



Cardinals get it done with defense

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Canfield helped the Metro Athletic Conference start the season 3-0.

By [JOE SCALZO](#)

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CANFIELD — When Canfield High football coach Mike Pavlansky plotted out the strategy for this season, he looked at his roster and couldn't help but notice what he'd lost.

His best playmaker, Sean Baker, had graduated and took his five starting linemen with him. The offense had shown promise at times, but there was little question what his team's strength was going to be.

"We felt good about our defense," he said.

After watching his Cardinals shut down one of the most explosive tandems in the area for 48 minutes on Thursday, he felt even better.

Canfield bottled up East seniors Sal Battles and Gary Thornton (on offense, anyway), held the Panthers to just 77 yards of total offense, didn't give up a defensive score and pounded out a 19-8 victory on Thursday.

When told of East's yardage, Pavlansky shook his head and said, "Incredible. Just incredible."

Senior Colin Hoelzel was similarly succinct.

"Cool," he said.

Consistent message

All week long, Pavlansky and his coaching staff had preached discipline on defense and avoiding the big play. The message sunk in as East didn't have an offensive play longer than 10 yards.

"We all reacted to the ball and played great team defense," Hoelzel, who finished with two sacks, said. "We got lots of sacks and lots of pressures. We didn't let anything get outside and we didn't give up any big plays.

"That was one of our main goals."

East coach Brian Shaner, the former Rayen coach, seemed a little dazed after watching his team lose to Canfield for the sixth straight year. In most of those, his team had a chance to win.

Thursday was no exception.

"It seems like a replay every single year," said Shaner, whose team added just four Wilson players in the merger, three of them starters. "Their defense shut us down and we couldn't find any continuity.

"They took away what we hang our hat on."

Good enough

Canfield's offense wasn't much more explosive — both teams relied heavily on quarterback draws out of the shotgun formation — but the Cardinals were more efficient. Starting quarterback Mark Carrocce carried 17 times for 58 yards and two touchdowns, absorbing some brutal hits in the process.

"Mark's a competitor and he doesn't shy away from those hits," said Pavlansky. "We'd like to see him slide or run out of bounds on some of those, but he's not going to do that."

Carrocce was banged up by the end of the third quarter and gave way to junior Adam Muth, although that was the plan anyway.

Pavlansky favors the two-quarterback system.

"We have all the confidence in the world in Adam's abilities," said Pavlansky.

Muth engineered the game-clinching drive early in the fourth quarter, leading the Cardinals 42 yards in four plays and capping it with a 13-yard touchdown run.

Muth finished with six carries for 31 yards, Carrocce added 69 yards passing and junior Dan Banna had 32 yards rushing.

East's first score came on a safety when Canfield snapped the ball over punter Pat Sankovic's head and into the end zone early in the second quarter. (The Cardinals also had a bad punt snap in the first quarter.)

The second score, which gave the Panthers an 8-6 lead midway through the second quarter, came when East linebacker Ray Catley forced Christian Smith to fumble on an option play. Thornton scooped up the ball and raced 42 yards for the touchdown.

"Our defense played well — they always show up to play," said Shaner. "[But] it was a terrible offensive showing."

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