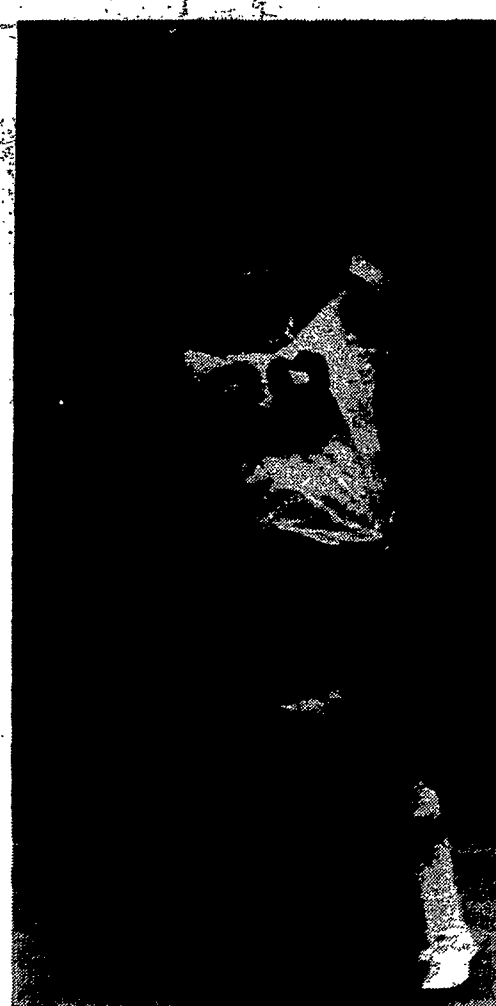




Halfback Jacques Monte slips past McQuaid's Matt McConville in the second quarter.



Mark Zlotnik rejoices after scoring the tying touchdown that forced the game to go into overtime.

Just one point from glory,

McQuaid Knights fall to Fairport in championship rematch

By Kevin Myers

History painfully repeated itself for the McQuaid football team Sunday, Nov. 17, when Fairport dashed the Knights' championship hopes in a grueling sectional rematch.

In the final seconds of last year's pairing, the Red Raiders held McQuaid just 18 inches short of sending the section 5, class AAA championship into overtime. In overtime this year, Fairport stopped a McQuaid two-point conversion attempt that would have clinched the title.

The Fairport victory was not only a sectional title for coach Don Santini, but also his second championship in a row.

The first play of the game suggested a possible McQuaid romp. Starting on the 20-yard line, McQuaid quarterback Chris Caruso launched a 40-yard pass to Chris Hauber, who ran 40 yards into the end zone. Perhaps the first-play strike stunned the Red Raiders or psyched up the Knights, but either way the Knights' offense went on to outgain Fairport 245 yards to 53 in the first half.

The Red Raiders answered the McQuaid score on their first possession, crossing the end zone on a 52-yard drive after a 46-yard kickoff return by halfback Tim Soudan. But McQuaid preserved its lead when Aaron Mooney blocked Lou Vanacore's extra-point kick. The Knights were ahead 7-6.

The Knights went on to dominate the remainder of the second half, scoring their second touchdown on a 33-yard pass to Mark Zlotnik. It was a lofty pass into the end zone that either defender or receiver could have caught. But Zlotnik jumped higher than his opponent, and miraculously held onto the ball as he fell to the carpet. An illegal procedure call cancelled Flannigan's extra point kick, and McQuaid's extra-point nightmare had begun. The attempt from five yards back was blocked.

McQuaid forced the Red Raiders to punt on their next possession, and the Knights started on their own 45-yard line. Combined

rushes by halfbacks Mark Passero and Dave Hodges, a first-down conversion pass to Hauber and sweeps by Caruso brought the Knights to the one-yard line on fourth down. Caruso swept right for the touchdown. The extra-point kick was blocked again, but the half ended with the Knights up 19-6.

McQuaid would have probably been better off if there had been no halftime lapse in play. As often occurs at halftime, the winning team lost its momentum. After a good halftime pep talk, Fairport players emerged more aggressive. "I told them about pride and about determination," Santini said. "I reminded them that this was their chance to win two in a row."

The defenses hung tough at the onset of the second half, forcing four consecutive punts, and on Fairport's third possession of the half, Vanacore hit the right goal post on a 30-yard field-goal attempt. But Fairport scored on their next two possessions. Soudan carried consecutively three times to score the first touchdown, Vanacore narrowing McQuaid's lead to 19-13 with the one-point conversion.

After a 33-yard sprint by halfback Jacques Monte, who later received the championship's player-of-the-game award, quarterback Keith Pavia swept 14 yards to set up Monte's five-yard struggle through the middle for the touchdown. A bad snap on the extra point attempt preserved the 19-19 tie.

With just 2:15 remaining in the game, the action increased to a spellbinding level of suspense. Red Raider Craig Fox rounded up a Passero fumble and ran 25 yards into the end zone. The Knights lost the lead and their quarterback on the play when Caruso was ejected for fighting. Again the extra point was blocked, and the Knights were down by six.

Coming into the game with just three snaps' playing time for the entire year, Junior Joe Williams completed a 28-yard

pass to Hodges on fourth-and-10, and then a 46-yard touchdown bomb to Zlotnik for the tie. With just 1:30 remaining in the game, the sectional title weighed heavily on the tender shoulders of the extra point squad. McQuaid's place-kick holder Mike Newcomb was out of the game with a mild concussion, so coach Tom Sprague chose to attempt the two-point conversion. The conversion failed when Williams fumbled the snap from the center. After Vanacore's 45-yard field-goal attempt fell just inches short with seven seconds remaining, the suspense exploded into overtime with a 25-25 deadlock.

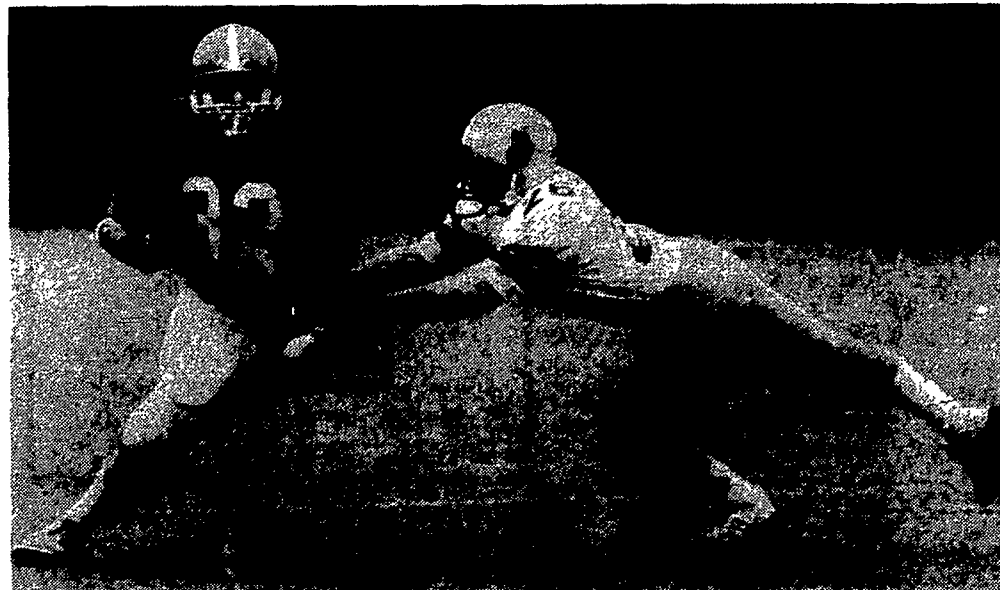
Under overtime rules, each team takes the ball on the other's 10-yard line to score by field goal or touchdown. On first down, Pavia fumbled, but Monte fell on it for Fairport. On third down Monte eluded three

tacklers for the touchdown. Vanacore put the Red Raiders up 32-25 with a successful kick.

An interference call against Fairport gave the Knights first-and-goal on the five-yard line, and Passero ran in to put his team to within one point. This time Sprague was faced with the decision to kick for the tie or go for two to win. He chose to go for the win. But again the Knights fell short on a fumble.

Sprague said he would have attempted two points for the win even if Newcomb had been able to hold.

"Those kids came to win," said Fairport coach Don Santini. "I can't even imagine what he (Sprague) is feeling." But, he added, "Somebody has got to win."



Jacques Monte of Fairport is crushed by Nick Backscheider (65) and Dan Peacock (86), as the Raiders advanced down the field.

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