

Yates, Moody cap off week with TD Club awards

Bryant, Murray also recognized for their performances

By Dennis Brunson

Crestwood High School had not beaten crosstown rival Sumter in football since the 2013 season. But that came to an end for the Knights on Friday with a 27-21, double-overtime victory on Sumter Memorial Stadium's Freddie Solomon Field.

And while the players who ended the 9-game losing streak were in elementary school when it started, the significance of the accomplishment was not lost on them.

"We hadn't beaten them in so long," said senior running back Azarian Yates. "They (Sumter) were saying this, saying that, that they were going to blow us out. We were able to prove everybody wrong."

"It was a great feeling," said senior wide receiver/defensive back Khalil Moody. "It was about redemption, respect for us. We went out there and got straight to business. This is my favorite game I've ever played in."

It was more than just the significance of the victory that made Moody feel that way. It was his performance and that of Yates, for that matter. Moody blocked a 32-yard field goal on the final play of regulation to send the game into overtime and Yates scored the game-ending touchdown on Crestwood's second possession of overtime. Because of those plays and a several others, Moody is the SAFE Special Teams Player of the Week and Yates is the Offensive Player of the Week for the Sumter Touchdown Club presented by FTC.

The other two selections are Kingstree linebacker Rodney Bryant as Defensive Player of the Week and Manning left guard Javon Murray as the Lineman of the Week.

The quartet will be honored at the club's weekly breakfast meeting on Friday at the Sumter County Recreation and Park's 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 Wes Mitchell of Gamecock Central.

OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE WEEK

AZARIAN YATES

CRESTWOOD

RUNNING BACK

SENIOR

Along with the game-winning 4-yard score, Yates carried the football 25 times for 168 yards and caught two passes for 25 more. Crestwood head coach Roosevelt Nelson said Yates' contribution to the offense is sometimes overlooked because of 4-year starting quarterback Javion Martin and his bevy of wide receivers.

“Our offense is at its best when Azarian is running like that,” Nelson said. “Our passing game gets a lot of credit, but we’re very underrated when it comes to the running game.”

Yates, a 6-foot, 211-pound senior, said the offensive line did a great job for him from the outset.

“The running game was there,” Yates said. “I was running physical and everything. There is always going to be stuff I need to improve on, but I feel like I did pretty good.”

On the touchdown, it appeared as if Yates was going to be stopped for no gain. However, he broke out of the pack and got into the end zone.

“I was able to spin out of it and the touchdown was right there,” he said.

DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE WEEK

RODNEY BRYANT

KINGSTREE

LINEBACKER

SENIOR

Bryant had two interceptions, returning one 40 yards for a touchdown, to go with five tackles and four tackles for loss in the Blazers' 34-20 victory over Green Sea Floyds. Also, Bryant ran for 111 yards and three touchdowns on 11 carries in his first game in the offensive backfield.

“He had an unbelievable game,” said Kingstree head coach Brian Smith. “He dictated the pace of the game on both sides of the ball. He’s a big reason we won the game.”

The interception return for a touchdown came in the first quarter. He made a correct read and jumped in between the football and running back on a screen pass and took it down the left sideline for the score.

“They thought I wasn't coming to the running back,” the senior linebacker said. “They didn’t know I was right there.”

Bryant credited the play of the line for giving him the opportunity to be such a disruptive force in the game.

“My line made it easy for me to get to the hole,” he said. “They made a big hole for me to go through where I could make the plays. I was depending on my line.”

LINEMAN OF THE WEEK

JAVON MURRAY

MANNING

LEFT GUARD

SENIOR

Murray graded out at 95 percent in helping the Monarchs rush for 291 yards and accumulate 393 yards of total offense in their 32-6 win over Lake Marion.

Murray, a 6-2, 280-pound senior, is in his third year as a starter for Manning. After two years starting at left guard, he was moved to left tackle to start this season. However, the decision was made to move him back inside and he is thriving there.

“He's real mobile for his size,” Monarch head coach Reggie Kennedy said. “With what we do, the guards pull a lot so we decided to move him back to guard. Having an experienced guard makes us a lot better. We pull him a lot.

“He had a lot to do with what we did on Friday. It was good to see him lead us with him being a senior.”

Murray said he was motivated for the contest by Manning’s 27-13 loss to the Gators last season. He even referenced the Battle of the Bridge trophy given to the winner of this game each season. The name of the trophy comes from the fact that the two schools are basically separated by Lake Marion and the Interstate 95 bridge that crosses over it.

“To be honest, I just wanted my trophy back,” Murray said. “I knew I had to get in my zone, open up gaps for the people in the backfield to run through, let them do their jobs.”

SPECIAL TEAMS PLAYER OF THE WEEK

KHALIL MOODY

CRESTWOOD

ATHLETE

SENIOR

Along with blocking the field goal, Moody also returned two punts for 37 yards and had two solo tackles on special teams. Along with that, Moody also had an interception in the end zone to end Sumter’s second overtime possession. And to cap it off, he caught a 60-yard pass.

Nelson likes having the senior cornerback/wide receiver on his sideline.

“Khalil Moody affects games in all three phases,” Nelson said. “What he did on Friday wasn’t a surprise to me in any way. You practice like you play and Khalil works hard in practice.

On the blocked field goal, Moody raced in from the right side and laid out to get the ball just after it came off the foot of Gamecock placekicker Alex Krivejko. Crestwood called a timeout prior to the ball being snapped. Sumter went through with the kick and that allowed the Knights an opportunity to talk over their approach on rushing the kicker.

“Coach Nelson told me what I needed to do,” said Moody, who holds an offer from Marshall to play football. “[He told me to get low, go full speed, and I would get the block, and that's what happened.”

“We actually discussed that in a special teams meeting,” Nelson said. “We thought we had it where we could beat the block, and I just told him to go get it. We had confidence he would get it down.”