

SHS Duo honored as SAFE Players of the Week

June, VanPatten also recognized by Sumter TD Club presented by FTC

By Dennis Brunson

Sumter High School head football coach Mark Barnes thought his Gamecocks needed a stellar performance to defeat Ashley Ridge in the first round of the AAAAA playoffs on Sumter Memorial Stadium's Freddie Solomon Field.

And that's what the veteran head coach got – on both sides of the ball. The SHS defense held a Swamp Foxes offense averaging more than 40 points a game to just six points until the final play of the game. The offense had almost 400 yards of total offense, 300 on the dot coming via the running game.

Cornerback Cammorrie Wells led the defense with 10 tackles and had one of Sumter's five interceptions while center Ashton Barr led the charge up front opening holes for running backs John Peebles and Kam Fortune. Because of their performances, Wells has been selected as the SAFE Defensive Player of the Week and Barr as the Lineman of the Week for the Sumter Touchdown Club presented by FTC.

The other two selections for the SAFE Players of the Week are Laurence Manning Academy quarterback Tyler June as the Offensive Player of the Week and Wilson Hall kick returner Blake VanPatten as the Special Teams Player of the Week.

The foursome will be honored at the club's weekly breakfast meeting on Friday at the Sumter County Recreation and Parks' and Jasmine Hall located at 155 Haynsworth Street. Breakfast will start at 7 a.m. with the program beginning at 7:30. The guest speaker will be The Citadel football head coach Maurice Drayton.

DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE WEEK

CAMORRIE WELLS

SUMTER

CORNERBACK

SENIOR

Wells had 10 tackles, one tackle for loss, one interception and one pass breakup. While Ashley Ridge was known for its prolific offense led by 6-foot-5-inch, 205-pound wide receiver Derrick Salley Jr. -- who had 100 catches for almost 2,000 yards coming into the contest -- the Gamecocks were also focused on taking away the running game led by Jayden Acosta.

While Acosta finished with 76 yards on 18 carries, 17 of those came on one run and 24 of the yards came on his first three carries of the game.

Wells was getting a lot of work in run support.

"They just kept running the ball my way," said Wells, who had a season high in tackles. "I was fortunate to get to the running back and make the tackles.

"We performed well overall. We were game planning (Salley and Acosta). We just came prepared and ready to play. It was just a matter of getting in the flow early in the game. We knew the game plan. It was just that we had to execute and playing at game speed."

“He did a good job,” Barnes said. “He was strong in coverage and adding himself to the outside runs, the quick screens, the tunnel screens. For his size (5-11, 155), he’s very physical. One of the things we like about him is he doesn’t mind getting in there and mixing it up.”

OFFENSIVE LINEMAN OF THE WEEK

ASHTON BARR

SUMTER

CENTER

SENIOR

Barr graded out at 93 percent and had two knockdown blocks as the Gamecocks rushed for 300 yards. As impressive as the 300 yards looks, perhaps the more impressive number was Sumter had no yards lost running the football.

Barr, a 5-10, 245-pound senior center, does more than just snap the ball and then find someone to block. He starts run game communication for the rest of the offensive line and calls out protections.

“I felt pretty good,” Barr said. “The coaches did a great job preparing us and coaching us a lot more during the game. It’s one of the best games we’ve played. We were able to open it up for the running backs.”

Barnes is happy Barr was selected because he’s been a consistent performer.

“He’s done great job all year at center after a year where we struggled at center so much,” Barnes said.

“He’s been consistent snapping all year, he knows how to use his body to get in the right position to overtake the noseguard.

“His greatest trait is getting where he needs to be. He does a good job recognizing the fronts the defense is in and getting us where we need to be. I’m extremely pleased he was selected for this award. Sometimes the guys who are consistent week in and week out get overlooked.”

OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE WEEK

TYLER JUNE

LAURENCE MANNING

QUARTERBACK

SENIOR

June completed 8 of 9 passes for 154 yards and five touchdowns while rushing for 24 yards and another touchdown in the Swampcats' 49-13 win over Heathwood Hall in the first round of the SCISA AAAA playoffs.

“Tyler had a very efficient day,” said LMA head coach Will Furse. “We ran the ball well, but we were just trying to find some balance. We’re always happy to score no matter how we do it.”

Heathwood Hall made a point to take away Laurence Manning’s leading receiver, Josiah Burson. June, in turn, tossed two touchdown passes apiece to fullback Wayne Bowen and wide receiver Jackson Brunson and one to wide receiver Noah Tanner.

“I was throwing to other guys I know can make plays,” June said. “The offensive line was doing a good job protecting and we were just clicking.”

After splitting time at quarterback with freshman Grainger Powell for the first half of the season and playing some wide receiver and in the secondary on defense, June has been seeing most of the time behind center down the stretch.

June just wants to do what he can to help the Swampcats win.

“It was a different role at the beginning of the season,” June said. “I’ve been at quarterback most of the games lately. Hopefully we’ll keep on playing like we have.”

“He’s done really well with it,” Furse said. “His best position is quarterback, and that’s where he’s been playing mostly as of late. He’s gotten better. I’ve been coaching him since he was a freshman. He’s one of the best in the state, in my opinion. Hopefully we’ll continue to improve along with him.”

SPECIAL TEAMS PLAYER OF THE WEEK

BLAKE VANPATTEN

KICK RETURNER

SENIOR

VanPatten returned a kickoff 80 yards for a touchdown in the Barons' 49-28 victory over Northwood in the first round of the SCISA AAA playoffs.

VanPatten’s touchdown return closed out the victory for Wilson Hall. Northwood was making a late charge, having scored to make it 42-28 in the fourth quarter. The Chargers initially tried an onside kick on the ensuing kickoff but were penalized for being offsides. They decided to kick it deep and VanPatten gathered in the ball at the Wilson Hall 20-yard line.

He was the only one who was back deep because Wilson Hall had its hands team in anticipating an onside kick. He was surprised when the ball came his way.

“I started bobbling it, then it hit off my helmet,” said VanPatten, who fielded the ball in the middle of the field. “I said, ‘Oh crap, they’re coming.’ I started off jogging as I looked for a hole. I saw an opening and went right through it (down the right sideline).”

VanPatten also caught a 28-yard touchdown pass and returned an interception 78 yards for a score as well.

“So I had a touchdown on offense, defense and special teams,” he said. “That’s the first time I’ve ever done that.”

“He’s one of our faster guys, and he’s been a big playmaker the last few years,” said Wilson Hall head coach Adam Jarecki. “We try to find ways to get him the ball. People will try to double him up, so we move him around and try to do different things. He runs kicks back, we have him at split end catching the ball and running some as well. We use him all over the place. He’s one of the pieces of the puzzle, and we use him as much as we can.”