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Siuslaw from 1B

practice,” he said. “I’m excited to go to practice, I’m excited to go to games. I was talking with Braydon [Thornton] the other day, and it was like, ‘The season is almost over. It was sad. I don’t want it to end.’

After Friday’s win, the chances of having Viking football reach the state playoffs became a very real possibility. Ranked 14th in the 3A, the Viks are just one game away from securing a playoff spot — and just two wins away from securing a home-game advantage.

“I’ve never been in a situation with any sport where we went to the playoffs, because we haven’t really been successful in any high school sports my whole career,” Blankenship said. “But now it’s a lot more fun. The vibe on the team is all happy and ready to work and get after it.”

The Viks have been “getting after it” all season, but there was a setback two weeks ago when they lost against Santiam Christian.

“We weren’t discouraged too much,” Blankenship said. “It was more like a



Siuslaw coach Sam Johnson (right) addresses his team after Friday’s win.

learning experience. We tried to do stuff that we don’t always do, so with [Pleasant Hill] we just got back to what we’re used to doing.”

Siuslaw head coach Sam Johnson had another way to put it. Days before Siuslaw battled Pleasant Hill, Johnson said that the Viks would come out on the field with “a fire that hasn’t been seen for a long time at Siuslaw.”

Blankenship laughed at the line. “That’s a good way to explain it,”

In Blankenship’s view, Friday’s game was a must-win.

“Before Friday night, we were thinking we had to win two games to make playoffs. If we win all three, we get a home playoff — so it was a must-win for us,” Blankenship said. “And it being a home game, well... we had to win the home game.”

There was also a rivalry between the two schools, with emotions running high the last time Siuslaw and Pleasant Hill met during the pre-season jamboree. And then there was a personal reason for the players to want the win: Johnson left Pleasant Hill to come coach for Siuslaw.

“We really wanted to win this for him.”

The Viks showed off their fire early, less than a minute into the first quarter, with Blankenship running a 63-yard play.

“Everyone was pretty excited,” he said. “Nobody really thought this. After Santiam Christian, 40 seconds in, we already scored? It was awesome.”

The Viks got a little stuck when the Billies scored a safety after the Viks blocked a pass on a P-Hill fourth down.

“We didn’t really block the play correctly, so it was just a broken play, really. It wasn’t too bad,” said Blankenship. “Once we were able to stop them on defense, we were good to go.”

By the end of the first quarter, Siuslaw was up 14-2.

“I think we kicked the ball off from our 15-yard line twice and they didn’t score. So that was pretty big for our defense to stop that.”

One of the best plays of the night occurred when

the Viks were fourth and goal with a two-throw pass — a flea-flicker — into the endzone.

“Braydon suggested that play,” Blankenship said. “He’s a little cocky, always talking about how he’s QB1 and tries to mess with me a little bit. He’s like, ‘I need to throw a touchdown pass.’ So, I was like, ‘Yeah, let’s do it.’ He got it and he was able to throw it to Brady Libby. I was impressed with how he stayed there and just threw the ball. It was awesome.”

At that point, the battle between Siuslaw and Pleasant Hill became a little less pleasant as it became clear the Billies’ chances of a win were fading.

“Stuff got a little chippy,” Blankenship said.

The Billies head coach Joel Smith got ejected from the game after a disagreement with an official. Soon after, an assistant coach was kicked out.

Then there was an incident where Thornton was injured.

“He went to tackle the punter on a fake punt, and then he was standing there and got pushed,” Blankenship said. “And then a big pile started happening, people were pushing and shoving.”

Blankenship was on the other side of the field and wasn’t able to see what occurred in the pile, but “you could see Braydon getting pulled out holding his head.”

The Billies took a knee as Johnson ran out to the field, followed by Athletic Director Chris Johnson. Soon after, an ambulance arrived as Thornton was escorted to the sidelines by the entire Vikings team, cheered on by the crowd.

“He was fine,” Blankenship said, reporting that there was no concussion. “A couple of marks on his head was pretty much it. That was a relief for us.”

The field became covered with flags after that, an apparent overabundance of caution by officials because they “were really watching out for stuff. Some of the flags maybe were unnecessary because they were trying to keep everything safe,” said Blankenship. “They were really on top of stuff.”

By the fourth quarter, the Viks filled the field with JV players to help ease the tensions. Blankenship took the whole thing in stride.

“I think they thought they should be winning,” he said. “They felt things weren’t going their way. That kind of happens. Emotions are high when they’re playing against one of their old coaches.”

The Viks finished up the game 44-15, and when the final buzzer blew, the sidelines exploded in cheers.

“It was awesome. It was great winning with a good margin of points,” Blankenship said.

In the field huddle, Johnson told the team how proud he was that they didn’t fall into division on the field when emotions ran high, and “how it’s great that we didn’t lose our temper during the game.”

There are still two games left, and this Friday’s Homecoming game against La Pine could be difficult.

“They run the ball a lot,” Blankenship said. “They’ll try and pound it down our throats just like we do to other people. Their quarterback can throw it pretty far. They don’t throw it often, but when they do, it ends up with pretty big plays for them. Our defensive line and linebackers fill in and have the DBs be awake and not fall asleep. That’s the biggest thing.”

The teams are evenly matched, and in no way is Blankenship thinking the team should rest on their laurels.

“You’ve got to be ready. You never know when a team is going to show up, especially in our league,” he said.

If the Viks lose this Friday, Blankenship said they’ll flush it and move on to Sutherland with the same fire they brought to Pleasant Hill.

But if they win?

“A win for homecoming? We haven’t had that for a while,” Blankenship said. He paused for a bit, thinking of words. He couldn’t find them.

“I don’t even know how to explain it. It’ll be awesome.”

Kick-off for Friday’s game against La Pine is set for 7 p.m.

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