

## Struggling Cougars fall to PV Spartans

Written by Tom Fruehling

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It's an uphill struggle to say the least for a team to spot the other side 21 points after just one offensive play and expect to win a game.

On homecoming night Friday at Kingston, Kennedy gifted Pleasant Valley three quick touchdowns on a fumble, a busted defensive play and a kickoff return.

The Cougars tried to come back. But it was too little and too late and they fell, 40-28, for their fourth straight loss of the season.

"We just dug ourselves too big of a hole," said first-year Kennedy Coach Brian White. "It's been the story of our season. We keep shooting ourself in the foot. We beat ourselves."

The game wasn't a minute old when the Cougars' coughed up the ball at the 25-yard line and the Spartans' Nate Elsey-Williams ran the recovery back for the first score.

Following a shanked Kennedy punt, Pleasant Valley option quarterback Chase Kipper scooted 38 yards on the first play from scrimmage for another six points.

"That was just blown coverage on our part," White explained.

The Cougars seemed to gain some moxie on their next possession when Shaun Beyer picked up 16 yards on a fake punt (the first of two on the night). But no sooner did they narrow the gap to 14-7 on a 6-yard pass reception by Austin Bailey from Sammy Lizarraga than Pleasant Valley's Tyler Flanders ran the ensuing kickoff back 68 yards for yet another score.

Three Spartain touches of the ball and three touchdowns in the first quarter.

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“We made a few mistakes early in the game that hurt us,” said Lizarraga, the rifle-armed baseball pitcher who White is counting on to lead a passing attack to complement Kennedy’s traditional grind ‘em offense.

And after a rough start with three first-half interceptions alone (and one more in the third quarter), the lanky senior gunslinger did pick up speed with a pair of late TD strikes to Dralle and a sky-high tipped pass that Ray’ez Bell snagged in the end zone.

“We kept our pride,” Lizarraga said. “We fixed some things, and we made a nice little comeback. We seemed to put it all together in the second half.”

Indeed, after trailing 24-7 at halftime the Cougars outscored the Spartans 21-16 the rest of the way. They had more first downs (16-10) and more total yards (334 to 261).

“It’s been that way all season,” said White. “We’ve played four tough teams, and we’ve had more first downs in every game.

“We just can’t get the most important part. And that’s more points. We can’t seem to get over the hump. That’s the trick.”

Even though Lizarraga is strong-armed and Kennedy has a trio of tall, fast receivers, White is still not happy with the passing game he thinks a team needs to be competitive.

“We’ve got to get better, and I know we will. For years, Kennedy has been known as a run-only team. And I feel good about our running game.

“But our seniors are not used to us throwing the ball. It’s a foreign concept to them.”

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Lizarraga, for one, thinks the way his team bounced back Friday night is a harbinger of better days ahead, beginning next Thursday against surging Jefferson at Kingston.

“Confidence is contagious,” the all-state pitcher pointed out. “I know good things are gonna happen.”