

Mustangs finish the season with an 8-3 record



The Mustangs getting ready to snap the ball in their game against Regis last Saturday. - Photo By Jeremy McDonald

The Heppner Mustang football team had their season come to an end in the OSAA 2A State Football Championships Quarterfinal round of the state playoffs with a 27-20 loss to the Regis Rams. The Mustangs finished the season with an 8-3 record.

Heppner received the opening kickoff and marched down the field on a nine-play drive. The drive was highlighted by a 25-yard run by Hayden McMahon, a 40-yard pass completion from Mason Orem to Cameron Proudfoot, and an 11-yard run by Caden George. The drive ultimately stalled at the Regis 3-yard line and the Rams took over on downs.

The Heppner defense rose to the challenge as Cameron Proudfoot stepped in front of a Regis pass and intercepted the ball. He then sprinted 44 yards for a Mustang touchdown and the first score of the game. Heppner led 6-0 midway through the first quarter. Just over a minute later, Regis would score their first touchdown of the game to take a 7-6 lead.

On the next Mustang possession, they would fumble the ball at midfield and Regis recovered it. The Rams scored on a long pass play to make the score 14-6 as the first quarter ended.

Heppner moved the ball on their next possession but ultimately had to punt the ball away. Regis scored their third touchdown of the game on a short run to make the score 21-6 early in the second quarter.

After the Regis kickoff, the Mustangs went on a 9-play drive that ended in a score when Caden George ran the ball in from 2-yards out. That made the score 21-12 with seven minutes left in the first half. The teams then traded possessions for the rest of the quarter and the score at halftime was 21-12.

Nick Wenberg intercepted a pass on the Rams' second play of the third quarter. A long Mustang drive came to an end with a Regis interception. Five plays later Cameron Proudfoot would intercept another Ram pass. The Mustangs were unable to capitalize on this possession and would have to punt the ball away. That was the end of the third quarter with Regis still leading the game 21-12.

The tough Mustang defense stopped the Rams on downs at the Heppner 15-yard line. On the next play, Orem would pass the ball to Cameron Proudfoot who took it all the way to the end zone for an 85-yard touchdown reception. Caden George ran the ball in for the 2-pt. conversion

to make the score 21-20 with nine minutes left in the game.

The quick strike Regis offense would score on its next possession to now make the score 27-20 with seven minutes left. The Mustangs then moved the ball on an eight-play drive that ended when Regis intercepted a Heppner pass. Regis ran out the rest of the time in the game and got the win by a score of 27-20.

Heppner had 173 rushing yards and 193 yards passing the ball. The Mustangs had 366 yards of total offense and Regis had 462. The teams had the same number of first downs (19) and the time of possession was nearly identical.

Orem was 8-12 passing the ball for 181 yards and a touchdown. Caden George was 1-2 for 12 yards. Cameron Proudfoot led the team in receiving with 142 yards and 1 touchdown on 5 catches. Wenberg had 2 receptions for 23 yards, Caden George had a catch for 15 yards and Caleb George caught a ball for 13.

Caden George and Hayden McMahon both led the Mustangs in rushing with 68 yards each. Caden had 16 carries and scored a rushing touchdown in the game while Hayden had 12 carries in the game. Orem followed with 35 yards rushing and Wenberg ran the ball for 2.

On the defensive side of the ball, Cameron Proudfoot and Caleb George led the team in tackles with 5 each. Cameron also had 2 interceptions for the team. Orem and Wenberg were next with 4 tackles in the game and Wenberg also recorded an interception. With 3 tackles each in the game were Caden George, Jaime Cavan, Owen Guerra, and Tripp Stewart. Caden would also have 1 interception. With 2 tackles each for the Mustangs were Landon McMahon and Conner Wilson.

The Mustangs had a good overall season and fought through some adversity when they lost their three-year starting quarterback Landon Mitchell. Some players had to move to new positions to make up for the loss and they stepped up and performed admirably. Heppner lost three key seniors off of this year's team, Mitchell, Caden George, and Cameron Proudfoot. Their leadership will be missed in the locker room, at practice, and on the field.

The future of Mustang football still shines bright as many underclassmen played significant minutes this year and gained valuable experience in varsity games.

CREZ funds allocated to capital projects

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long to burn through a million bucks," he said.

Morrow County Administrator Matt Jensen said the county will be looking at several options for long-term funding for roads and other projects.

"We will need to have a discussion with the board of commissioners in the near future about where to dedicate some of the funds that we have," he said.

He added that they currently are anticipating a \$5 million allotment for community development from the Amazon structure on Bombing Range Road. That allotment is supposed to be geared toward infrastructure in the affected taxing districts.

"That's something that we need to have a discussion with the BOC (board of commissioners) to say, does that get dedicated to or split up between different things," Jensen said. "But it is one of those available ones to go to roads or buildings, however, the BOC commits to that."

"We do have the million dollars that just came in. It's just sitting there waiting to be allocated," he added. "We do need some additional money in the circuit court building, so I was all right with the recommendation toward that fund for this, knowing that we have some others that we definitely need to have some consideration from the board of commissioners to designate."

Wenholz referred to the \$5 million community development allotment toward infrastructure in affected taxing districts.

"Would that be split amongst the taxing districts? Do they have a vote on that?" he questioned.

Jensen responded that the wording implied it only needed to be used on projects within the county, not for district-specific projects.

"If we wanted to disburse it to other capital infrastructure projects that the districts wanted to do, open up, more or less, a grant program or disbursement, or if the county says, 'These bridges satisfy needs of all the county in one way or the other,'" Jensen said. "Those are some decisions that we do need to have some discussions on."

He added that it would continue to be even more important as tax-abatement programs continue with both the enterprise zone and county programs like Strategic Investment Program (SIP) agreements.

Morrow County Commissioner Chair David Sykes said the discussion echoed what he had been thinking about funds coming in that were outside the budgeting process. He said he would prefer to have the commissioners sit down with the county administrator and finance director and talk through the decisions.

"I don't like ad hoc or decisions off the cuff," said Sykes. "I like to have a process. CREZ III's going to be busy, and this isn't the last we're going to get."

"The shotgun approach to me doesn't feel right," he added. "I think we need to sit down and talk about it."

Ince said he fully supported a more strategic capital plan that would roll into the budgeting process.

"There will be revenues that are received outside of the budget process, and this is not something I would ever include in resources for a budget, because we don't have any guarantee of a distribution of funds from the CREZ," said Ince.

On the other hand, he said, funding sources such as SIP agreements provided more certainty.

"Those are by contract. We can forecast with regularity and certainty that we're going to receive those in an upcoming year, so those would be included as a resource in a budget,"

he said.

Sykes responded that he understood there would be times when revenue could not be budgeted in advance, but he was concerned with having a process in place so that both the board of commissioners and various entities understood what funds were available and where they could go.

"So that everybody knows. Everybody knows, this is how you put in an application, this is how the decision is going to be made to get it disbursed, are we doing it correctly within the budgeting or whatever process," said Sykes.

Wenholz agreed that a work session would be helpful, especially if the county assessor could provide projections of what they could expect for both income and planned projects.

"To my point of roads and bridges, include Eric, and what is your five-year road plan?" Wenholz said,

referring to Morrow County Public Works Director Eric Imes. "What could be reasonably accelerated by hiring contractors to do it? While we have the money, get it spent, get the project done, and then it's done."

Ince reminded the commissioners that any board action would commit the funds, but that board action could also uncommit those funds in the future.

Wenholz said he was comfortable allocating the funds to capital improvements without designating a project. With Commissioner Roy Drago Jr. absent, the commissioners voted 2-0 to commit the \$1 million to the capital improvement fund but to leave it unallocated to a specific project for the time being.

Meanwhile, the commissioners and staff agreed to plan for a work session in late December or early January to further discuss processes that could be put in place for future decision-making.

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