

Simonsen's gutsy call lifts Prairie

Written by Jim Ecker

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Dakota Simonsen, a sophomore with absolutely no varsity experience, was minding his own business on the sideline Friday night when Cedar Rapids Prairie quarterback Trey Beckman was injured late in the third quarter and had to leave the game against North Scott.

Prairie Coach Mike Morrissey sent Simonsen into the game against the No.7 Lancers with the score tied, 7-7, and all the fans hooting and hollering.

"At first I was thinking, 'Oh crap,'" Simonsen confessed later. "I was nervous. First varsity game. Homecoming. And they're one of the better teams in the state."

Simonsen took a deep breath and made a gutsy call that resulted in the winning touchdown as Prairie topped North Scott, 13-7.

Simonsen originally stuck to the script after entering the game and gave the ball to star tailback Keagan Pinter five straight times on the winning drive and Pinter delivered with runs of 9, 15, 20, 7 and 5 yards that took the ball to the North Scott 3-yard line.

Morrissey called for the same play - give the ball to Pinter - but the quarterback has the option of reading the defense and throwing a bubble pass to a wide receiver if he thinks that's the smarter play in the situation.

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Simonsen looked at the defense and did what he was trained to do. He faked a handoff to Pinter and threw a pass to the right side to Jojuan Simpson, who got a good block from Jalen Rima and stepped into the end zone for a 3-yard touchdown and a 13-7 lead.

"That was a decision I made," said Simonsen. "It's an option to either give it to Pinter or go (with a pass). All the linebackers were cheating over, so ... "

So he threw the game-winning touchdown pass. And yes, it was the first pass he'd ever thrown at the varsity level.

"He made a gutsy read and made the throw," said Morrissey. "Not bad for his first varsity pass, I'd say.

"For a young kid to have the confidence to do that, it's pretty impressive. I almost went into panic mode for a second when I saw him pull it back. It was a great read."

Some fans may have wondered who he was. The No.12 who was listed on the varsity roster Friday night was Preston LaGrange, a defensive back and receiver. Simonsen, who actually played two quarters in the sophomore game Friday night as No.16, wore LaGrange's jersey for the varsity contest and made a memorable debut.

Pinter expected Simonsen to give him the ball at the 3-yard line with the game hanging in the balance, but was glad Simonsen did what he did. "That was pretty good," he said with a big smile.

Pinter did not touch the ball in the first quarter and was getting a little antsy, but he broke loose for a 54-yard touchdown in the second period and finished the game with 19 carries for 158 yards. He wanted the ball and finally got it.

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"Yeah, I was impatient," he acknowledged, "but when I got it, I knew what to do with it."

Beckman was knocked dizzy after running for 17 yards and a first down on the final play of the third quarter. He spent the rest of the game sitting on the bench as a precaution.

Simonsen stole the show with his gutsy performance, but the Prairie defense was the real show-stopper Friday night. The Hawks came up with seven turnovers against the No.7 team in the state with four interceptions of North Scott quarterback Matt Sacia and three fumble recoveries.

"We had fun tonight," said star defensive end JoJo Simpson, the older brother of the Simpson who caught the touchdown pass. "Our defense rallied around each other. Our offense put in two scores and we stopped them every time (except once). It was good enough for us."

Coen Brown intercepted two passes and joined a long list of defensive stalwarts that include Bryce Meeker, Ben Boldt and many others.

"Today we gave a total team effort, just like Coach Morrissey emphasizes every day," said JoJo Simpson. "We came out and rallied around the ball."

"We got fumbles because we were tackling and stripping the ball. Beat them on homecoming night. First time in four years. It felt great."

PRAIRIE 13, NORTH SCOTT 7

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NS CRP

First downs 15 15

Rushes-yards 36-82 36-229

Passing yards 145 84

Comp-Att-Int 18-28-4 17-31-4

Fumbles-lost 3-3 1-0

Punts-avg. 5-37.0 5-36.8

Penalties-yards 8-60 3-15

North Scott 0 0 7 0 - 7

Prairie 0 7 0 6 - 13

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Scoring plays

CRP - Keagan Pinter 54 run (Sam Drysdale kick)

NS - Kier Brown 11 run (Colton Jessen kick)

CRP - JoJo Simpson 3 pass from Dakota Simonsen (kick failed)

Individual Statistics

Rushing

North Scott - Ridgeway 15-36, Sacia 15-32, Brown 5-33, Team 1-minus 19.

Prairie - Pinter 19-158, Beckman 11-28, Rima 3-34, JoJo Simpson 3-9.

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Passing

North Scott - Sacia 18-28-4, 145.

Prairie - Beckman 15-28-4, 84; Simonsen 2-3-0, 0.

Receiving

North Scott - Grimes 8-81, Steidler 1-11, Brown 3-19, Ridgeway 2-13, Gronewald 3-21.

Prairie - Roma 5-24, Grade 4-34, Brown 2-14, Pinter 2-7, Jojuan Simpson 2-7, Alberts 1-1.