

Bears whip Maroons for regional title
by JOHN HENSON, Harlan Daily Enterprise



Even before they could make it home from a 40-7 thrashing at the hands of Pulaski County in late August, senior defensive end Jordan Calton and the Harlan County Black Bears were plotting their revenge.

(Image: Harlan County's Dylon Smith fought for yardage during the Bears' 35-21 victory over Pulaski County in the 5A regional championship game on Friday.)

Payback was especially sweet Friday as the Bears rolled to a 35-21 win at James A. Cawood field, capturing the school's first

regional title and the first for a Harlan County team since Scott Russell and the Evarts Wildcats upset Pikeville in 1990.

"We said after they beat us we would meet them again and it will be a different outcome," said Calton, who was selected District 8 player of the year earlier this week.

Calton and the HCHS defense controlled the high-powered Pulaski offense, limiting the Maroons to only 51 yards rushing while sacking Pulaski quarterback Zach Eastham seven times.

"They are a pressure defense, and we just didn't do a very good job picking up the blitz," Pulaski County coach Johnny Hines said. "I made some bad calls and got ourselves in a hole early in the first quarter trying to score too quickly instead of getting a drive going. We made a lot of mistakes all the way around. But I don't want to take anything away from Harlan County. It was their night. They played terrific all night long, from start to finish. I congratulate them."

The regional title was the fifth for Harlan County coach Tom Larkey, who won four at Rockcastle County before taking over the HCHS program when the school opened in 2008.

“Our kids have worked hard and improved,” Larkey said. “Coach (Ovie) Canady put four men on the line this time to put pressure on the quarterback, and that really helped us a lot.”

Harlan County (11-2) also controlled the line of scrimmage on the offensive side. The Bears rolled up 384 yards on the ground, led by Dylon Smith with 178 yards and Marcus McMillian with 124.

“Offensively, we’ve just matured on the line of scrimmage,” Larkey said. “The first time we played we could barely get a first down.”

“They did a great job on the offensive line,” Hines said. “We felt like if they were able to control the ball, control the clock, that’s the style they want to play, and we’d be in for a long night. That’s exactly what happened.”

The Bears set the tone for the night on their opening possession, marching 90 yards in nine plays as Smith and McMillian took turns ripping off big gains. Smith went the final 2 yards over the left side of the line for a 6-0 lead with 7:57 to play in the first quarter. Logan Joseph blocked Josh Jenkins’ extra point attempt.

Pulaski County (11-2) broke through with a big play early in the second quarter as Eastham found running back Alex Abner with a pass that turned into a 68-yard scoring play when McMillian slipped after the catch. Andrew Patton’s extra point gave the Maroons a 7-6 lead with 6:43 to play in the second quarter.

Harlan County answered with a five-play, 66-yard drive highlighted by Smith’s 50-yard run. McMillian scored on a 3-yard run on the next play, then added the two-point conversion for a 14-7 HCHS lead with 4:44 left in the second quarter.

The Bears slowly won the battle of field position in the third quarter and got the ball on the Pulaski 35 after holding the Maroons following a 41-yard Skylar Saylor punt to the Pulaski 5.

McMillian scored seven plays later on a 9-yard run over the left side of the line. Jenkins’ extra point stretched the Bears’ lead to 21-7 with 24.3 seconds left in the period.

Harlan County got the ball back four plays later and needed only three plays to reach the end zone as Smith rumbled 24 yards with 10:11 left in the game.

Another touchdown pass from Eastham to Abner, this one covering 11 yards with 9:32 left, helped Pulaski cut the deficit to 14.

A McMillian interception with 5:30 to play set up the final HCHS touchdown as Middleton muscled his way into the end zone from the 10. Jenkins’ extra point gave the Bears a 35-14 lead with 2:14 to play.

Eastham ran 24 yards for a touchdown with 1:09 left. Harlan County senior tackle Brian Owens was tackled on the play as he rushed Eastham, but the Bears didn't get a call and the touchdown stood.

Pulaski got the ball back on a fumbled handoff but ran out of time at the Harlan County 10.

Harlan County will play host to Fort Thomas Highlands on Friday in the state semifinals. The winner advances to the 5A state championship game in Bowling Green against the winner of the Christian County-John Hardin game.

Pulaski County 0 7 0 14 — 21

Harlan County 6 8 7 14 — 35

HC — Smith 2 run (kick blocked)

PC — Abner 68 pass from Eastham (Patton kick)

HC — McMillian 3 run (McMillian run)

HC — McMillian 9 run (Jenkins kick)

HC — Smith 24 run (Jenkins kick)

PC — Abner 11 pass from Eastham (Patton kick)

HC — Middleton 10 run (Jenkins kick)

PC — Eastham 24 run (Patton kick)

PCHS HCHS

First downs 15 20

Rushes-yards 22-51 54-384

Passing 194 2

Comp-Att-Int 13-27-1 1-3-0

Punts-Avg 4-31 3-35

Fumbles-Lost 1-0 1-1

Penalties-Yards 11-80 11-115

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING—Pulaski County, Abner 7-21, Eastham 14-21, Haste 1-9. Harlan County, Smith 20-178, McMillian 21-124, Middleton 6-53, Brewer 7-29.

PASSING—Pulaski County, Eastham 13-27-1-194. Harlan County, Brewer 1-3-1-2.

RECEIVING—Pulaski County, Abner 7-161, Hall 2-24, Wesley 2-6, McQueen 2-3. Harlan County, Maggard 1-2.

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