

DEFENSE RULES FOR REGIS FOOTBALL



PHOTOS BY DANIELLE PETERSON / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Regis defenders surround Kennedy's Bishop Mitchell as he runs for a touchdown in a Tri-River Conference game Friday.

Rams capture home opener in 15-7 victory over Kennedy

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STAYTON – How's this for a statistical anomaly: No. 9 Regis held No. 2 Kennedy to one touchdown Friday, but Kennedy never punted.

The Rams' defense bent on occasion, but had almost no breakdowns in a stellar performance that was the difference for Regis in a 15-7 home victory in the Tri-River Conference opener for both schools.

Kennedy (0-1 Tri-River, 4-1 overall), the Class 2A state runner-up last season, came into the game averaging 44.8 points. The Trojans were coming off a 48-15 rout at Lost River in a game that senior quarterback Brett Traeger accounted for five touchdowns.

Traeger did not produce a touchdown against the Rams, and while senior running back Bishop Mitchell rushed for 140 yards and the Trojans' lone score, he earned those yards.

"We pride ourselves on defense," said senior linebacker Eric Gustin, who also plays tight end and running back. "A great week of practice translated into a great game for the defense."

Third-year Regis head coach Kyle McGrath took it a step further.

"We came into it preaching we're the No. 1 defense in the state and we're proud of it," McGrath said. "We knew that they probably had the best offense, so it was gonna be a major battle."

It evoked memories of last season's game won by Kennedy, 14-6.

It would come as no surprise if these teams met again deep in the state playoffs. Regis (1-0 Tri-River, 3-2 overall) lost in the state semifinals last season to Heppner, which defeated Kennedy in the state championship game.

"It would not surprise anyone," Regis senior quarterback/free safety Bryce Piete said of a possible rematch with Kennedy.

If you like hard-hitting defense, Regis High School was the place to be Friday.

One of the biggest plays came late in the third quarter with Regis clinging to a 9-7 lead.

Kennedy faced a fourth-and-4 play from the Regis 34-yard line. Traeger pitched the ball to Mitchell, who raced around right and was stopped in his tracks by Bryce Piete's younger brother, junior running back/strong safety Brandon Piete.

"I was right behind him," Bryce Piete said. "As soon as I saw him hit that guy I went, 'oh my gosh, just amazing.'"

The home grandstands were filled with Regis fans, and most of them were on the field after the game celebrating with the players and cheerleaders.

"For this big a crowd to come out helps us a ton," said Brandon Piete, who scored the Rams' first touchdown on a 3-



Regis's Eric Gustin runs the ball as the Rams defeat Kennedy 15-7 in a Tri-River Conference game on Friday in Stayton.

yard run early in the second quarter. "It really gives us the extra oomph."

Time after time, the Regis defense turned Kennedy away.

After stopping Kennedy on downs at the Regis 17-yard line with 4:35 remaining, the Rams answered with a three-play, 87-yard drive culminated by Gustin's 52-yard touchdown run for a 15-7 lead. He finished with a team-high 113 yards on the ground.

Fittingly, Regis sealed the victory on defense when senior cornerback Charlie Gescher came up with an interception on Kennedy's final possession.

"Our defense is basically what drives this whole team," Bryce Piete said. "Holding them to seven points, that's outstanding. At the same time, we expected that. We hold our defense to such a high standard."

It has often been said that defense wins championships. If the Rams continue to play defense at "such a high standard," they could make a title run.

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KENNEDY - 0-7-0-0 - 7

REGIS - 0-6-3-6 - 15

Second quarter

Regis - Brandon Piete, 3-yard run.

PAT no good

Kennedy - Mitchell, 5-yard run. Hernandez kick

Third quarter

Regis - Pelayo, 23-yard field goal

Fourth quarter

Regis - Gustin, 52-yard run. PAT no good.



Regis defenders take down Kennedy's Bishop Mitchell in the Rams' win over Kennedy on Friday.



Regis's Eric Gustin runs the ball against Kennedy Friday in Stayton.