

Lions fend off late Lakeridge rally

BY MATTHEW SHERMAN

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West Linn scored three touchdowns in the first five minutes on Thursday but ultimately had to hold on in the fourth quarter, overcoming a Lakeridge rally for a 31-26 victory.

The win, along with Lake Oswego's victory over Clackamas, sets up a showdown between the Lions and Lakers next week in a game that will be for the Three Rivers League championship.

West Linn couldn't have asked for a much better start. After forcing a three-and-out on Lakeridge's first possession, the Lions scored in just three plays, getting a 27-yard touchdown run by Mason Finnerty.

Lakeridge then fumbled the ensuing kickoff and West Linn converted three plays later on a 14-yard pass from Logan Ems to Sam Clark.

Two plays into the Pacers' next drive Tom Knecht was picked off by Ben Trussell which led to a four-yard touchdown run by Finnerty on fourth down to put West Linn up 21-0.

West Linn's defense forced six turnovers on the night as Lakeridge's offense made numerous miscues in the first half.

After trading fumbles, Lakeridge got on the board on a 20-yard pass from Knecht to Brandon Loiler on the final play of the first quarter.

Even with their good fortune, the Lions missed opportunities to extend the lead even further, missing a field goal and failing to score on another opportunity deep in Lakeridge territory.

Ryan Harman tacked on a 39-yard field goal to close out the first half, making it 24-7.

The teams traded interceptions early in the third quarter but Lakeridge would eventually score again as a 32-yard catch by Justin Luevano set up a one-yard score by Dylan Erwin.

A bad snap on a punt during the Lions' next possession set Lakeridge up again and Dylan Gaar's short touchdown run cut the lead to 24-20 with 11 minutes to play in the game.

West Linn then went back to the run game, handing the ball off to Finnerty eight straight times. He had three runs of more than 15 yards and single-handedly led a 77 yard touchdown drive.

Lakeridge responded quickly, using a flea-flicker to get into scoring range. Knecht would score on a two-yard keeper with 5:25 to play but the Lions converted on fourth-and-inches on their next drive and Ems hit Byrne for a game-ending completion on third down.