Ponte Vedra Stuns Florida State High with Comeback Victory

Ponte Vedra mastered the two-minute drill to perfection with a thrilling come from behind 23-22 road victory Friday night over Florida State High. Third year

starting quarterback Ben Burk directed the offense brilliantly to secure the win, just moments after Michahi Danzy’s dazzling catch and run of 79 yards appeared to have secured victory for the home team. Danzy, a Florida State commit, brought the home crowd to its feet when it looked like the Sharks had Florida High doomed as they were faced with a long 3rd and 25 to go to pick up a first down. Danzy broke a tackle after receiving a short pass over the middle and then used his four-star speed to race into the end zone to give Florida High a 22-17 lead with but two minutes remaining. Shark defensive back Ridge Richardson made a shoe-string tackle of a Seminole running back just inches away from the goal line on a two-point attempt that ultimately proved to be a huge play.

After the ensuing kickoff went into the endzone for a touchback, Burk began his by heroics orchestrating an 80-yard drive to pay dirt in eight plays. Burk first connected with Griffin Owen for a 25 yards completion that moved the ball to the Shark 45. After Burk scrambled for six-yards he then completed a pair of passes to Cole Madson for 27 and 19 yards to move the ball down to the Florida High 3-yard line. Two plays later Brian Case powered over from the one-yard line with just 13 seconds left on the clock to make the final score read Ponte Vedra 23 Florida State High 22.

However, with time for only one more play, Danzy threw a scare into the Sharks as he nearly broke away for another long TD gallop but again it was Ridge Richardson who made his second big defensive stop to bring down Danzy as time ran out.

Third year Ponte Vedra coach Steve Price showered nothing but praise on Burk’s performance. “He’s a really good quarterback,’ said Price. “You can really see that he has played quarterback for three years. I’m really pleased that Ben is enjoying his senior year, he’s a fine young man for sure.” Added Price.

The Sharks spotted Florida High an early 3-0 lead but regained the lead on a nine-yard TD run by Junior running back Brian Case. Florida High then took 9-7 lead into halftime when they scored on a 4th and four play late in the second quarter. The Seminoles then padded their lead to 16-7 in the third quarter on a 44-yard TD scamper from Danzi. The Sharks bounced back to make it a one score ball game on the first play of the final period. Looking at fourth down and eight at the Florida High 35, Burk received text-book protection from his front offensive line of sophomore tackles Brody McLeod and Colin Butler, guards Rocco Garcia and Jovanni Mackenzie, and center Jake Guarnera. Showing his poise, Burk stayed in the pocket and threw a perfect pass to Ryan Smith to cut the lead to 16-14.

On Florida High’s next possession, a sack from sophomore defensive tackle JP Dolan forced a Florida State punt. The Sharks than began a methodical 75-yard drive to take the lead 17-16 on a 25-yard field goal by Evan Redmond with four minutes remaining. The game’s final four minutes were filled with huge plays with the victory not secured until Richardson’s game saving tackle.

Burk had his best day as a Shark by completing 15 of 21 passes to five different receivers for 219 yards. Burk also ran for a tough 60 yards to give him a total of 279 yards against a very strong opponent. With a number of returning veterans from a 2022 team that won 14 straight games before losing in overtime to Cocoa in the state championship game, Florida High came into this season with the highest of expectations. According to coach Price they had been ranked as high as the 21st best team in the state in all divisions.

 Madson also had a career day as the senior wideout caught nine passes for 121 yards. Case was a workhorse as a running back by rushing for 110 yards and two touchdowns.

“I thought we made some good strides and we need to just continue to improve. It’s amazing the improvement from game one to game two, especially the work of our offensive line,” said Price.

In addition to a couple of key tackles from Richardson, Price had the highest of praise for defensive back Joe Mahoney. “I’ve coached a long time and Joe is the best technician corner that I have ever had. He’s really – really good,” gushed Price. Mahoney completely locked down Florida High’s four-star receiver Ashton Hampton who had zero receptions for the entire game. Mahoney knocked down three Seminole passes and also made a huge play in the game when Florida High took the lead at 9-7. Mahoney streaked through to block the attempted extra point in a game that was decided by one point.

 With their record now at 1-1 after their opening game loss to highly ranked Bartram Trail by a slim three points, the Sharks will take their bye week this Friday before hosting Middleburg on Friday September 15. The Sharks should be in good health for their encounter with Middleburg as coach Price stated that his team came out of the Florida High game with only a few bumps and bruises.

Submitted by Jim Moyes