CLASS 1A STATE FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

Heartbreaker

Powder Valley falls just short in loss to Adrian in state title game

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The (La Grande) Observer

In a game of inches, Powder Valley came up just shy of a state football championship.

The Badgers exchanged blows with top-seeded Adrian in the OSAA 1A state championship game, but the Antelopes ultimately came out on top. Despite leading through the first three quarters, Powder Valley was bested 46-38 at Baker Bulldog Memorial Stadium on Saturday, Nov. 27.

"The boys played outstanding," head coach Josh Cobb said. "We just ran out of time."

Coming into the title matchup, top-seeded Adrian had not trailed all season and had outscored its opponents 618-54. The Antelopes blanked Powder Valley 38-0 on Oct. 1.

The championship game proved to be a much more competitive matchup.

The action between the two teams was neck-and-neck for four quarters, with both fanbases packing the stands in Baker City.

The Antelopes started at their normal pace, taking an early lead. Adrian quarterback Conley Martin, this year's 1A Special District 2 East player of the year, ran for a 61-yard touchdown on the game's first play to give the Antelopes a 6-0 lead. He finished with 219 passing yards, 57 rushing yards and four total touchdowns.

Powder Valley did not back down, as junior Cole Martin ran the ensuing kickoff back for a 94-yard touchdown. The Badgers converted the extra point to take an 8-6 lead, the first deficit of the season for Adrian. Powder Valley would hold the lead until midway through the fourth quarter.

Late in the first half, the Powder Valley defense came up with a huge stop on fourth-and-goal at the team's own eight-yard line. Just when it looked like the Antelopes were going to retake the lead, the Badgers gained momentum.

Early in the second quarter, senior Case Olson broke loose for a 65-yard rushing touchdown that put the Badgers up 16-6 and ignited the Powder Valley sideline.

Adrian stayed calm and kept to its game plan. Conley Martin concluded a productive drive with a two-yard touchdown run to cut the lead to 16-14. Despite driving deep into Adrian territory, Powder Valley ran out of time before the half and went into the locker room leading by two points.

In the second half, the teams settled in as touchdowns came much easier for the offensive weapons on both teams.

Powder Valley senior Casey Vaughan opened the scoring in the second half with an eight-yard receiving touchdown to put the Badgers up 24-14.

Once again, Adrian responded quickly and scored on a 23-yard touchdown pass from Conley Martin to Gavin Bayes to cut the lead back to 24-22 just four minutes into the third quarter.

Powder Valley quarterback Reece Dixon was efficient throughout the game, coming up with huge plays in the second half. He scored on a 23-yard touchdown run with 5:30 remaining in the third quarter to give the Badgers a 32-22 lead. Dixon finished the game with 107 rushing yards, 129 passing yards and three total touchdowns. Kaden Krieger, Dixons' top target, made several big plays throughout the contest and hauled in 72 receiving yards.

As the final seconds ticked off the clock in the third quarter, Adrian running back Jace Martin scored on a 13-yard rushing touchdown to cut Powder Valley's lead to 32-30. At the conclusion of two dominant seasons, both teams' championship hopes came down to the final 12 minutes.

Early in the fourth quarter, Powder drove deep into Adrian territory but suffered a major blow — Dixon left the field due to injury. But on fourth-and-goal from the Adrian nine, Dixon returned and ran for a touchdown. He would play sparingly for the rest of the game.

"We stayed focused and never gave up," Cobb said of battling through adversity.

The Badgers could not convert the extra point, which kept the Antelopes within one score at 38-30 with 9:14 left in the game.

Jace Martin was back at it again for the Antelopes on the ensuing drive, closing out an Adrian drive with a two-yard touchdown run. Conley Martin converted the two-point conversion to knot the game at 38-38 with just under five minutes remaining.

Alex Wittwer/The (La Grande) Observer

Case Olson (No. 25) makes a clean break to score a touchdown against Adrian at Baker High School on Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021. Powder Valley Badgers lost to Adrian Antelopes 46-38 during the final game for the OSAA 1A State Championship in a heartbreaking finale which saw a successful comeback attempt in the fourth quarter by Adrian.

"It was a tough game," Cobb said. "On both sides, the teams played real good football."

The tension was palpable on both sidelines as the sun began to set on an epic championship matchup.

Dixon came back into the game, but a big hit on third-and-21 led to a fumble that gave Adrian the ball at the Powder Valley six-yard line. Just one play later, Conley Martin ran in from six yards out to give the Antelopes their first lead since the opening minute. Adrian led 46-38 with 2:37 remaining in the game.

Adrian came away with several key stops to force a fourth-and-11 at the Powder Valley 21-yard line with just 1:46 to go. With the season on the line, Dixon was unable to complete a pass to Cole Martin as the Antelopes secured the victory.

"I wish we would have come out on top, but they were better than us today," Cobb said.

The title is the second consecutive official OSAA state championship for Adrian, who defeated St. Paul in 2019.

"It's outstanding," Cobb said of the large turnout for the game. "This is small-town football. To play in east Oregon on grass and to have a finish like that — you can't get any better than that."

For Powder Valley, the season finishes just one touchdown shy of glory. The Badgers concluded the year as state runners-up after going 11-2 on the year.

"It was a great season," Cobb said. "They had so much focus all season. Both teams played two seasons in one academic year. That's a lot of football to stay healthy for."

Powder Valley's large group of seniors helped the team get to the championship game for the first time since 2003, which marks just the fourth time that the school has competed in the final.

"It's been really fun," Cobb said. "We'll be back next year."

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