

Tigers charm Cobras with playoff magic

As a child, magic can wow you with simple card tricks and sleight of hand. Performers like David Blaine and David Copperfield became mega-stars with their “magic” tricks. People love the stuff.

Then there’s fantasy magic, with characters from far-flung locales using sticks or their hands to propel some invisible yet powerful force. Of course, this mysterious force exists in literature only.

But then is sports magic. I suppose we use the word “magic” because we have no other word which semantically fits. Magic is mysterious and we aren’t sure how it works, we just know that it does and it inspires awe and wonder.

Stanfield’s playoff win over Central Linn was magical. There’s no other word to describe it. After the first half, East Oregonian sports reporter Matt Entrup asked for an update. I wrote: “Central Linn up 20-6, playing better.”

It was simple and concise, but it was also the truth. The Tigers, despite moving the ball the entire first half, had three three-and-outs and six points. Central Linn appeared to be more experienced, more ready for the moment.

But mysterious as magic is, it just sort of popped up. Enoel Angel caught a touchdown pass that almost hit the goalpost with seconds left in the third quarter. Justin Keeney made a diving catch to pull within one late in the fourth quarter when the top-ranked Cobras thought they had the game in hand.

They had been banging their big fullback Alex Pettner into the Stanfield line and moving the ball seemingly at will. Many of Pettner’s good runs involved broken tackles at the line of scrimmage.

We don’t know how it works, just that it does.

Because somehow the game changed in that second half. Pettner fumbled — it proved to be inconsequential in terms of points but huge in terms of usage — and got fewer carries in the second half as a result. Quarterback Jesse Wibbens, who had been used sparingly to this point, was the featured back in Central Linn’s overtime drive, and he scored the Cobras’ overtime touchdown.

But Pettner, who had been money in short yardage situations all night, was stuffed at the line. Stanfield missed no tackles this play, and Pettner was denied two points and the Cobras denied a semifinal appearance.

It was magical. I had no idea how it happened. But it did. And that’s what we love about magic. It’s the mystery, it’s the wonder that comes from seeing things happen in front of your face that seems to defy explanation. There is always one, it turns out, but that takes away the fun.

Stanfield did the things it needed to win. Tyler Monkus had more than 200 yards. Dylan Grogan got the passing game going, albeit late. The Tigers defense stood when it needed to.

None of that overrides the magic of that last play. None of that changes the fact a big, strong 250-pound back was stuffed at the line of scrimmage by a small roster full of relatively small guys.

Isn’t magic fun?
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With no pressure, Stanfield preps for Kennedy

Tigers roll into first semifinal in 58 years

By **SAM BARBEE**
Staff Writer

Stanfield football coach Davy Salas expected this. Nothing about it surprised him.

That’s a rather shocking revelation about his Tigers, which pulled back-to-back upsets to appear in its first state semifinal football game since 1957, when Stanfield beat Merrill, 27-7. Saturday, the Tigers head to Hillsboro where they’ll play No. 4 Kennedy at 5 p.m. for a chance to play for the 2A state championship. Heppner plays Regis at noon in Hillsboro.

“I just think that, to be honest, we’re at a point where nobody thought we’d be there,” Salas said. “We believed that we were gonna be here. We knew we had a special team. We knew we were gonna get there. But when you hear the name ‘Stanfield foot-



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS
Stanfield’s Tyler Monkus dives through the scrum against Heppner’s Patrick Collins (67) and C.J. Kindle earlier this season.

ball,’ you don’t think of a perennial power. We’re not a perennial power. We haven’t put together 20 years of winning streaks.

Some of these bigger schools, they’ve been contenders these past five, 10, 15 years. But we’re just taking it as it goes. If our journey leads us to a state championship, we’ll follow it there. But pressure? I don’t feel any pressure.”

Stanfield’s route to the

semifinals was a quiet one. Starting outside of perceived championship group, the Tigers (10-1) did nothing but win and win convincingly. They won their first four games — all out of conference — by an average of 31.75 points before slipping by Weston-McEwen and Ir-rigon by a combined total of 13. Then the 60-6 home loss to Heppner seemingly knocked them down a peg,

but a 62-6 win over Pilot Rock — the only team to truly give the 1957 squad any trouble, interestingly — and a 41-26 win over Culver demonstrated Stanfield as a legitimate contender.

Then Stanfield knocked off offensive powerhouse No. 8 Vernonia, 56-26, on the road, then upset No. 1 Central Linn, 27-26, in overtime. Stanfield finished the season ranked

fourth, but was dropped to ninth in the playoff seeding. Though Salas feels that was a bit of a slight, he isn’t using it as motivation. It’s not his style.

“We’re gonna take the same approach we take every week,” he said. “We’re taking down teams everybody is picking ahead of us. We’re gonna keep playing our football.”

Kennedy’s route was similar to the Tigers’. With the exception of 14-6 wins over Amity and eventual league champ Regis, Kennedy eased through its schedule to a 10-1 record while averaging 27 points per game and allowing just 11. Compare that with Stanfield’s numbers (39/23, respectively) these teams appear to be evenly matched on paper.

Stanfield will keep running the ball behind its explosive running back Thyler Monkus, quarterback Dylan Grogan and a stable of capable backs that also includes Makiah Blankenship and Justin Keeney. In Stanfield’s upset win over Central Linn, Monkus rushed for a quiet 218 yards on a similarly quiet 27 carries, while Grogan provided all the scoring with 114 yards rushing, 117 yards passing and four total touchdowns.

Meanwhile, the Trojans are more balanced offensively than Stanfield. While the offense is largely run out of the shotgun, it utilizes Wing-T concepts like pulling guards and lots of movement and misdirection in the backfield.

Quarterback Brett Traeger, a junior, is competent throwing and running, and has the ability to extend broken plays with his legs and scramble for positive yardage. He takes long strides and can run away from defenders. He becomes a bigger weapon, though, when paired with 210-pound senior running back Jacob Lopez, who takes carries from the shotgun as well as the upback in the I-formation. Salas pointed to Lopez as an important cog in Kennedy’s attack, similar to Alex Pettner last week.

“It’s pretty straightforward football,” Salas said. “They don’t do anything fancy. They stay on their blocks. It’s a very well-coached team.”

Kennedy also has viable receivers in Owen Seiler, 6-foot-4 freshman tight end Rocco Carley, 6-foot-2 junior tight end Jack Suing, and junior slot/h-back Bishop Mitchell.

Salas has preached all year about not worrying about what anybody other than the Stanfield Tigers think of the Stanfield Tigers. That philosophy has worked thus far, with the Tigers flying under the state’s radar.

“We just gotta go out and play football. It doesn’t matter what the outside world thinks,” Salas said. “It doesn’t matter what the newspaper thinks, or TV stations or anything like that. Like I said, we’re gonna go play a football game.”

Stanfield advances to semis with tight overtime thriller

Tigers win after being down 20-6 at half

By **SAM BARBEE**
Staff Writer

Central Linn quarterback Jesse Wibbens had just scored a touchdown in overtime.

The No. 9 Stanfield Tigers led 27-26 on the road in the 2A football quarterfinals in Halsey, and it seemed apparent what would happen and who would get the ball.

The what was Central Linn going for two points and the win. The who was 270-pound Alex Pettner getting the carry. The burly back had fumbled earlier in the game and hadn’t been a huge focal point of the offense since. Still, first-year coach Davy Salas had an inkling who would get the deciding carry.

“I just told my guys, ‘We’re getting good reads, we just aren’t wrapping.’” Salas said. “When you get a good read, make you make that tackle.”

Stanfield got a good read and wrapped. Pettner was stood up at the line, clinching Stanfield’s 27-26 quarterfinal win. It’s the first time the Tigers have appeared in the football semifinals since the 1957 squad, which won the Class B title.

“I didn’t really talk about making history,” Salas said. “I just told me team, ‘Let’s go out there and make our way back home winners.’”

And they did just that despite being down 14 points at halftime on the road to No. 1 Central Linn, but erased the deficit with two Dylan Grogan touchdown passes, blocked the potential game-winning field goal, then stopped the Cobras on a two-point conversion in overtime.

Stanfield used its power running game to wear down the Cobras. Junior running back Thyler Monkus, who has been banged up in recent weeks but was close to 100 percent Friday night, carried 27 times for a quiet 218 yards.

Quiet, because classmate Grogan was wonderful. The lanky junior carried 21 times for 114 yards and two scores, and also completed seven of 17 pass attempts for 117 yards and two more scores.

“I train my kids every day to run,” Salas said. “We don’t stop running. They take their running and training seriously. In that fourth quarter, we were able to move the ball pretty easily. It’s a testament to their training and keeping their head in the game.”

Central Linn (9-2) led 20-6 at the break after Andre Holmes picked off a wayward Grogan pass and took it 30 yards for a score. Central Linn had just fumbled, and Stanfield gave the ball right back, and some points, too.

But Grogan hit Enoel Angel for a 12-yard score with four seconds left in the third quarter, then hit a diving Justin Keeney for a 9-yard scoring pass with 2:40 in the final frame to tie. Grogan also ran in a 13-yard score in the first half.

Central Linn, led by quarterback Jesse Wibbens and running backs Pettner and Chandler Jeppsen, marched



STAFF PHOTO BY SAM BARBEE
Stanfield quarterback Dylan Grogan (center) leads the No. 9 Stanfield Tigers into the semifinals in the state playoffs since 1957.

right down the field and had a chance to win with a 30-yard field goal, but Stanfield blocked it to force overtime.

It was the second blocked kick by the Tigers, who had blocked a point after in the first half.

Central Linn took control in the first half, partially on Stanfield mistakes. The Tigers’ first two drives ended on downs, but the Cobras couldn’t do much in the first quarter, either.

But a drive that snaked into the second quarter ended shortly thereafter when Pettner bulldozed in from a yard out with 11:40 on the clock. After a couple exchanges of possession, including a Cobras fumble with which Stanfield did nothing, Central Linn went on another methodical drive on the legs of Pettner and Chandler Jeppsen. Pettner, who fumbled earlier, made up for it with an easy 10-yard scoring run to double Central Linn’s lead. The point after was blocked, though, and that point proved huge.

Grogan hurdled a defender with 4:28 left and scored on the play from 13 yards out to halve Central Linn’s lead, then Holmes extended the lead with his pick-six.

But Grogan hit Angel, then Keeney to force overtime. He then powered in for a 6-yard score before Stanfield’s defense send the Tigers to the semis.

“We’re just excited to take care of two big games on the road,” first-year head coach Davy Salas said. “They gave us an opportunity to go play two league champs and were still playing.”

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Kennison Field again hosts playoffs

Two years after the modern, community-funded Kennison Field complex was completed, the project is still reaping benefits.

The only turf field east of the Cascade Mountains will again host playoff football games this season on Saturday, when the top-ranked Adrian Antelopes host No. 4 Crane at 3 p.m. in a 1A semifinal, and Vale hosts Scio in a 3A semifinal at 11 a.m.

Tickets will be available Sat-

urday morning stating at 10 a.m. Prices are \$5 for students and \$8 for adults. Tickets are valid throughout the day.

According to a press release, Hermiston School District generated more than \$4 million for the community and 44 jobs as a result of its hosting OSAA and other athletic events at the complex. Data from the 2013-14 economic impact study, administered by ECONorthwest, found that visitors spent an average of \$60.48 per day in the community.

“The district’s ability to host OSAA playoff games is not only

a benefit to Hermiston, but also to our region,” Communications Officer Briana Cortaberría said. “The district is proud to partner with OSAA and provide a playoff location closer to home for our regional teams. Playing in Hermiston allows more spectators to attend and decreases the need of overnight stays.”

Gun club hosts weekend shoots

The Hermiston Gun Club and Hermiston American Legion are

hosting Fun And Games Shoots this weekend.

The event, which is open to all ability levels, is Friday at 5 p.m. and Saturday at 9 a.m. at 77034 Gun Club Road, located off Exit No. 177 from Interstate 84. Food will be available for purchase during the event.

The cost is \$5 per shoot. It features a \$15 cash payout for each five shooters. Participants will shoot against others of the similar abilities.

For more information about the Hermiston Gun Club, visit www.facebook.com/hermistongunclub.