

Giants advance, defeat Indians in high-scoring affair

By Sean Douglas

The last time that the Marion Giants and the Mississinewa Indians met on the gridiron - one year ago - the Indians kicked a field goal, as time expired at Dick Lootens Stadium, to win their second sectional title in three years.

On Friday night in Gas City, the Giants enacted some revenge, and began their playoff run with an impressive victory over their longtime rival.

Behind over 300 yards rushing and some key defensive plays in crucial situations, the Giants overcame an all-world performance from Indians' running back Carson Campbell and advanced to the second round of the Sectional 20 playoffs with a 49-28 victory.

On a cold, rainy evening, the two teams combined for nearly 800 yards of offense, most of which came on the ground. Khalid Stamps rushed for a remarkable 207 yards and two touchdowns on 23 carries, while Malachi Silmon added 50 yards and two scores of his own for Marion. Campbell put together one of his best performances of his high school career, rushing for 257 yards and three touchdowns, as well as collecting a receiving touchdown, against a stout Giants' defense.

"He was a man out here," Mississinewa Head Coach Kyle Buresh said. "All week, I told him that he needed to be the toughest guy on the planet this week. That's exactly what he was tonight. He was an animal. He was taking shots and getting right back up. I'm really happy to have him for another year."

Despite the final score, both teams got off to a sluggish start. The Giants went three-and-out on their first possession, and while they got the ball back on a muffed punt, could only muster eight yards before punting again. Mississinewa did not fare much better, failing to pick up a first down on their first drive.

However, on their ensuing drive, Marion went more uptempo offensively,

running plays quickly and preventing the Indians from catching their breath on defense.

The strategy worked to perfection, and it changed the course of the contest.

"We do a lot of different things. We've got three or four different packages that we use, and we finally got our kids understanding that," Marion Head Coach James Bell said. "We use what we have to use, and [running uptempo] made a difference for us. We put as much speed on the field as we can."

Starting at their own 20, the Giants drove 80 yards in 13 plays, grabbing the lead on a two-yard plunge by Malachi Silmon.

"That definitely caught us off guard, and they did a great job with that," Buresh said. "We were just playing high. We weren't keeping our leverage on the perimeter, and we allowed too much room in that cutback area for them."

The Indians, behind strong running from Campbell and quarterback Landry Rock, were able to tie the contest on their ensuing possession, embarking on a seven-play, 68-yard drive. On 3rd-and-21 from the 21-yard line, Rock found Campbell out of the backfield, and the Indians' star did the rest, taking the ball to the house.

Campbell took advantage of the running lanes his offensive line provided for him, making defensive players miss in the open field and picking up big chunks of yards on a majority of his carries.

"The offensive line did a really good job of creating lanes for him to run," Buresh said. "You give Campbell a seam, he is going to make the most of it."

No matter the score, Campbell kept the Indians in the game with his effort and his toughness against a talented defense.

The two teams traded touchdowns midway through the second quarter in a span of 1:06. Ty Coleman, one of Marion's top cornerbacks, got some work in on offense, scoring a 16-yard touchdown to put the

Giants back on top. One play later, Campbell burst through the line, rushing 73 yards to tie the contest back up at 14.

However, the Giants quickly regained the advantage for good on their following drive, as Stamps answered with a 65-yard score just two plays after Campbell's long run.

"We just continued to battle," Bell said. "It's play-off time, it doesn't matter what the score is as long as we are ahead when the clock ticks down."

Marion kept the pedal down in the second half, scoring three more touchdowns. Silmon scored his second touchdown of the evening midway through the third quarter to put the Giants up three scores, before back-to-back defensive touchdowns - a 21-yard pick-six by Coleman and a fumble recovery in the end zone by linebacker Jekwan Williams late in the fourth quarter helped to put the game away.

Campbell recorded two more rushing touchdowns in the second half - one from 39 and another from 17 - but the Indians were unable to mount a comeback effort.

Marion will square off



Ty Coleman breaks a tackle on his way to the end zone. Coleman scored twice for Marion in their win over Mississinewa. Photo by Sean Douglas.

against Fort Wayne South Side this coming Friday in the second round of the Sectional 20 playoffs.

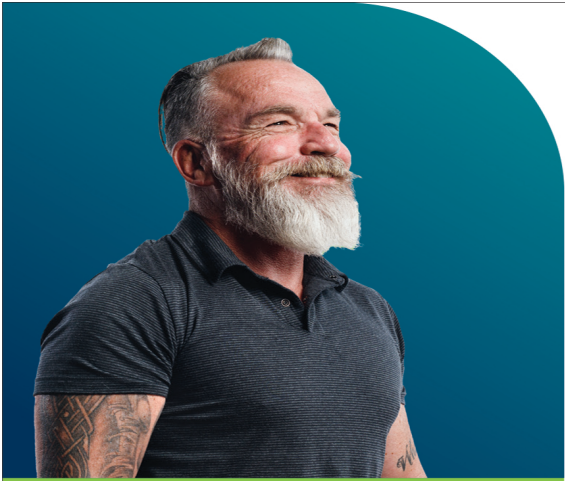
While the first season of the Buresh era came to a close on Friday, it can only be looked at as a resounding success. Despite playing under a new coach and

learning an entirely new system, the Indians only improved as the season progressed, becoming more acclimated to Buresh's scheme and playing better football as a result.

After a five-win campaign, Buresh is already

looking forward to next season.

"The growth and the development and the kid's understanding of what we are trying to do [has been incredible,] Buresh said. "I'm really excited for the future."



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