

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL: Greencastle-Antrim shows progress in loss to East Pennsboro

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By Ben Destefan

GREENCASTLE — Even in defeat, Greencastle-Antrim showed significant progress against a solid East Pennsboro squad Friday night at Kaley Field.

Ultimately, the Panthers scored 21 second-half points to overcome an inspired effort by the Blue Devils, remaining unbeaten with a 28-16 varsity football victory.

Still, despite falling to 0-3, this outcome felt much different than the previous two for G-A. The Blue Devils actually led at halftime, 10-7, before hanging around late, cutting the deficit to 21-16 with less than eight minutes remaining. East Penn star running back Onasis Neely sealed the win on a 48-yard touchdown run during the game's next possession, but Greencastle's vast improvement cannot be overstated.

"I'm just proud of the kids," Blue Devil head coach Chuck Tinninis said. "They have a lot of heart, a lot of class and they just want to get better. We had a great week of practice and we showed a lot of progress tonight. Now we just need to learn how to finish."

In losses to Chambersburg and Milton Hershey, Greencastle managed a combined 294 yards of offense through the first two weeks. Friday night, the Blue Devils racked up 328 total yards, headlined by Demetrius Burton rushing for 103 on 16 carries.

The difference came down to three long scoring plays by the Panthers (3-0), all of which occurred in the second half. Noah Alejandro broke free for an 81-yard touchdown, Tyler Mason added a 71-yard catch-and-run and Neely eventually delivered the dagger around the left edge, culminating in East Penn's rally. Neely finished with 169 yards on 26 carries, capped by his fourth-quarter touchdown.

"We were hanging right there with them, but when you play a team like East Penn, you can't miss tackles," Tinninis said. "We missed tackles on those three long touchdown runs, which was the difference. Overall though, aside from those couple plays, I thought defensively we played pretty well."

After G-A's promising opening drive stalled at the East Penn 29, the Panthers quickly flipped the field as quarterback Payton Morris connected with Mason for a 38-yard gain, moving deep inside Blue Devil territory. Three plays later, Alejandro took a sweep 19 yards to give East Penn an early 7-0 advantage.

With a field position battle developing, a botched snap on a Panthers' punt gave G-A the ball at the East Penn 23, setting up the Blue Devils' first touchdown of the season. Calling a screen, quarterback Cade McDowell dumped a short pass to Burton near the line of scrimmage, allowing the versatile junior to turn up field en route to tying the game at 7.

A tackle-for-loss by G-A's Brad Shear halted East Penn's next possession, giving the ball back to the Blue Devils with time winding down in the first half. Healthy gains by Burton and Tanner Bain pushed G-A beyond midfield, eventually bringing on kicker Ian Gelsinger for the final play of the quarter. Showcasing plenty of leg, Gelsinger drilled a 41-yard attempt as the clock expired, sending the Blue Devils to the locker room leading 10-7.

"We executed well there at the end of the first half," Tinninis said. "It was great to have the lead at halftime, we just needed to come up with a few more plays down the stretch."

After the teams exchanged punts to start the third, Daryn Holdsworth recovered a Panthers' fumble to seemingly maintain the momentum for G-A. A three-and-out ensued prior to Alejandro busting loose for his 81-yard trip to paydirt, reclaiming the lead for East Penn at 14-10.

Forced to punt on their next possession, the Blue Devils' deficit grew early in the fourth when Morris hit Mason in the flat on what should have been a short gain. Instead, Mason broke several arm tackles before finding space along the right sideline for a 71-yard touchdown and a 21-10 Panthers' advantage.

Admirably, Greencastle responded, as bursts by Burton and Kyrin Zimmerman covered 49 yards in two plays. Burton finished the drive with a 2-yard plunge across the goal line, making it a one-score game with 7:47 remaining. The two-point attempt failed, producing the 21-16 separation.

Wanting to drain the clock, East Penn leaned heavily on its workhorse by calling Neely's number for seven consecutive carries — the last of which resulted in the 28-16 final.

G-A returns to action next Friday when the Blue Devils open Mid-Penn Colonial Division play at West Perry.

