

Aicher took a screen pass for 24 yards on the first play of the possession then finished off the drive with a three-yard touchdown run to tie the game at 7-7.

“Our O-line really stepped it up today. When we get our offense going it helps our defense,” Aicher said.

West Salem answered when Lowery threw his second touchdown of the night, this time hitting Jack Bennett for a 41-yard score. But it didn't take long for McNary to respond.

First down completions from Jack McCarty to Ethan Martin and Tyler Copeland brought the ball into West Salem territory. On fourth-and-four from the 33-yard line, McCarty found Copeland once again across the middle. Copeland escaped from the grasp of a pair of defenders and scampered to the end zone for the 33-yard touchdown.

“It was nice for us to have some success on offense. We were opening holes and we were protecting our quarterback, which I thought gave us some confidence for us to make plays. It was a huge effort up front,” Auvinen said.

The McNary defense forced the Titans into a third-and-long situation with less than a minute remaining in the half. West Salem running back Nate Garcia looked like he had his forward progress stopped well short of the line to gain, but the senior kept his legs driving and broke free for a 39-yard touchdown with 26 seconds left in the second quarter, putting the Titans up 21-14.

The play provided a drastic shift in momentum before halftime.

“You just sit there and that's all you think about during halftime. There's just



McNary cornerback Sage Allen gets taken down after picking off a pass in the end zone.

Photo by MATT RAWLINGS of Keizertimes

nothing you can do right away,” Aicher said.

Garcia found the end zone once again in the third quarter on a 50-yard touchdown to give the Titans the two score lead.

It appeared that West Salem was getting ready to put the game away early in the fourth quarter as they drove inside the McNary 10-yard line. But on third-and-goal, McNary cornerback Sage Allen made the play of the day for the McNary defense, picking off Lowery's pass in the end zone and returning to the Celtics 27-yard line.

From there, the McNary offense went

to work, driving into West Salem territory. On third-and-10 from the Titans 31-yard line, McCarty connected with Braiden Copeland on an 18-yard screen pass. The following play, Copeland took it to the end zone on the ground from 13 yards out to make it a one possession game with less than nine minutes remaining.

The Celtics defense forced a key three-and-out to get the ball back with 5:29 left on the clock, but couldn't move the chains as McCarty just missed connecting with Tyler Copeland on third and fourth down, allowing West Salem to regain possession

with 3:34 left.

Despite having all three timeouts, McNary never touched the ball again in this game as West Salem converted two key third down runs and eventually ran out the clock.

“We just didn't tackle well. We had them dead to rights twice, but we couldn't finish the play,” Auvinen said “We know how to do it, we just didn't get it done today.”

McNary will attempt to get back in the win column on Friday, April 2 as they travel to North Salem for a 7:30 p.m. game.



Gunner Smedema (4) comes up with a big tackle.

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