1 with just over six minutes left. But Steubenville's Anthony Pierro intercepted a pass on third down in the end zone to seal the Big Red victory.

"We don't score on the 1-yard line," Hall said. "It's the little things like that that we just have to get back to work on."

Steubenville	13				
Massillon	3				
Massillon	00	03	00	00	03
Steubenville	00	07	06	00	13

SCORING SUMMARY

- S - Wiggins 7 pass from Macon (Macon kick)
- M - FG Geier 26
- S - A. Pierro 11 pass from Macon (Kick failed)

	Mas	Ste
First downs	6	18
Rushes-yards	24-35	47-208
Comp-Att-Int	8-16-1	9-15-0
Passing yards	81	95
Fumbles-lost	0-0	1-1

Penalty yards	2-20	4-32
Records	5-2	7-0

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

Rushing:

Massillon - Winters 9-18.

Steubenville - Macon 21-81; J. Pierro 19-59.

Passing:

Massillon - Partridge 8-15-95 INT.

Steubenville - Macon 9-15-81 2 TDs.

Receiving:

Massillon - Grunder 3-42; Olack 2-38; Smith 2-11.

Steubenville - Garay 3-32; Wiggins 2-15 TD; A. Pierro 2-20 TD.