

Massillon rolls past Buchtel, 31-6, in opener

Chris Easterling
Chris.Easterling@IndeOnline.com

The Massillon Tigers may be, for all intents and purposes, still a relatively inexperienced team. After all, one game doesn't make for a season's worth of experience.

However, the Tigers woke up this morning a team with a 1-0 record this season, after picking up a 31-6 season-opening win over the Buchtel Griffins on Thursday night in front of 8,353 at Paul Brown Tiger Stadium.

And that, ultimately, can mean a lot to a team trying to get a lot of guys a lot of experience on the run.

"It's massive," Tiger junior quarterback Kyle Kempt said. "It's a big confidence boost. Going into next week, we feel good about ourselves."

Granted, next week could – and likely will – bring with it a whole new list of questions. It will also bring with it a Thursday night matchup against a GlenOak team that also beat an Akron City Series team (Firestone) in its opener.

But all of that, for now, is a point to be dealt with at a later time. Right now, the Tigers are simply enjoying the rewards of a mostly successful season opener.

"Anytime you get a win, you want to enjoy it," Tiger coach Jason Hall said. "We want our kids to enjoy it tonight and enjoy it in school tomorrow. Once we get to lifting and watching film, it's going to be about us correcting those mistakes."

That may be the ultimate payout from Thursday's win for Massillon. The Tigers get the win, while the coaches get a film's worth of teaching points to go over.

On the positive, though, Massillon can look at the way it went up 21-0 in the first half as reason to be pleased. After a three-and-out on its first possession – followed by a Buchtel drive down to the Tiger 20 that ended with a blocked field goal – Massillon grabbed a 6-0 lead on its second possession.

The catalyst for the first Tiger scoring drive was senior running back Alex Winters, who gained 56 of 89 yards on the drive. Winters capped it off with a 2-yard scoring plunge at the 3:28 mark of the first quarter, although the extra point was missed.

Winters was one of two Tiger running backs to carry the ball more than 10 times on the night, as Massillon rushed for 166 yards on 37 carries for the game. Ryne Moore added a 19-yard fourth-quarter run for the Tigers, while gaining a team-high 102 yards on 16 carries.

"I think a lot of people don't know that Ryne Moore's pretty good," Hall said. "He made a move in the open field that's as good as any. ... It's nice to get them going."

The Tigers also, eventually, got Kempt going late in the first half. He was 3-for-3 for 101 yards on Massillon's last two possessions, both of which ended with long touchdown passes to Montel Harrison.

Harrison caught a 57-yard touchdown pass down the left sideline to give the Tigers a 14-0 lead — following the two-point conversion — with 2:02 left in the half. He then caught a wide-open 32-yard scoring strike with four seconds remaining before the band show to make it 21-0.

"That was big for me," said Kempt, who finished the game 8-of-13 for 134 yards with a touchdown and an interception that Buchtel returned 50 yards for a score to cut it to 21-6 early in the third quarter.

"Him being able to do that for me was just a big confidence boost," he added. "It was a boost for the entire team as well."

Buchtel's Darren McGinnis led all rushers with 121 yards on 22 carries. However, outside of the Griffins' initial drive of the game, they never were able to mount a serious offensive threat.

Not too bad for a team looking to gain its varsity experience on the run. Of course, the Tigers also know there will still be questions to answer in seven days.

"I don't think anything will quiet people down," Kempt said with a laugh. "It's Massillon. That's the fun part about it."