

Published December 9th, 2009

Encinal Ends Mats' Unforgettable Playoff Run

By Alex Crook



James King with the touchdown catch, tying the score at 14 Photo Jordan Fong

Anderson also ran for 84 yards on 17 touches in Miramonte's upset win. "It feels great just to get revenge on them after every year they've beaten us. And to shut them out, too. Our defense just played great. It was awesome," Anderson remarked after the game. With the win, Miramonte traveled to Encinal to continue their run toward the Championship.

The Jets struck first just 2:15 into the opening quarter on captain and senior running back Abraham Amiri's one-yard run, and the home team went up 7-0.

Matador Coupin was fired up following the Jet touchdown. Shortly afterward, Coupin made an attempt to fight some of the Jets defenders but was prevented by teammates.

Coupin then channeled his adrenaline into a seven-yard touchdown catch from Anderson with 5:48 to go in the first quarter, knotting the score at seven apiece.

On the ensuing kickoff from Piganelli, Jet junior wide receiver Paul Okamura returned Piganelli's kick 70 yards for an Encinal touchdown and the lead, 14-7.

Facing a crucial fourth-and-two on Encinal's three-yard line with 1:41 to go in the first, Coupin punched two yards for the first down; but the Mats could not produce on the next set of downs.

In the first play of the second quarter, Jets sophomore running back John Trodder took the handoff. Trodder fumbled the ball, which was picked up by Mats senior linebacker Egor Machin, and eventually thrown to senior wide receiver James King 13 yards for the touchdown, 14-13, but the Mats' still trailed by one.

The visitors scored one more time in the first half with 4:24 left when senior running back Kevin Paulsen fumbled the ball, but a heads-up Piganelli threw himself onto the ball in the end zone for the 20-14 lead for Miramonte.

With 26 seconds left in the first half, Encinal's fourth down conversion fell short, which turned out to be a major momentum swing towards Miramonte, and halftime came with Miramonte up 20-14.

Just 34 seconds into the third quarter, Anderson turned a quarterback keeper into a 54-yard touchdown run for the Mats.

With 2:52 on the clock, Encinal junior running back Jonathan Allen scored on a 41-yard run, and Encinal pulled within six.

Just 50 seconds into the fourth quarter, Jets sophomore running back Andrew Ve'e ran seven yards into the end zone, and the point after gave Encinal its first lead since early in the second quarter.

About three minutes later, with 8:54 left in the game, Ve'e took it in again, this time from 28 yards out to give the Jets some breathing room, 34-26.

Only a minute later, as 7:21 showed on the clock, Encinal senior linebacker Juan Perez picked up a Miramonte fumble and returned it down the sideline into the end zone for a comfortable 41-26 lead. Each team would score once more, but for the Matadors, it was not enough to keep Encinal from continuing their dominance as the Jets held off Miramonte, 48-26.

Although disappointed, Matador head coach John Wade was also proud of how his team had played the entire season. "I don't think anyone would've thought that we'd be playing tonight...we were a young team before the season and we've got a lot of football left in us," said Wade.

Miramonte varsity football finished the 2009 regular season at 4-6, which is usually not enough for a team to stake its claim in the post-season. However, John Wade's Matadors managed to enter the NCS Playoffs and proved they belonged there. 12th seeded Miramonte defeated Novato High on Saturday November 28th, to qualify for the third round where they faced top-ranked Encinal on Friday, December 4.

The Mats did not want a repeat of the last three years, when they lost to the Novato High Hornets two out of the three. The Mats got their revenge, shutting out the host Hornets 17-0.

Miramonte started lighting up the scoreboard in the first quarter when junior fullback John Coupin punched the ball in from a yard out to put the Mats up 7-0.

As time expired in the first half, Mats junior kicker Anthony Piganelli hit an impressive 48-yard field goal as both teams went into the locker room with the visiting Matadors ahead, 10-0.

Novato came out firing in the third quarter, but Miramonte regained possession and would add one more touchdown when senior linebacker PJ Gabrielli ran it in from a yard out. For the final 53 seconds of the ball game Miramonte milked the clock down to zero.

In his second year as a Matador, Miramonte sophomore quarterback Ross Anderson threw for just 104 yards, making 7 of 14 passes.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA