

Red-Rocked Tigers' six-game win streak snapped

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STEUBENVILLE The last time the Massillon Tigers ventured into Steubenville's infamous Death Valley, they struggled to match Big Red's physicalness in a 10-point loss. Friday night, they traveled back down to the Ohio River looking to show things were going to be much different on this trip.

Instead, it was Steubenville that once again proved to be the aggressor for much of the game, sending the Tigers home with a 24-7 defeat in front of a sellout crowd in Death Valley.

"They outplayed us on the offensive and defensive line," said Tiger coach Jason Hall after his team saw its six-game win streak snapped as they fell to 7-2.

"They hit some big plays, which affected us. It seemed like every time we did something, we would do something to shoot ourselves in the foot. We didn't play a consistent football game. Offensively, we didn't do anything tonight."

The Tigers held to just 106 total yards on 39 plays, and just five first downs for the night. Where it was even more pronounced was in the running game, where Massillon was held to just eight yards on 18 carries.

"To beat somebody who's as tough as you, you have to come out and fight them," said Steubenville coach Reno Saccoccia, whose team improved to 9-0 as he picked up his 300th career win. "That's what I tell our kids. You have to be able to go toe-to-toe, nose-to-nose with them. We couldn't out-athlete them tonight. We couldn't do that. ... Our game plan against a team better than us is we have to be tough."

BIG RED PULLS AWAY

That showed itself most dramatically in the fourth quarter, when Steubenville turned a 10-7 lead into a 24-7 advantage with a pair of long scoring drives. The first drive, a 14-play, 78-yard drive, was capped with JoJo Pierro's 2-yard plunge at the 5:50 mark of the fourth quarter.

On the subsequent kickoff, Big Red recovered the kickoff at the Tiger 47. This time, it took seven plays to grind out the score, with Pierro's 3-yard scoring burst making it a 17-point Steubenville edge with 2:27 remaining.

Massillon would run just five plays in the fourth quarter, and none until the 2:26 mark of the quarter.

A year ago, Steubenville's six turnovers helped give Massillon a big 21-point win. In Friday's rematch, an early Tiger turnover helped put Massillon in an early hole.

On the third play of the game, Big Red's William Houst bull-rushed his way in to wrap up the quarterback. As he was making the tackle, he managed to strip the ball away as well to give Steubenville the ball at the Massillon 31.

"He didn't have a lot of big plays, but he had a lot of pressure plays," Saccoccia said of Houst.

Six plays later, Big Red had the lead as Marcus Prather hit Najee Murray perfectly in stride on a slant pattern for a 15-yard scoring strike. The point-after try gave Steubenville a 7-0 lead about four minutes into the game.

BIG REDS PRESSURE

The ability to keep the Big Red defenders out of the backfield played a huge role in why the Tigers were unable to get a consistent offense going, especially in the first half. Massillon's first two possessions were derailed by sacks, while even when it was able to get a pass play off, its quarterbacks endured a pounding.

"They got consistent pressure on us, and we didn't capitalize on any of it," Hall said. "They had a gameplan to put pressure on us. They were successful."

On the Tigers' lone scoring play, Kyle Kempt was hit as he delivered a 13-yard touchdown pass with 1:32 left in the half. Harrison had to make a slight adjustment against the defender in the end zone in order to come back for the football and the catch.

Harrison's scoring catch, though, only put Massillon in a 10-7 deficit. Big Red had taken a 10-0 lead just about two minutes into the second quarter on a 28-yard Luke Smith field goal.

Massillon's ability to force turnovers in the first half helped it to keep the Big Red offense from adding to its lead. The Tigers managed to record a pair of fumble recoveries prior to the half, once at the Massillon 11 and another at the Tiger 43 after a reception.

For the game, Steubenville would finish with 367 total yards. Of that, 176 would come on the ground.

Now, Massillon must turn its attention right away to another team clad in red and black, archrival McKinley. And all that game may hold is the Tigers' playoff chances.

“We’ve got to refocus and get ready for a big game next week,” Hall said.