

Mustangs nip Cougars, 14-13

The Heppner Mustangs hung tough and won a thriller over the Crow Cougars 14-13 Saturday, Nov. 28 in the Class 2A State Championship Semifinals. The Mustangs will play the Vale Vikings, a 21-6 winner over the Lost River Raiders.

Crow brought a big, strong veteran team to the Morrow County Fairgrounds to play the Mustangs before a huge crowd of fans. Turnovers and conditioning both played big roles as the Mustangs recovered two Cougar fumbles and intercepted two passes. After a hectic first quarter, the Mustangs settled down to shutout Crow for the rest of the game and seemed to dominate as the Mustangs speed and strength overcame the Cougars' size advantage.

The Mustangs survived a disastrous first quarter. After receiving the opening kickoff and getting a first down, Heppner committed their only turnover of the game. Quarterback Rick Koffler had his pitch knocked down and recovered by linebacker Jason Canaday at the Mustang 33 yard line.

Crow wasted little time in putting the ball into the end zone. Canaday, a hard running halfback, gained 17 yards on Crow's first play. Canaday gained 70 yards on 13 carries on the afternoon. Quarterback Adam Manley hit split end Brett Johnson with a bullet down to the two yard line and Manley ran the next play into the end zone for the touchdown with 7:18 remaining in the first quarter. Brett Bottom kicked the pat for a 7-0 Crow lead.

This was the first time the Heppner Mustangs were behind this season and it tested the players' fortitude. The Mustangs punted after three downs but Andy Barker mishandled the punt and Ryan Pence hustled down and recovered the ball.

Heppner started from their own 40 yard line. A play action fake found Len Brittner wide open. Koffler hit Brittner and he made several nice moves en route to a 49 yard pass completion to the Cougar 11 yard line. On third and four, Koffler kept the ball on the option around the left end for the score. Brittner shanked the pat after a high snap from center and Crow led, 7-6.

The Cougars struck back quickly. After a 15 yard gain by Canaday up the middle, Manley found Jeremy Martin wide open down the middle on blown pass coverage for a 42 yard touchdown pass. The pat was bobbled and defensive end Tony Burt lit up Bottom with a vicious hit to snuff the attempt. With 1:13 left in the first quarter, Crow led 13-6.

The Mustangs were defended well for the remainder of the half by Crow's huge line and mobile linebacking corp. Meanwhile the Mustangs were doing everything they could to stop the Cougars.

Ryan Pence stripped halfback Brodie Thomson of the ball and

linebacker Scott Coe recovered the fumble to stop the Cougars' next drive. Brittner made a diving interception of a Manley pass to stop another Crow rally.

As the first half ended, the crowd was restless as the Mustangs were having trouble moving the ball against the bigger Cougars.

Heppner came out determined to take the lead in the third quarter. After forcing Crow to punt, the Mustangs took over on their own 21 yard line. The Mustangs benefitted from a pass interception call early in the drive and then Coe took an option pitch for an 11 yard gain. Coe earned every one of the 47 yards he gained on the day. Five different backs carried the ball 25 more yards on the next five plays. Koffler hit Burt across the middle for a 15 yard gain to the goal line. After Koffler was stuffed on a quarterback keeper, he ran into the end zone behind the blocking of Pence and tackle Kevin Kilkenny. The score was 13-12 with Crow leading when coach Greg Grant went for the lead with a two-point conversion attempt.

Koffler dropped back to pass, looking for Burt in the left corner of the end zone. Burt broke off his route inside and Koffler headed for the end zone. Fullback T.R. Riehl sprung Koffler with a great block on Canaday. The two point conversion was good and with 3:23 remaining in the third quarter it gave Heppner a 14-13 lead.

The third quarter ended as Burt sacked Manley for a nine yard loss and Shane Munkers caused an intentional grounding call on Manley with a strong rush up the middle. Crow was forced to punt.

Defensive Back Kevin Payne intercepted the Cougars' next

possession for the fourth Cougar turnover of the afternoon. The pick set up the Mustangs on the Crow 30 yard line. A penalty moved Heppner back five yards. The Mustangs were penalized twice on the afternoon. Payne gained 10 yards on a reverse but the Cougars took over on downs with 5:55 remaining and 73 yards to paydirt.

Things looked bleak for Heppner on the first two plays. Canaday and Thomson each romped 15 yards up the middle to cross midfield. Thomson was the leading rusher with 81 yards on nine carries. After one more first down, the Mustangs stiffened.

Crow lined up for a 42 yard field goal. Kicker Brett Bottom had plenty of leg but the kick sailed just wide right to preserve the victory.

Statistically the game was as even as the score. Crow gained 238 total yards to Heppners' 210. First downs favored Heppner, 11-10. The team that made the least mistakes won the game. Crow suffered through four turnovers while the Mustangs lost only one fumble.

The win sends the Mustangs into the Class 2A championship game for the second time in five years. The game between Heppner and the Vale Vikings will be played Saturday, December 5 at Parker Stadium in Corvallis on the campus of Oregon State University. It will be played in conjunction with the Class 1A and 3A championship games.

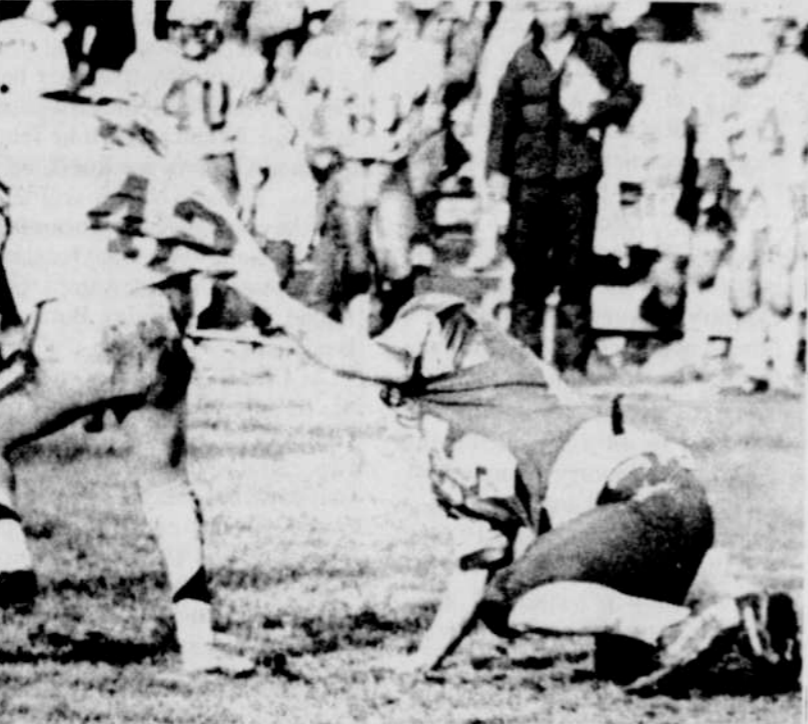
St. Paul will play Dufur in the Class 1A final at 11 a.m. The Mustangs will challenge Vale at 1:30 p.m. and The Dalles and St. Helens will square off at 4 p.m. in the Class 3A championship game.



Kevin Payne makes interception against Cougars. No. 32 is Scott Coe. Pass was intended for No. 80, Brett Johnson.



L-R: Seniors Ryan Pence, T.R. Riehl, Kevin Kilkenny, Scott Coe, Jason Hanna and Shane Munkers and an autographed football by the San Diego Chargers show who's number one. Kevin received the football this week congratulating the Mustangs on their outstanding season. His brother Pat has a friend on the Chargers team and arranged for the ball to be sent.



Heppner's Shane Munkers gets a hold of Crow running back Jed Owen's (42) jersey.



Mustang fans get excited during game

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ASC nominees set

The slate of nominees for the upcoming ASC committee election has been developed. R. H. Matthews has announced.

The candidates in Morrow County are as follow: Richard A. Peterson, Clinton H. Krebs and William R. Jepsen.

The ASC committee election will be conducted by mail from November 27 until December 7. Voters may also get ballots at the county ASCS office. Eligible ASC voters will receive a secret ballot in the mail with instructions on how to vote for candidates of their choice and return the ballot to the county ASCS office.

ASC encourages nominations of qualified women and minorities because historically they have not been well represented on ASCS committees, said Matthews. Participation in ASC elections is open to all farmers regardless of race, religion, sex, color, age, handicap, or national origin.

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