

Thompson, Little Hawks roll over Cougars

Written by Mike Koolbeck

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Kennedy Coach Tim Lewis said his Cougars played their best football of the season Thursday night against No. 2 Iowa City High.

And then came the second half.

Ronald Thompson ran for four second-half touchdowns to power City High past Kennedy, 34-13, in a Mississippi Valley Conference football game at Kingston Stadium.

The win was the 33rd straight in regular season play for City High (5-0). Kennedy (2-3) had its two-game winning streak stopped.

Despite running only 15 plays in three first-half possessions, Kennedy trailed only 6-0 at halftime. City High sophomore Drew Cornwell kicked field goals of 33 and 26 yards.

"That was as good of football as I've seen our kids play in the first half," Lewis said. "The problem is you play four quarters, not two.

"I don't think (City High) did anything in the second half, adjustment-wise."

City High Coach Dan Sabers said the Little Hawks did not make any adjustments. They just came out and ran the ball hard.

"I think we just got into it," Sabers said. "They were cutting us and we just needed a few more reps to get used to how aggressive (Kennedy) was.

"I've seen a lot of things, but this was kind of interesting how it unfolded right away."

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After both teams played penalty-free ball in the first half, the Cougars picked up their only two fouls of the night early in the third quarter, and they were big ones.

Kennedy received the second-half kickoff, but was pushed back to its own 10 by a holding penalty to start the drive. The Cougars went three plays and out, then had a facemask penalty on the ensuing punt that gave City High a first down at the Cougars' 39.

"It hurt us with opening kickoff when he had that penalty and we went three straight plays and out," Lewis said. "And then they just smashed us in the mouth."

Thompson took the handoff on first down and raced 39 yards for a touchdown. He followed that with a 36-yard scoring dash - on the first play after a 30-yard punt return by Jeremy Johnson - and the Little Hawks' lead shot to 20-0. A fumble on Kennedy's next series, the only miscue for either team, gave the Little Hawks the ball at the Kennedy 21. Four plays later Thompson bounced in from 5 yards out and the Little Hawks' lead was 27-0 with 6:48 still left in the third quarter.

"That was discouraging, that we wouldn't respond better," Lewis said.

The Little Hawks had run six plays, scored three touchdowns and turned a narrow lead into a 27-0 bulge.

"The first half we came out kind of sluggish," said Thompson, who finished with 28 carries for 238 yards. He boosted his season rushing total to 1,071 yards and 14 touchdowns. "The coaches kept stressing to us to run North and South and use your blockers and that's what we did.

"It was all the same blocking. We were running off-tackle and iso basically the whole game. What I did was stand behind my blockers, and ran North and South straight up the gut. It opened up perfectly. It was all because of my line. They just kept pushing the D-line over."

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City High ran 70 plays to just 31 for Kennedy. The Little Hawks had 67 rushing plays for 354 yards and completed 1-of-3 passes for 10 yards.

"In the first half we knew they were going to run iso and we were stopping them," Kennedy senior safety Josh Jahlas said. "They were going strong side, but then they went weak side and that's what got us. We just got to learn how to play four quarters. We played two quarters great against the No. 2 team in the state. We just need to learn how to finish."

City High's defense also came to life in the third quarter, forcing three three-and-outs and a fumble before retiring to the sideline with a 34-0 lead. Kennedy finished with 217 yards, but 135 came on its two scoring plays against the Little Hawks' reserves.

"I feel like we really picked up our energy and started owning the line of scrimmage," said senior defensive end Steve Ferentz, the son of Iowa football coach Kirk Ferents. "The first half we were a little lethargic, but in the second half we found our rhythm and played hard. We played Little Hawk football."

Ferentz, an end on offense, also mentioned the Kennedy defensive line strategy of "cutting" the Little Hawks' offensive line. The Cougars would fire off the line at the offensive line's lower extremities in attempt to back them up and jam up the gaps in the middle of the line. The Little Hawks had 29 carries of two yards or less.

"It's hard to adjust to because you can't really practice against it because you don't want to get guys hurt," Ferentz said. "It's effective. I can't blame them for doing it. I'm surprised more teams don't do it."

Thompson's fourth touchdown of the half, a 21-yard dash on the third play of the fourth quarter, ballooned City High's lead to 34-0 with 10:46 to play and brought on the Little Hawks' reserves.

Kennedy scored a pair of touchdowns in the fourth period, both on long pass plays from Chico

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Lizarraga to Jahlas. The first went for 80 yards. Jahlas caught a pass over the middle, raced through the middle of the Little Hawks' secondary and streaked to the end zone. The second came on a quick out and went for 55 yards. Jahlas was left unguarded on the sideline.

"I guess it was too little, too late," Jahlas said.

"We'll see how our kids respond," Lewis said.

"We feel like we can run the table and go into the playoffs at 6-3," Jahlas said. The Cougars closed the regular season with four straight wins a year ago after starting the campaign 1-4 and qualified for the playoffs, reaching the quarterfinals.

Kennedy plays Jefferson next Friday night at Kingston Stadium. Iowa City High hosts Washington that night.

IOWA CITY HIGH 34, KENNEDY 13

Iowa City High	0	6	21	7	-	34
Kennedy	0	0	0	13	-	13

ICH - FG Drew Cornwell 33

ICH - FG Cornwell 26

ICH - Ronald Thompson 39 run (Cornwell kick)

ICH - Thompson 36 run (Cornwell kick)

ICH - Thompson 5 run (Cornwell kick)

ICH - Thompson 21 run (Cornwell kick)

CRK - Josh Jahlas 80 pass from Chico Lizarraga (pass failed)

CRK - Jahlas 55 pass from Lizarraga (Jordan Holzer kick)

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Team Stats

First downs -- ICH 19, CRK 7

Rushes yards -- ICH 67-354, CRK 19-45

Receiving yards -- ICH 10, CRK 172

Comp-Att-Int -- ICH 1-3-0, CRK 5-12-0

Punts-avg. -- ICH 1-38, CRK 6-39.3

Fumbles-lost -- ICH 0-0, CRK 1-1

Penalties-yards -- ICH 1-10, CRK 2-15

Individual Stats

Rushing -- ICH: Ronald Thompson 28-238, Amos Lavela 10-40, Jasper Washington 11-33, Cortez Barfield 4-19, Isaiah Washpun 9-18, John Law 3-6, Tate Thompson 1-5, Tyler Stika 1-(-5). CRK: Trevor Heitland 6-34, Alex Hillyer 9-29, Chico Lizarraga 4-(-18).

Passing -- ICH: Washington 0-2-0-0, Stika 1-1-0-10. CRK: Lizarraga 5-12-0-172.

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Receiving -- ICH: Eric Kenney 1-10. CRK: Heitland 3-37, Josh Jahlas 2-135.

Sophomore score - Kennedy 21, Iowa City High 0