

Oilers edge Irish Blizzard in battle for first place

Worcester Telegram & Gazette

August 12, 2008

Randolph 29 Clinton 28

RANDOLPH - After a Friday evening postponement, the Clinton Irish Blizzard and the Randolph Oilers finally dodged the rain and locked horns Sunday night in an Eastern Football League battle between 2-1 teams.

The result was a thriller, with the teams combining for 30 fourth quarter points. In the end, the Oilers rallied to defeat the Blizzard 29-28 at Randolph High School.

The game, which featured a lot of offense, went down to the wire. Clinton led throughout before Randolph rallied and scored with 1:35 left in regulation.

Randolph opted for a two-point conversion try and successfully converted to gain a 29-28 lead. Clinton drove to the Randolph 30-yard line with a minute remaining, but a John Riccio to Matt Surette pass was picked off and Randolph held on to edge Clinton in a battle for sole possession of first place in the EFL.

Clinton falls to 2-2 on the season, while Randolph improves to 3-1.

Clinton took the opening drive 66 yards in eight plays, with Scott Allard and Ty Gamble doing most of the work on the ground. The two running backs combined for 49 yards on the drive before Gamble scored from two yards out to give Clinton a 7-0 lead after a successful Jamie Cairns kick.

Clinton's fourth offensive possession was just as impressive, with the Irish Blizzard marching 62 yards in 11 plays. Riccio completed four passes during the drive, including three to Jim Learned, and Allard added 20 yards on the ground.

Learned eventually took a handoff from Riccio and blasted in from 4 yards out, giving Clinton a 14-0 second-quarter lead.

Randolph answered just before the half when quarterback Ryan Myers threw a 20-yard touchdown pass as time expired, closing the gap to 14-7 heading into the break.

The Oilers got on the board again in the third quarter when a 9-yard Myers touchdown pass made it a 14-13 football game after Clinton blocked the extra point attempt. That set the stage for a wild fourth quarter, with each team scoring twice and Randolph converting a pair of two-point conversions.

As Clinton gained possession in the fourth quarter, Allard took a handoff from Riccio and raced 78 yards before being hauled down at the Oilers 10. Riccio immediately hit Lorin Reed in the corner of the end zone, extending Clinton's lead to 21-13.

Randolph answered with a touchdown drive and two-point conversion, knotting the game at 21.

The Irish Blizzard responded with Riccio going up top to Reed for a 50-yard touchdown strike. Clinton now held a 28-21 lead with 3:03 left in the fourth quarter.

However, the Oilers again answered the bell, taking the ensuing kickoff out to midfield. Randolph quickly marched down the field and scored with 1:35 remaining in the game.

Randolph lined up for a two-point conversion and connected on a successful pass attempt, assuming a 29-28 lead.

Clinton looked to be in a position to score late when Riccio hit Learned on consecutive passes to give Clinton a first and 10 at the Oilers 30 with a minute remaining, but the Oilers defense came up with a big turnover. A Riccio to Surette pass deep in Randolph territory was intercepted, sealing a 29-28 win for the Oilers.

Clinton's offense was paced by its rushing attack, with Nate Orcutt, Jeff Learned, Jon Davies, Josue Diaz, and Matt Kronopolus opening holes for the Irish Blizzard running backs.

Clinton rushed for 195 yards and two scores on the night. Allard led the attack with 129 yards on 11 carries, and Gamble contributed 58 yards on 10 carries with a touchdown.

Quarterback Riccio completed 12 of 18 attempts for 145 yards and two scores. Learned led all receivers with six catches, while Reed added 80 yards receiving and two touchdown catches.

Clinton's defense got solid performances from Roger Blaikie, Jamie Cairns, and Luis Rodriguez on the defensive line. The trio combined for two sacks and four tackles for a loss.

Alex Mitchell and Alejandro Miranda paced the linebackers, combining for 13 stops. Chris Leblanc played well in the secondary, notching an impressive four pass breakups, and Derek Guimond also played well from his free safety position.

Clinton (2-2) is back in action Saturday when it travels to Charlestown High School to face off against the Charlestown Townies (2-2). Kickoff has been moved back to a 7 p.m. start.

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