

West Linn 55, Centennial 14: Lions start fast, trample visiting Centennial

Jerry Ulmer, *The Oregonian*, September 09, 2011 10:44 p.m.



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West Linn's Elijah Eaton, holding off Centennial's Luan Hau, scored on a 70-yard pass and a 22-yard run Friday night. - (Doug Beghtel/*The Oregonian*)

WEST LINN - There were no bear sightings Friday night at the West Linn High School football field, where residents spotted one nearby early in the week.

But what fans did see was a big, fast and aggressive West Linn team doing pretty much as it pleased in a 55-14 win over Centennial.

Four Lions threw touchdown passes, including senior tailback Mason Finnerty, and the defense forced five turnovers in the Class 6A nonleague game. West Linn is 2-0 and building momentum.

"I thought if we could fix our quarterback situation, we had it in the bag," said senior receiver Elijah Eaton, who caught a touchdown pass and ran for a score. "Now that we have it after this game, I think we're ready to rock."

West Linn, which passed for 285 of its 465 yards, got two touchdown passes from junior Logan Ems, one from junior Andy Kallien and one from sophomore Derek Sunkle. But it was the one from Finnerty that made a splash.

The team auctioned off the first play-call of the year, and the winner was 1994 West Linn graduate Ian Giamacco. He called for a halfback pass from Finnerty to Eaton.

"My coach comes up to me during walk-through and says, 'All right, you need to warm up your arm,'" Finnerty said. "We had practiced it two times and I threw it out of bounds both times. I told him that I'd be fine during the game."

He was right. Finnerty caught an overhand lateral, turned and fired a 70-yard touchdown pass to Eaton on the game's first play from scrimmage. The Lions never looked back.

"I heard someone paid a lot of money for it," Eaton said.

It was the start of a big night for Finnerty, who also ran for a 15-yard touchdown and caught a 17-yard scoring pass.

West Linn scored the first four times it touched the ball.

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Ems, the starter, hit junior Mario Mastrandea in stride for a 61-yard touchdown pass. Senior Mitchell Vogt won a jump ball in the end zone on a 28-yard touchdown pass from Kallien. And Finnerty blew threw a gaping hole from 15 yards as the Lions made it 27-7.

The Eagles (1-1) moved the ball, though, and remained in the game throughout the first half. Senior Luan Hau caught touchdown passes of 32 and 3 yards from senior Corey Messineo, the latter pulling them within 27-14 with 2:37 left in the half.

Centennial had momentum and was looking to get closer before half, but West Linn senior cornerback Ben Trussell jumped an out-route and ran an interception back 48 yards for a score to make it 34-14 at halftime. The Eagles couldn't recover.

"They're a good ballclub. Every time we got something going, they countered," Centennial coach Chris Knudsen said. "If we hadn't gotten behind, we could've stayed in our gameplan and do the stuff we do, but they got us out of that by getting a couple scores up."

The Lions showed balance on offense, with no player reaching 100 yards in rushing, passing or receiving. On defense, Trussell and seniors Sean Byrne and Andrew Yokubaitis had interceptions.

Eagles sophomore A.J. Wienke, who ran for 137 yards in an opening win over Clackamas, was held to 52 yards on 13 carries.

-- Jerry Ulmer