

Marion falls again to DeWitt Central

Written by Tom Fruehling

Tuesday, 30 October 2012 00:35 -

Long after the scoreboard lights had been turned off Monday night at Thomas Park, Marion Coach Tony Perkins was standing alone in the middle of the football field.

The 26 seniors on his team that had just lost 28-13 to DeWitt Central in the second round of the Class 3A playoffs and were walking hand-in-hand the length of gridiron and back again as is a tradition for the last home game.

Perkins, in his 14th year of coaching the Indians and 29th overall, then had them line up single file for what he calls the “final walk.”

Before the players passed through a gauntlet of underclassmen, students and fans, they one-by-one said their good-byes to the coach. He greeted each senior with a heartfelt hug and words shared only by the two of them.

“I just tell them that I love them and that I’m proud of them,” Perkins explained. “They’re all like sons to me. We’ve been through a lot together, and each one has given me four years of hard work and everything they had.

“It’s always hard to say good-bye.”

Even in defeat to a team that beat them twice in two weeks and will now face seemingly unstoppable and No. 1 ranked Decorah Friday in a quarterfinal round game, Perkins had nothing but praise for his squad.

“We went 8-3 and were district champs. These are great kids, and they had a great season. I’m very, very proud of them.”

And right to the end, he said, “They battled and battled.”

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Monday night against the Sabers (8-3), who won the teams' regular-season finale 17-16 on a fourth-quarter field goal, the Indians were doomed by allowing three big scoring plays and three costly turnovers. And while their normal strong running game was held pretty much in check, they couldn't stop DeWitt Central's own punishing rushing attack.

Marion gained just 128 yards on the ground (and 194 overall), while the visitors piled up 343 rushing yards (along with only 22 passing).

"Our defensive interior line was just getting overpowered by their offensive line," said Marion senior linebacker Ethan Herren. "It wasn't that they were bigger than us. They were just powerful, and they played with good technique."

The Indians started out strong, scoring on their first possession of the game with a nearly seven-minute drive capped by senior Trev Biery's seven-yard dash just inside the pylon.

But the Sabers came right back on their first play on offense when slick option quarterback Mitch Green cut upfield for an untouched 76-yard touchdown run.

After grinding out an 89-yard scoring drive on seven plays early in the second quarter, DeWitt went up 21-7 when Green peeled off another back-breaking 45-yard score.

"I thought we played them pretty evenly most of the game," said Biery, the workhorse tailback who was held to 75 yards on 14 carries. "But those big plays really hurt us."

Marion junior quarterback Trevor Hardman, who was sacked eight times in the game and harassed all over the field trying to find open receivers, closed the gap to 21-13 at halftime by hitting Nick Connolly with a 15-yard scoring strike.

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Hardman's pass into double coverage early in the second half was intercepted, however, and two lost fumbles in the fourth quarter killed drives.

"On all three turnovers, we were driving," said Perkins. "But that's football. We made mistakes, and they didn't."

Biery fumbled on the Sabers' 23 when the ball was popped loose, and wide receiver Quinn Cannoy lost the ball on their 45 on an end-around reverse with 4:49 left in the game.

DeWitt's Austin Lechtenberg scored soon after on a 38-yard scamper to put the game out of reach.

Afterward, Perkins held his composure as the seniors filed by, some with tears on already sweat-soaked cheeks.

By the end of the line, though, even the coach was teary-eyed.

"It's tough," he said. "But it's not about wins and losses.

"We're like a family. What this is all about is helping these kids become future great husbands and great dads."

Lessons learned, according to Herren, the last one to get a farewell hug from his coach.

"Perk, he's like a second father to me," he said. "He's taught me a lot more than football."

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DE WITT CENTRAL 28, MARION 13

DWC	MAR	
First downs	11	11
Rushing	44-343	37-128
Passing	3-5-0	6-13-1
Passing yards	22	66
Punts	3-28	3-34
Fumbles/lost	0/0	2/2
Penalties	11-120	4-40

DeWitt Central	7	14	0	7 – 28
Marion	7	6	0	0 – 13

SCORING PLAYS

MAR – Trev Biery 7 run (Dalton Ott kick)

DWC – Mitch Green 76 run (Keegan Lass kick)

DWC – Austin Lechtenberg 5 run (Lass kick)

DWC – Green 45 run (Lass kick)

MAR — Nick Connolly 15 pass from Trevor Hardman (kick failed)

DWC – Lechtenberg 38 run (Lass kick)

INDIVIDUAL LEADERS

RUSHING: DeWitt Central – Green 8-140, Chris Keitel 23-108. Marion – Biery 14-75, Tyler Gunderson 6-50.

PASSING: DeWitt Central – Green 3-5-0-22. Marion – Hardman 6-13-1-66.

RECEIVING: DeWitt Central – Lechtenberg 2-21. Marion – Gunderson 3-32, Quinn Cannoy 1-10, Connolly 1-15.