

# CELTS,

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The McNary defense forced the Bulldogs into a punting situation near midfield on their first drive. But the long snap went through the hands of the West Albany punter and rolled all the way to the Bulldogs 10-yard line, which is where McNary took over.

After McNary quarterback Jack McCarty's first completion to Gunner Smedema brought the Celtics down to the five-yard line, two straight runs from Dunagan got the ball to the one. On fourth-and-goal, the Celts called the junior running back's number once again. Dunagan was met at the line-of-scrimmage by a pair of West Albany defenders but was able to get across the goal line with the second effort, giving McNary the early lead.

Dunagan was a workhorse in the backfield in his first ever varsity start, rushing for 97 yards on 27 carries.

"Dakota has earned his time and took full advantage. He's got a low center of gravity and sees the field really well," Auvinen said.

Two possessions later, a muffed exchange from West Albany led to Rios recovering a fumble, allowing the Celtics to start their possession in the

red zone once again. McNary faced another fourth-and-goal from the one-yard line seven plays later, but this time, McCarty kept the ball himself on a zone-read and plunged into the end zone, putting the Celtics on top 13-0 midway through the first quarter.

"They gave us a short field a couple of times and we were able to take advantage," McCarty said.

The Celtics looked to be in total control after the defense got another stop, which was followed by a trio of first down completions by McCarty. But after the drive stalled on the Bulldogs five-yard line, Logan Ready pushed his 23-yard field goal attempt to the right, keeping the score at 13-0.

The Bulldogs proceeded to go on their only scoring drive of the game, marching 95 yards down the field and ending the possession with a touchdown

catch from T.J. Zimmerman, allowing West Albany to cut the lead to six in the second quarter.

"It takes a special group of guys to come together when it's tough and the red zone is a tough zone where everything shrinks. It's one of those areas where the tough guy wins. Luckily, we had a lot of tough guys."

— Jeff Auvinen, McNary head coach

13-7 lead going into the locker room.

While the Celtics new no-huddle offense sputtered in the second and third quarters, McNary's defense continued to shut down any West Albany threat as they came away with their second red zone stop late in the third quarter.

"It's about having that bend-but-don't break mentality. We gave up some yards, but we were able to keep them out of the end zone for the most part. It was big-time for us," Rios said.

Even though McNary held the lead for most of the contest, the momentum completely changed at the start of the fourth quarter.

Facing a third-and-seven near midfield, McCarty was flushed out of the pocket and ran to his right to buy time. Just before he was about to throw on the run, McCarty had the ball stripped from him as he was sacked to the turf. West Albany defensive lineman Hunter Hampl scooped the ball up and rumbled 50 yards for the score as the Bulldogs took their first lead of the game at 14-13.

The Celtics were then stuffed on fourth-and-inches on their next possession and were forced to give the ball back to West Albany in their own territory. The Bulldogs, however, turned the ball over on downs moments later as McNary took over possession on their own 18-yard line with 7:29 remaining.

McCarty had endured his struggles after the Celtics took a 13-0 lead in the first quarter, turning the ball over three times. But, in his first game as a starter, the senior signal-caller was determined to lead his team down the field.

"I pride myself on being able to come back from bad situations," McCarty said.

Earlier in the game, McCa-



Zane Aicher (20) runs for a first down after catching a pass in the open field. KEIZERTIMES/Matt Rawlings

rtly had attempted to connect with speedster Ethan Martin twice on a wheel route downfield. The two finally hooked up on the first play of the drive when McCarty hit Martin in stride down the sideline for a 31-yard gain.

"I really felt like that play gave us the momentum back. We were ahead most of the game, but energy wise, we felt like we were down," McCarty said.

McCarty then hit Zane Aicher for an 18-yard completion down the middle to the 25-yard line. After a first down run by Dunagan, McCarty threw a 14-yard strike to Braiden Copeland for a touchdown, allow-

ing the Celtics to regain the advantage with 4:47 remaining. McCarty finished the game passing 14-of-25 for 130 yards.

"I think Jack got some confidence going and just started rifling the ball around," Auvinen said.

McCarty got the ball back after West Albany went three-and-out but couldn't overcome a holding penalty and had to punt the ball back to the Bulldogs with less than two minutes to play.

West Albany, who had no timeouts left, got the ball on their own 40-yard line and drove inside the red zone. A pass interference penalty gave the Bulldogs the ball at the Mc-

Nary 10-yard line with 16 seconds remaining.

But for the third time in the game, McNary was able to get a red zone stop as Cale threw four consecutive incompletions, sealing the Celtics win.

It was the least amount of points given up by McNary since the 2017 season.

"It takes a special group of guys to come together when it's tough, and the red zone is a tough zone where everything shrinks. It's one of those areas where the tough guy wins. Luckily, we had a lot of tough guys," Auvinen said.

McCarty will play host to McKay at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, March 12.



Jack McCarty (3) and Tyler Copeland chest bump after McCarty's touchdown run in the first quarter. KEIZERTIMES/Matt Rawlings

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