Malvern's gridiron defense shuts down St. Joe's Prep with 21-10 win

* By Bruce Adams Sep 12, 2001

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MALVERN - About the only thing hotter than the weather last Saturday afternoon at Malvern Prep's Quigley Field was the Friars' defense, which kept St. Joe Prep out of the end zone for the last 47 minutes of a 21-10 win.

After St. Joe's Prep star running back Kyle Ambrogi rumbled 76 yards for a touchdown on just the third play from scrimmage, Malvern Prep's defense held the visitors to just one field goal the rest of the way.

Malvern Prep coach Gamp Pellegrini said, "I was surprised we could stop them like we did [the rest of the game]. We talked about Ambrogi all week in practice. His spirit was here with us all week. I knew if we didn't stop him, we would be in big trouble. You have to give a lot of credit to [defensive tackle Shawn] Quinn, [defensive tackle Michael] Meehan, [defensive end] T.J. Cascio and (defensive end) Eric Moore up front, and our linebackers - they did a good job."

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Cascio, who made several quarterback sacks, said, "We knew that if we could dominated the line of scrimmage, we could win. Once we were able to stop Ambrogi, we knew they'd have to come to the passing game. We have a strong [defensive] secondary, and our [defensive] line just kept putting pressure on the quarterback, and we shut them down."

Pellegrini said, "I also thought our secondary did well - [defensive backs] Kevin Barr, D.J. Driscoll, Robert McCarrigle. We covered the pass well. We did a lot of man-to-man defense, and we did a lot of blitzing, and I think we had quite a few sacks. Barr and Driscoll are outstanding football players, so we put them on the corners out there - they can cover, and they can run and catch the ball."

The contest marked a resumption of a rivalry that hadn't been played for more than a decade.

"This was a very emotional game for me from the standpoint that three of the St. Joe's coaching staff [Gil Brooks, Greg Mellvain and Bill Kerrigan] played for me at St. Joe's Prep when I was [coach] there," said Gamp. "I felt proud because I felt that maybe I did something positive for those guys 30 years ago."

The Malvern coach added, "I hope the series will continue, because I think it's a game between what I consider are two premier Catholic boys' high schools."

After SJP drew first blood Saturday with Ambrogi's 76-yard touchdown reception, Malvern came back two plays later with a 61-yard touchdown reception by Driscoll. The Malvern receiver cut across the middle of the field, grabbed a medium-range pass from quarterback Matt Skellan and maneuvered into the end zone.

"Driscoll has great hands and good speed," said Pellegrini. "That play wasn't designed to be a touchdown, but I'll take it. We've got some good receivers - Kevin Barr has speed and good hands, and our tight end, Chris Emper, is an outstanding player, too."

A bad snap on an SJP punt attempt led to the second Malvern touchdown. From that point on, Malvern's defense shut down SJP, despite the scrambling of SJP quarterback Vince Gallagher.

"I didn't realize [Gallagher] is as slippery as he was today," said Pellegrini. "A lot of their completions were because he ran around [in the backfield]. He had some good receivers to throw to. I knew [St. Joe's Prep's] Jim Lachman and Pete Chromiak are excellent receivers, and [SJP's] Pat Kaiser is a very good back. "

Gallagher's scrambles did not make things any easier for the Malvern defense in Saturday's heated temperatures.

"Both teams were dying in the heat out there - the heat was brutal," said Pellegrini. "We had guys playing both ways out there, and it was a great tribute to the kids to step it up the way they did."

When Malvern back Mike Treston made a nice 17-yard run into the end zone midway through the third quarter, it put SJP into a 21-10 deficit from which they did not recover.

Malvern kicker/punter Brendan Carney also played a role in stopping the SJP offense, booting several punts greater than 50 yards and nailing several kickoffs out of the end zone, negating any possible long run-backs.

Pellegrini said of Carney: "I don't know if you're going to see another high-school punter that can kick the ball like he can. He's really an outstanding kicker - a weapon by himself."