



The Giants won their fifth sectional championship on Friday night and their second in the last three years. **Photo by Sean Douglas**

# Giants grab sectional title

By Sean Douglas

It's said that offense wins games, but defense wins championships.

And it's an old adage that ran true-to form in the Sectional 20 championship game at Dick Lootens Stadium on Friday night.

The defense set the tone, the offense found its groove after a slow start, and the Marion Giants defeated the Delta Eagles, 38-21, to win their fifth sectional title in school history and their second title in the last three seasons.

"It feels great," Marion linemen Johnny Davis said. "It didn't end how we wanted it to last year, and to come back, go through adversity and all the odds, and just win it all, it feels great. It's a different feeling."

"It's unbelievable," Marion quarterback Cubie Jones added. "We came a long way. It was rough at the beginning of the season, but we just kept praying. People prayed for us. We are just blessed."

In what has been a tumultuous year, the Giants battled. They battled through a global pandemic. They went to work every day knowing that their season could end at any given moment.

And on Friday night, after all those trials and tribulations, they stood on the field together as one unit – and as Sectional 20 champions.

"Every day, we are just thankful," Marion Head Coach James Bell said. "It's not how you start, it's how you finish. The guys have done a great job. I'm at a loss for words. All I can say is I'm proud of these young men, I'm proud of the coaches, and it's just good to be here at Marion High School."

Delta, a predominantly run-heavy team, punched

## Up next

Marion will travel to Kendallville this coming Friday to take on East Noble for the regional championship. Kick off is 7:30 p.m.

Marion in the mouth in the early going. Their first two runs went for 60 yards, and in just three plays, they were in the red zone.

But in what would become a trend throughout the first half, the Giants' defense stiffened, and made plays in critical situations.

On 4<sup>th</sup>-and-4 from the Marion eight-yard line, Delta quarterback Brady Hunt rolled out to the right and fired a pass towards the end zone. However, Marion corner Ty Coleman read the play perfectly, coming up with the interception.

"They moved the ball down the field," Marion Head Coach James Bell said. "They got some big plays on us, but we got tough down there inside the 10, and we made the plays we had to."

In all, Delta had six drives in the first half, not including the final play they ran before the halftime horn sounded. Along with the interception, two drives ended in turnover on downs, two more ended in punts, and their final drive ended in fumble recovery for Marion's David Jones.

"It's a game of feeling each other out," Bell said. "We made some adjustments on defense, we started stopping them, and we started moving the ball. Then, we continued to score. That's what we do."

As the Marion offense worked to find their rhythm, their defense did their part to keep the Giants in the

contest. They bottled up the running lanes, they tightly covered Delta's wide receivers, and most importantly, made key stops.

"We knew we had to stop the run, foremost, because they are an 84-percent run team, but really, it was a statement game," Davis said. "We heard [people] say that defense is one of our weakest links, and to us, that offended us, and we knew we had to come out and execute and make a statement."

After a scoreless first quarter, Marion was finally able to break the scoreless in the latter stages of the second, embarking on a 11-play, 59-yard drive, capping it off with a 11 yard run from Khalid Stamps.

The Giants' defense collected another three-and-out shortly after, and it took Marion's offense just two plays to find the end zone again. Jones found a streaking Braxstin Delgado down the middle of the field and him in stride from 57-yards out, increasing Marion's lead to 14-0 at halftime.

"The defense pumped us up," Jones said. "They pumped us up."

Early in the third quarter, the Giants looked to put the game away. Stamps scored his second touchdown of the evening from 41 yards out to make it 21-0, and Jones followed with a 53-yard scamper of his own on the Giants' ensuing possession increased their lead to 28-0 with under six-and-a-half minutes to play in the quarter.

However, the Eagles would not go away quietly, switching to a more up-tempo style of offense that worked heavily in their favor. Evan Conley broke Marion's shutout bid with a three-yard touchdown run on Delta's next drive, and

after a Giants' three-and-out, Hunt recorded a 30-yard touchdown run to cut Marion's advantage to 28-14.

With momentum beginning to swing in Delta's favor, the Giants put together one of their most methodical drives of the evening, covering 55 yards and shaving nearly five minutes off the clock. Kyle Coryea would go on to nail the 34-yard field to put the Giants back up by three scores.

"We wanted to move the ball and manage the clock," Bell said. "That's what we do."

Delta would go on to score one more touchdown midway through the fourth quarter, but the Giants ran out the clock, adding one more Stamps touchdown, this time from 11 yards away, for a little extra insurance.

As a team, the Giants compiled 388 yards of offense. Jones finished 4-of-8 for 133 yards and a touchdown, while Stamps finished with 160 yards and three touchdowns on 25 carries. Jones also carried the ball 11 times for 65 yards and a touchdown.

"We have taken pride the last four years in creating and developing a running style and being able to run the ball no matter who you are," Bell said. "That's what we try to do, and we just find different ways to do it. It paid off tonight."

Marion will travel to Kendallville this coming Friday to take on East Noble for the regional championship, and the Giants are ready for their next challenge.

"We just have to do what we do," Davis said. "We know that work's not done and the mission is not done. We want state."

# Lady Norse top Mississinewa in season opener

By Sean Douglas

On Thursday night in Gas City, the Mississinewa Indians did not just lose their season opener against Northfield.

They may have lost much more.

Senior guard Darah Watson suffered an apparent knee injury in the first quarter, and issues in both the rebounding and turnover departments resulted in a 57-40 defeat.

Mississinewa struggled to hang on to the ball for most of the evening, committing 22 turnovers, many of which were unforced, and were outrebounded by a significant 40-21 margin. With a lack of size due to the departures of both Caily and Carly Bolser, the Norse took advantage, scoring on a plethora of putback layups and dominating the glass from start to finish.

With less than 10 seconds remaining in the first quarter, Watson drove to the hoop and went up for a shot. However, the whistle was blown for a foul, and Watson came down on her leg awkwardly, crumpling to the hardwood.

After laying on the floor for several minutes, Watson had to be carried off the floor, clearly in immense pain. She had issues with the same knee in the past, fracturing it a year-and-a-half prior, and finally seemed to be completely healthy after playing through her ailments last season.

Losing Watson, Mississinewa's top defender, a blossoming offensive threat, and a beloved teammate, would be catastrophic. Now, all that they and Head

Coach Laura Friday can do is hope that the injury was not as bad as it looked.

"I'm not sure exactly what it is, but I'm praying and hoping that it's something small that we can bounce back from," Friday said. "You could tell tonight that the team was a little deflated when she went out. She's our leader. She's our vocal leader. She's our scoring leader. That was tough. I love the kid, and I shed a couple of tears not knowing what's going on, but hopefully we will figure it out tonight and go from here."

After a rough first quarter in which the Indians only scored nine points, shot three-of-10 from the floor, turned the ball over six times, and suffered the shock of a potentially devastating injury, they played excellent basketball in the first five minutes of the second stanza. Alayna Webb scored eight of the Indians' first 10 points, including a pair of triples, to cut the Norse lead to 19-17. Marley Starnes followed with her first basket of the game to tie the contest at 19-19.

The two teams traded baskets to make it 21-21 with 3:16 to go, but the Norse, behind four points from Kyra Kennedy, ended the second quarter on an 8-0 run, taking a 29-21 lead at halftime.

Northfield put the game away in the third quarter, outscoring the Indians 19-7 and knocking down eight field goals in the process. Kennedy, Emma Hoover, Addi Baker, and Kenzie Stout all crashed the basket, and used their superior length to come away with rebounds and create easy

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Mississinewa's Alayna Webb drives to the hoop against Northfield's Kyra Kennedy during the Indians' home opener. **Photo by Sean Douglas**