

# Heppner whips Vale to claim state crown

Photos by Joyce Hughes

The Heppner Mustangs realized a boyhood dream Saturday Dec. 5 at Parker Stadium in Corvallis with a 24-12 thrashing of the previously unbeaten Vale Vikings to claim the class 2A State Football Championship crown.

The win was the first time in school history the football championship had been won by the Mustangs. Teams in 1942 and 1988 got to the championship game but were defeated.

Fast starts were a trademark of the Mustangs in the playoffs. Saturday they made a statement to the Vikings and the crowd with their first possession. Heppner took the opening kickoff and marched 75 yards in 11 plays to take a lead that was never threatened. Senior running back, Scott Coe started the drive with a 21 yard gain off the right side.

Quarterback Rick Koffler ended the drive when he hit halfback Kevin Payne with a 23 yard scoring pass with barely four minutes gone. Kicker Len Brittner split the narrower college uprights with the pat and it was 7-0 for the Mustangs.

One of the questions that had to be answered was, could the small, quick and strong Mustangs stop the big, high powered Vale offense? The Mustang front line of Shane Munkers, Kevin Kilkenny and Ryan Pence, along with defensive ends Tony Burt and Dwayne Dunaway dominated the line of scrimmage the entire afternoon. The Vikings gained only 70 yards of total offense in the first half. Linebackers T.R. Riehl and Scott Coe plugged the holes and defensive backs Koffler Payne, Brittner, and strong safety Jim Tellechea kept the passing lanes clogged until the game was out of reach.

After stopping Vale on their first possession, Heppner used a flanker reverse pass and caught Vale napping. Senior Jason Hanna found Len Brittner open downfield for a 39 yard pass reception. The drive stalled at the Vale 18 yard line.

After forcing a punt, the Mustangs struck again. Koffler found Brittner across the middle for a 46 yard gain to the Vale 18 yard line. After a small gain, Len Brittner, on a perfect snap from Munkers and hold by Payne, booted a 27 yard field goal from the extreme left hash mark. That made the score 10-0 with 2:13 left in the first quarter.

Vale fumbled away their next possession. The Vikings lost three fumbles on the afternoon. After exchanging punts, Koffler picked off the first of three interceptions the Mustangs had on the afternoon to end the first half.

Heppner owned the third quarter. Jim Tellechea intercepted quarterback Jeremy Johnson to end Vales first drive. Kevin Kilkenny foiled the Vikings next drive with an interception of a middle screen, returning the ball to the Viking 10 yard line.

The Mustangs squandered the effort, fumbling at the goal line but Dwayne Dunaway ended Vale's next drive with a fumble recovery. Heppner put together a 10-play 54 yard drive to go ahead 17-0. Kevin Payne did most of the damage with runs of 14 yards and 10 yards on the drive. Koffler converted two third down plays during the drive behind the blocking of center Joe Lindsay and the rest of the veteran offensive line. Koffler led all rushers with 83 yards on 18 carries. Scott Coe, who put on another all state performance at running back, scored from five yards out. Coe had 20 carries for 81 yards on the afternoon and literally ran over Vale defenders on several occasions. Brittner was perfect with the pat.

With 1:32 remaining in the third quarter, the Vikings tried to get back in the game by moving Larry Ramirez, a 6'6" 250 lb. tight end to quarterback in the shotgun. The shotgun backfired. After two gains, the Mustangs swarmed Ramirez and defensive end Tony Burt slammed into the Viking quarterback. The ball popped loose and defensive lineman Shane Munkers scooped

it up and sprinted, well, as fast as a lineman can sprint, 31 yards to the end zone. Brittner added the pat for a 24-0 lead, and folks, the game was over.

Vale did score twice with Ramirez hitting Cory Maag and David McPheeters with touchdown passes but it was much too little and much too late.

Game statistics were a little closer than the game itself. The Mustangs won the game. It wasn't even close. Vale was dominated. They didn't stand a chance. The Mustangs were in total control. Time of possession favored Heppner 31:36 to 16:24. Total yards favored Heppner 324 to 227.

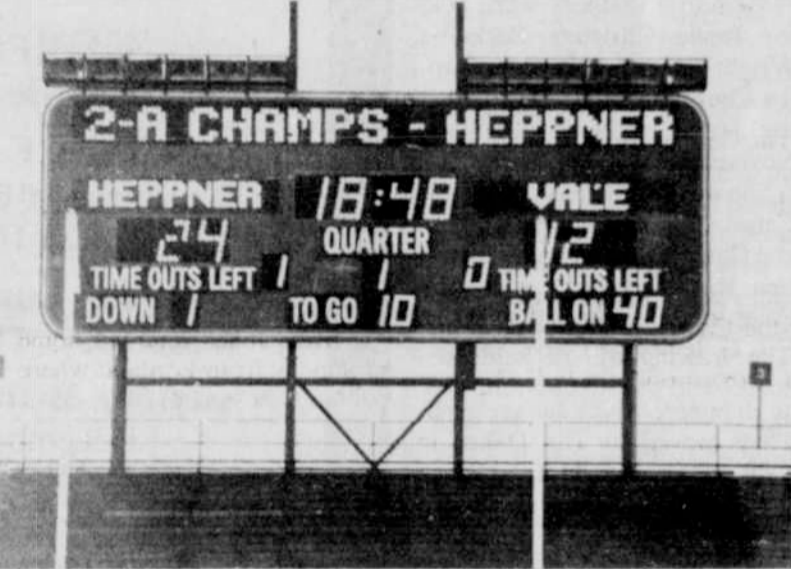
The only performance that wasn't championship caliber was the officiating. Heppner suffered through 10 penalties totalling 98 yards on an assortment of poor judgement calls and out of position guesses. Vale was penalized twice for 10 yards.

The game was attended by an excellent turnout of Heppner alumni, relatives, family and other boosters.

The players attended an Oregon State University Basketball Game Saturday night after the game and were greeted with a 70 car caravan of well wishers from Lexington to Heppner on Sunday afternoon who was still celebrating the hard earned victory.



Heppner running back Scot Coe works for extra yardage



Scoreboard tells the story. Heppner is the winner



Linebacker Coe makes tackle



Mustang quarterback Rick Koffler says "We're number one"





Head coach Greg Grant



Kevin Payne fights for yardage






Tony Burt celebrates victory with Coach Grant

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