

Swedes fall in quarter-finals

Written by Deb Egenberger
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Gothenburg boys play hard through final buzzer

ALBION—There was a glimmer of hope and a spark of confidence for Gothenburg when the Swedes tied top-seeded Boone Central/Newman Grove in the first quarter of their Class C-1 state playoff game last week.

After allowing the Cardinals to score on their first drive of the game, Gothenburg used a razzle-dazzle play to even the tally.

The Swede celebration didn't last long, though, as Boone Central returned the ensuing kickoff for another touchdown and continued pounding on Gothenburg until the game ended with a 38-20 Cardinal win.

"The kids kept playing and playing hard," said Gothenburg coach Craig Haake. "We moved the ball but there was nothing sustained. Boone Central is a good ball club, certainly the best we've seen this year."

The Cardinals showed their power early and often. They scored on their first possession with a 6-yard run by Tanner Mazour with 9:16 to go in the first quarter.

"I think the kids were a little surprised by their speed," Haake said.

The Swedes got nowhere on their first series and then held Boone Central for little gain.

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That's when Haake pulled out the trick play.



On third-and-7, Swede quarterback Blake Ristine pitched to running back Zach Wolf, who threw the ball back to Ristine for a 65-yard scoring reception.

With regular kicker Trenton Long sidelined by injury, Haake turned to Ross Ostendorf for the point-after kick.

“We had to have kicker tryouts last week,” Haake said. “We went through several kids before we found Ross.”

Ostendorf split the uprights to tie the score 7-7 with 4:17 to go in the first.

Wolf kicked off to the Cardinals, booting a line drive to around the 20 yard line where Blake Slizoski caught it and returned the ball 80 yards to give the Cardinals the lead for good.

“I think if we could have just stayed tied for a little bit and gotten our bearings under us, we might have been OK,” Haake said.

Instead, Boone Central tacked on another touchdown in the second quarter as well as a field goal as time ran out in the first half to take a 24-7 lead into halftime.

“At halftime I knew we just needed to calm down,” Haake said. “We were starting to slow them

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down a little bit. We just needed to get something going on offense.”

That didn't happen out of the gate in the second half. Instead, the Swedes fumbled the first snap of the third quarter, giving the Cardinals the ball on the Gothenburg 25 yard line.

Two plays later, Slizoski ran in from 8 yards out.

Gothenburg received the kickoff, once again fumbling on the second play from scrimmage. The turnover resulted in another Cardinal touchdown.



“Within three and a half minutes of the third quarter, we're down 38-7,” Haake said. “But I have to give the kids credit. They just kept playing.”

The Swedes held off the Cardinals the remainder of the game and managed to put a couple more scores on the board.

Defensive end Tanner Borchardt intercepted a Mazour pass and returned it to the Boone Central 25 yard line with about nine minutes to play in the game.

Preston Franzen finished it off with a 2-yard run into the endzone with 9:50 to play. An Ostendorf PAT kick made the score 38-14.

And the Swedes weren't quite done.

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Boone Central fumbled the kickoff to give the Swedes another chance but Gothenburg didn't get anywhere with the next possession.

With Ristine injured on the sideline, Connor Schwanz took his first snaps of varsity ball.

"He struggled his first few snaps," Haake said, "and then he just stepped up."

The Cardinals fumbled again, giving Gothenburg a short field and the Swedes capitalized with a strong drive capped by a 1-yard touchdown run by Logan Sheets with 3:42 to play in the game.

Haake said he chose to go for the two-point conversion to possibly make it a two-score ball game but the option play failed.

Sheets finished with 39 yards rushing on 10 carries and Franzen had 37 yards on 16 carries.

Wolf's halfback toss to Ristine was the big gainer in the passing column. Logan Koehler also had two receptions for 31 yards total.

"For a group of kids that returned only two starters on one side of the ball and three on the other, these kids did well," Haake said. "We played a lot of sophomores all year and they got better and matured as the year went on."

The Swedes finish with a 6-5 record, making it into the third round of the state playoffs for the second straight season.

"I think I could safely say this team maxed out," Haake said. "I couldn't ask for more."