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# Tigers Take Down Royals In 20-0 Shutout

By Paul Vanderveer; Correspondent

Those football fans who arrived early for last Friday evening's clash between the visiting Marple Newtown Tigers and the Upper Darby Royals might have noticed a small group of the home team's students slathering purple and gold paint over the upper portion of their bodies in the parking lot in front of the school. These Royal rooters were obviously preparing for an evening of fun and, hopefully, a victory for their team in the important initial Central League tilt of the 2007 season.

And if you take a look at recent gridiron history, the purple and gold crew would have reason for their optimism-for in that decade or so, it has been Upper Darby which has frequently challenged the triumvi-rate of Strath Haven, Conestoga, and Ridley when it comes to the prime position in the Central's hierarchy.

Well, the current campaign is barely underway, and this edition of the Royals may yet prove their mettle in playing against the powers mentioned above. But for now, the evidence seems to show that it is Marple which has emerged as the most worrisome foe for the league's elite.

That verdict was handed down in the form of a 20-0 Marple victory in which the victors demonstrated competence in every facet of the pigskin game.

"We beat a good team here tonight," said Marple coach Ray Gionta afterwards. "They've been a solid program for a long time."

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Indeed, Upper Darby head coach Rich Gentile had claimed the one hundredth win of his career when the Royals defeated Monsignor Bonner in the season opener. The veteran mentor knows good football when he sees it, whether his team is on the right or wrong side of the final score.

"Marple did a great job tonight-especially up front," Gentile remarked.

The outcome of the game could hardly be termed an upset, for under Gionta's direction the Tigers have established themselves as a force to be reckoned with over the last several seasons.

But aside from the fact that the game was effectively decided by the end of the third quarter, perhaps the most surprising aspect of the proceedings was the aerial ability displayed by Steve Giordano, a first year starter at quarterback for Marple.

Giordano connected on seven passes for 103 yards-a sizable total for the wing-T, run first Tigers.

"We were able to mix things up on offense, and keep them somewhat off balance," Gionta noted.

Gentile agreed that, in this meeting of similarly styled teams, his opponent's ability to balance the attack was a key factor in the outcome.

"Giordano probably threw the ball a little better than we expected," he reflected.

Marple established the tone of the game immediately by marching 65 yards in eight plays following the opening kickoff. Giordano connected with do-everything running back John Gallagher and tight end Dan Giordano for key completions, and fullback John Rutecki sliced off a 20 yard run. Gallagher scored from five yards out on third down when the Royals were perhaps looking for a pass.

Upper Darby tried to respond, as fullback Sekela Mwantembe pounded away at the interior of the Marple defense. The Royals crossed the Marple 40 before having to punt. It was to be their longest march of the evening.

Mwantembe and running mate Chris Green were to combine for 69 yards rushing, but quarterback Brian Thompson, who had been quite effective against Bonner, was

under heavy pressure whenever he tried to throw.

"We didn't run the ball well enough, and to win this year, we have to be able to run," Gentile stated emphatically.

Upper Darby's defense did its best to keep the game within reach after the initial Marple touchdown. Safety Chris Ciccone made a fine interception, and lineman Ervin Coles made several tackles for losses when Marple tried wide sweeps.

Linebackers Dominic Pinkston and Dan Behmke, along with lineman Mike Marquis, played their parts in keeping the score at 6-0 when intermission arrived.

But any thoughts of an Upper Darby comeback were quickly squelched in the third quarter, as the Marple defense pinned the Royals deep in their own territory.

The resulting excellent field position allowed Marple to score the final two touchdowns, with Gallagher and quarterback Giordano making brilliant open field runs to cross the goal line.

Local football followers were well aware that in Gallagher and Rutecki, the Tigers were returning two outstanding backs to the field this fall. But aside from Penn State signee Peter Massaro, the offensive line had to be rebuilt.

Based on Friday's performance, it certainly appears that players such as Steve Renolds, Jay Trio, Joe Gordon, and Greg Falcone have learned quickly.

"I'm the offensive line coach," Gionta said with a smile. "They did very well tonight."

On the defensive side of the ball, Dan Giordano filled holes from his linebacker spot, while defensive end Brian Hulsey sacked Thompson three times. Reynolds and Massaro also wreaked havoc up front, while Gallagher and Brandon Rook patrolled the defensive backfield.

"I was a little concerned when we were up only 6-0 at halftime, because Upper Darby is a good team," Gionta said.

Coaches, of course, are always concerned about their own team. But Marple demonstrated on Friday evening that there will be plenty of reasons for opponents to be fretting when it's their turn to face the Tigers.

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