

No. 1 Pella stuns No. 2 Saints on final play

Written by Jim Ecker

Friday, 11 November 2016 07:51 -



CEDAR FALLS - They called it the semifinals of the Class 3A playoffs Thursday night, but don't be fooled by that.

Top-ranked Pella and second-ranked Xavier arguably played for the state title Thursday night in the UNI-Dome in one of the greatest and most dramatic playoff games in state history.

Pella quarterback Nick Finney threw a 20-yard touchdown pass to Ryan Van Wyk on the final play of the game as the Dutch stunned the Saints, 34-30, in a terrific contest between the two best Class 3A football teams in Iowa.

"That WAS the state championship," declared Xavier tailback Maliki Wilson, who scooted for 240 yards and cracked 2,000 for the campaign. "Back and forth, going like that.

"You don't have No. 1 and No. 2 on the same side of the bracket," he said.

Unfortunately, the Iowa High School Athletic Association put Pella and Xavier in the same bracket and prevented them from officially playing for the Class 3A crown. The Dutch (12-0) will face Webster City (11-1) for the official title next Thursday, but Pella will be heavily favored to win its third state title in a row.

Webster City topped Glenwood, 6-3, in the other semifinal Thursday night.

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The Saints (11-1) took a 30-28 lead in the see-saw battle when Shane Scott drilled a 37-yard field goal with 3:34 left in the ballgame, and it looked like they had sealed the victory when Josh Gerke intercepted a pass at his own 15-yard line with 1:45 left to play.

"All we were thinking was we had to get one first down," said Xavier quarterback Bryce Schulte. "And even if we did punt it, we had a good chance of stopping them with our 'D'."



Pella stuffed Wilson on three straight running plays, stopped the clock with a pair of timeouts and forced the Saints to punt. Ryan Jasper got off a 48-yard boomer and the Dutch took over on their own 44-yard line with just 45 seconds left in the game and without any more timeouts.

Finney hit Van Wyk with a 28-yard pass to the Xavier 20-yard line and the clock stopped with seven seconds left as the officials moved the chains for a first down. There was time for one more play, maybe two.

Finney dropped back and lofted a pass to Van Wyk in the end zone, and the 6-foot-5 receiver leaped and caught the ball for the winning touchdown as Xavier defensive back Quinn Schulte fell to the turf.

Some teams might have spiked the ball with seven seconds left and tried for a field goal, but Pella went for broke.

"I just knew we had to get one more play off. We didn't really have time to kick a field goal or

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anything," said Finney. "I knew Ryan would be there and I threw it up to him.

"There wasn't much time to think," said Finney. "I just knew we had to make a play and we did."

There was sheer jubilation among the Pella contingent; shock and disbelief for the Saints.

"Xavier gave us the best game that we've gotten all year. And we gave them the best game they've gotten all year," said Van Wyk. "And to top it off like that was just an amazing experience.

"Nick looked at me," said Van Wyk, describing the final play. "He told me the route to run. I ran the route and he put the ball in a great spot. It was a great call and he threw a great ball."

Finney, an elusive quarterback with a soft touch on his throws, was a one-man wrecking crew for Pella as the Dutch won for the 40th straight time. He passed for 334 yards and three touchdowns and ran for 94 yards and two scores, giving him 428 yards of total offense and five TDs in the scintillating affair.

It looked like a ping-pong game on turf for most of the night.

Xavier took a 7-0 lead on its opening drive on a 3-yard run by Schulte, but Pella tied the game 7-7 on Finney's first touchdown pass.

Xavier took a 14-7 lead when Wilson broke loose for a 72-yard score, but Pella quickly countered with a 73-yard run by Finney to knot the game at 14-14.

Pella took a 21-14 lead on Finney's 2-yard touchdown run, but the Saints pulled within 21-17 at halftime on a 33-yard field goal by Scott, his first of three field goals.

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The Saints took a 24-21 lead on a 2-yard by Schulte in the third quarter, but Pella went ahead 28-24 on Finney's second touchdown pass.

The Saints pulled within 28-27 on Scott's 42-yard field goal and then grabbed their 30-28 advantage on Scott's 37-yard boot, but Finney broke Xavier's hearts with his 20-yard TD pass to Van Wyk with all zeroes on the clock.

It was a gut-wrenching defeat with tears everywhere. Xavier Coach Duane Schulte hugged his son Bryce for several minutes after the game in a warm embrace.

"He was telling me that he's proud of me and he loves me. And that he was so happy to coach me in my high school career," said Bryce Schulte.

Duane Schulte rarely shows much emotion at football games, but his voice began to crack when he talked about trying to console his sons Bryce and Quinn after the defeat.

"I just told them I love them. I'm so proud of them," he said.

Bryce Schulte completed 9 of 18 passes, but they went for only 46 yards. The Xavier receivers had trouble shedding Pella defenders and the Dutch put enough heat on Schulte to make things difficult.

The Saints did most of their damage on the ground with 373 yards rushing. Wilson finished with 240 yards on 27 carries, fullback Erik Rodriguez had 67 yards on seven carries and Schulte contributed 66 yards on 15 tries.

Finney completed 18 of 30 passes for 334 yards and three TDs, but he also had three interceptions (two by Gerke and one by John Rocca). The Dutch feature a pair of 6-foot-5

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receivers in Van Wyk and Donovan Holterhaus, who towered over the Xavier defensive backs and combined for 12 grabs and 284 yards.

Pella finished with 433 yards of total offense and Xavier finished with 432. Both teams deserved to win; neither team deserved to lose.

"Just two very good teams going at it," said Bryce Schulte. "Just back and forth. A game you'd want to see and you'd want to come to.

"We battled our hearts out," he said. "I can't say much more."

PELLA 34, XAVIER 30

XAVIER PELLA

First Downs	21	16
Rushing	49-373	17-99
Passing yards	59	334
Comp/Att/Int	10-19-0	18-30-3
Fumbles/Lost	1/0	0/0
Punts	5-39.2	3-48.0
Penalties	5-45	2-25

Xavier 7 10 7 6 - 30
Pella 0 21 7 6 - 34

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Scoring Plays

X - Bryce Schulte 3 run (Shane Scott kick)
P - Drew Pringle 16 pass from Nick Finney (Kaden Miedema kick)
X - Maliki Wilson 72 run (Scott kick)
P - Finney 73 run (Miedema kick)
P - Finney 2 run (Miedema kick)
X - Scott 33 FG
X - Schulte 2 run (Scott kick)
P - Holterhaus 64 pass from Finney (Miedema kick)
X - Scott 42 FG
X - Scott 37 FG
P - Van Wyk 20 pass from Finney (No PAT attempted)

Individual Stats

Rushing

Xavier - Wilson 27-240, Rodriguez 7-67, B.Schulte 15-66.
Pella - Finney 14-94, Warner 2-0, Holterhaus 1-5.

Passing

Xavier - B.Schulte 9-18-0, 46 yards; Wilson 1-1-0, 13 yards.
Pella - Finney 18-30-3, 334 yards.

Receiving

Xavier - Wilson 4-16, Butkowski 3-33, Q.Schulte 2-minus 3, B.Schulte 1-13.
Pella - Holterhaus 7-156, Van Wyk 5-128, Warner 3-8, Pringle 2-24, Viersen 1-18.