

TRIBUNE-REVIEW

McKeesport star leads South to win

By Keith Barnes
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Anthony Becoate made his share of memorable plays while helping McKeesport to its first PIAA Class AAAA championship since 1995.

Just to make sure no one forgot about him, he made a huge impact on the Foothills Football Classic on Saturday at Norwin High School.

Becoate forced a fumble and recovered another in the first half, both of which led to South touchdowns to help his team to a 28-20 win over the North.

"I didn't know it was a fumble until I saw the official pointing the other way," Becoate said. "They were training us to watch the bootleg. I knew it was coming, and that's what we were waiting for."

With the South leading, 7-6, and the North stuck at its own 10, Burrell running back Tyler Henderson cut to the outside and had a lot of daylight ahead of him. But before he could break away for a huge gain, he was caught from behind and had the ball knocked out by Becoate. Southmoreland's Nick Mains recovered at the North 17.

Norwin quarterback T.J. Salopek converted on the next play, as the Mercyhurst recruit hooked up with Thomas Jefferson receiver Heath Brickner for the second time in the game to put the South on top, 14-6, with 5:02 remaining in the first half. Brickner was named the game's most valuable player after catching four catches for 108 yards and the two scores.

Brickner found success in the aerial game, even though five quarterbacks for both teams struggled in the first half, completing only 13 of 37 passes for 162 yards.

"It was tough at first because everybody was hyped up for the game and everything was a step faster, but once we got the timing down, it went pretty good," Salopek said. "We worked real well at practice, but like I said, the speed was different in the game, but we worked it out."

Immediately after the ensuing kickoff, Rometo set up in shotgun at his 34 and watched the snap sail over his head. Instead of falling on the ball, he tried to pick it up and allowed Becoate to recover at the 11.

Four plays later, McKeesport quarterback Dan Kopolovich rolled right on a naked bootleg for a 4-yard touchdown and a 21-6 advantage at intermission.

Those late points were a contrast to a game that started out like an eventual scoreless tie. Neither offense was in sync, as starting quarterbacks Salopek and Tyler Huether of Penn-Trafford were unable to connect with their receivers.

Both teams only had seven practices to get ready for the game. Heuther finished the first quarter 5 of 15 for 32 yards, and Salopek missed his first four attempts before connecting with Brickner on a 27-yard touchdown pass to put the South ahead, 7-0, with 7:57 to play in the first quarter.

Romero finally brought some consistency to the position on his first full second-quarter drive when he completed three consecutive passes, including a 45-yard touchdown strike to Gateway's Brandon Livesy.

"Stuff happens and you can't take it back now," Heuther said. "We've only been practicing for a week, but it's just an all-star game and I had fun and both teams played a great game."

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