

Malvern Prep on top from the start

The Friars dominated Downingtown, 35-7. So much for "a great game, tight all the way."

By Rich Fisher
INQUIRER SUBURBAN STAFF

MALVERN — Key moments or drives can happen any time during a football game. But on Saturday, Malvern Prep wasted little time in establishing its most important possession — its first.

With its offense struggling during the season's first two weeks, the Friars took the opening kickoff and drove 77 yards on 11 plays for a touchdown.

That set the tone for Malvern Prep, which took a surprisingly one-sided 35-7 victory over visiting Downingtown. The Whippets (2-2), who entered the game as the No. 3 team in The Inquirer's suburban football rankings, have won the last five Chest-Mont League titles. Malvern Prep (3-0), the No. 4 team going in, is the two-time Inter-Academic League champion.

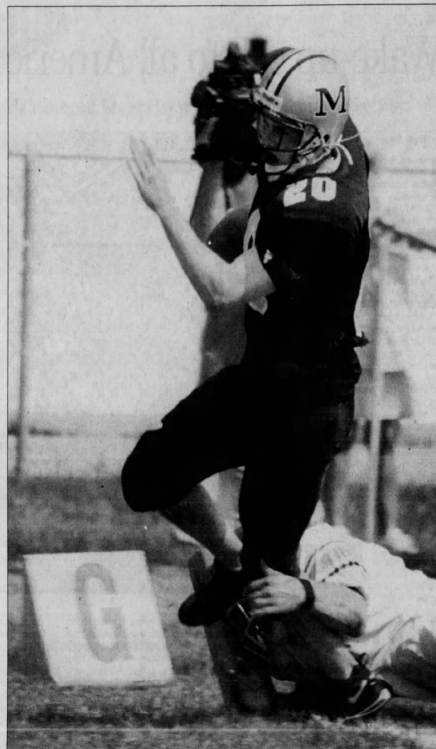
But the Friars have nearly everyone back from last year's team, while the Whippets suffered heavy graduation losses. Malvern Prep amassed 311 yards on offense, including 229 on the ground. The Friars nearly equaled the combined offensive output of their first two wins this season.

"Our offense was not clicking to the point where I thought we could play these guys and beat them," Friars coach Gamp Pellegrini said. "But after that first drive, obviously they started believing they could do it."

Fullback T.J. Cascio had 46 of his 71 yards on the Friars' first possession, which was capped by his 4-yard touchdown run and the first of five Brendan Carney PATs.

The Friars used their run to set up the pass effectively. Quarterback Matt Skellan finished the day 8 for 10 for 82 yards and a touchdown. He found Chris Emper for a 24-yard gain on the opening drive.

"In the past two games, the other teams scored first both times," Cascio said. "So when we scored that first touch-



Malvern Prep's Michael Treston cuts across the goal line for a touchdown despite the effort of Downingtown's Eric Sharp. Saturday's game was surprisingly one-sided.

down, we were thrilled. We knew we could beat them." "It definitely gave us confidence," Skellan said.

Malvern received solid line play from tackles Shawn Quinn and Stefan Niemczyk center Jeff Carroll, and guards Michael Meehan and Stephen Fischer, who was filling in for the injured Mike Walsh.

"The blocking couldn't have been better," Cascio said. "Without them, nothing was going to happen. The mentality was just to come out here and drive down the field."

Michael Treston's 19-yard touchdown run capped Malvern's second possession and gave the Friars a 14-0 lead.

Downingtown's defense finally stiffened. With 1 minute, 32 seconds left in the first half, the Whippets started an 80-yard drive that ended with Matt Helm's 10-yard touchdown pass to Geoff Paugan. The score came just 6 seconds before the half.

"I felt when we scored in our two-minute drill that we were back in the game," Whippets coach Jack Helm said.

With momentum on its side, Downingtown received the second-half kickoff. But on the first play from scrimmage, Michael Melvin intercepted for Malvern. Nine plays later, Emper caught a 5-yard touchdown pass to make it 21-7.

On Malvern's next possession, Skellan scored a back-breaking touchdown when he broke loose for a 74-yard run that made it 28-7 with 2:02 left in the third quarter. He dodged several tacklers along the way.

"Skellan had a career day throwing the ball, and that run was as good as you'll ever see," Pellegrini said.

Malvern's final score came on the first of two interceptions by Kevin Barr, who returned it 75 yards for a TD.

"We thought this would be a great game, tight all the way," Skellan said. "If anybody told me it would be 35-7, I would think they were crazy."

Downingtown, which started Matt Helm at quarterback for the first time, showed flashes of offense but usually did something to halt themselves. The Whippets had only 135 rushing yards, and Helm was 16 for 30 for 196 yards with four interceptions.

"The thing is, we're just not a very good football team right now," said Jack Helm, who is Matt's father. "If I had the answers, we'd push the buttons. I wish it was that easy."

Rich Fisher's e-mail address is rfisher@phillynews.com.

2001 MP 35 Downingtown 7

Clipped By:



Rcarey5171
Wed, Dec 30, 2020