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Acalanes heads to state playoffs; Mats come up short

By Jon Kingdon



Jack Miller scoring a touchdown Photos Olivia DeBoy

Playing in the North Coast Championship game is nothing new for Acalanes head coach Floyd Burnsed, having won five North Coast Championships when he was coaching at Miramonte. However, with Friday's win over Escalon 49-14 it will be the first state championship game for Acalanes and Burnsed since state championship games weren't played back then. The Dons will be playing Birmingham High School (Lake Balboa) at 11:30 a.m. Dec. 9 at Saddleback College in Mission Viejo.

Time of possession in a football game can be a very telling or deceptive statistic. In Friday's game, go with deception. Escalon had the ball for 41 minutes and 17 seconds and Acalanes had it for 6:43. The Don averaged 13.3 yards for each of their 27 plays. Escalon ran 75 plays and averaged 5.12 yards. There were no punts in the game.

Acalanes quarterback Sully Bailey had a complete game. He was 9 for 14 for 204 yards with one touchdown pass to Paul Kuhner, caught a 37-yard pass from Jake Boselli and ran five times for 31 yards and three touchdowns. Jack Miller had 8 carries for 87 yards, running for one score.

"Their defense had holes in it and we just had to find it and we knew our athletes could outrun them and we would have those big plays and that was the key to this game," Bailey said. "I'm grateful to my coaches because they trust me with the ball, and they allow me to do what I can to show my athleticism."

Escalon ran for 262 yards and threw for 118 yards but missed converting on four fourth down plays and threw two interceptions for touchdowns, one each by Trevor Rogers and Deonte Littlejohn. After an early long, time-consuming drive, Rogers, who along with Kuhner is on the Don's 4x100 relay team, made his interception and blew by the Escalon tacklers for 86 yards and the game's first score, putting Acalanes up 7-0. "Our coaches were saying that usually in that defense, we follow the crosser, but they knew something was going to come back to the other side, so I just waited and once I saw that ball in the air, I made the interception," Rogers said

Littlejohn also had two sacks. "Deonte has been a great player and just a year ago, he was playing freshman football," assistant coach David Ortega said.

Coming into the game, the key was to slow down Escalon's running attack. "We knew it was going to be hard to stop their offense the way they overload and run the wing T," Burnsed said. "They run that way, and they do a great job, and it took us a while to get it going. The time of possession was crazy, but we scored almost every time we got the ball."

The Dons have relied on team defense all year having had 18 different players with at least one tackle for loss, led by Drew McKenzie and Deonte Littlejohn, each with 15 tackles for loss. The team also had 29 sacks led by Drew McKenzie (5) and Collin Malmquist (5)."

Early in the game, Acalanes stopped Escalon on two key fourth down plays deep in Acalanes territory and that set a precedent for the rest of the game. "We knew we had to play a full game and our kids understood that," Ortega said. "We lack a little bit in size but we're fast and we like to get into people. I'm really proud of them because we've come a long way. From the start, this has been a team with a goal, and they've been achieving their goals and believed the whole time that they could get there."

Though already planning for the logistics for the championship, Burnsed took a moment to share his personal feelings: "This is really special, especially with a great group of kids, Acalanes and the community here. I think it's awesome."

Miramonte

It's been a year of streaks for Miramonte - winning their first six games, losing their next three and then coming into their North Coast Regional Championship game against Pleasant Valley High School with a three-game winning streak, all of them North Coast Sectional games.

Pleasant Valley, a much higher ranked team, was bigger in size and numbers and that proved to be the difference in the game. Still, Miramonte was only trailing 17-12, behind two Carson Blair to Jack Quinnild touchdown passes, entering the fourth quarter before losing by a final score of 31-12.

Miramonte head coach Jack Schram knew it was going to be a difficult challenge to take on the much higher ranked Pleasant Valley team. "They're very dynamic in everything they do," Schram said. "They spread it and go unbalanced and do a lot of different things. In the end we needed to play a better game than we did but we had our moments. We took our first drive and went 80 yards for the touchdown. We then had a couple of good, sustained drives but we had a couple of interceptions when we had opportunities to really seize the momentum."

Senior linebacker, Gabe Roman, felt the team left it all out on the field. "We knew it was going to be a hard fight. We started off well and even when we struggled a little bit later in the game, we responded back

well," Roman said. "With their larger roster, they were able to keep more guys fresh whereas we had a lot of guys going both ways. Unfortunately, it got away from us at the end. "Even though we lost the game, it was a good representation of how our season went in that we never gave up. Obviously winning the NCS title game and just coming up short of going to the state championship game was upsetting but I was happy with the success we had this year."

□ The size difference took away Miramonte's ability to run as effectively as they had done during the season. "We couldn't run the ball effectively against them, and then they made some adjustments in the second half when they went down to a five min box instead of seven," Schram said. "When we saw that in the past, we had been able to run against this type of defense but tonight we weren't able to, and once we fell behind by more than one score behind it really put the pressure on us and we gave up more sacks than we had all season."

□ Schram made it a point to salute the team's seniors: "I told them how proud we were to win the North Coast Sectional championship, and this was the first time Miramonte's been invited to the regional championship, so it was all on their leadership. Coming off of last year's disappointing NCS championship loss, we came one step farther and now the challenge for this year's juniors is to win another NCS championship and win the regional game next year."



Quarterback Sully Bailey Photos Olivia DeBoy

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