

Griffin's heroics propel Quakers past Little Irish 16-3

By Richard A. Kiley

Franklin's Rodney Griffin is the epitome of the old adage, "He does everything except drive the bus to the game."

Last Saturday afternoon against Aquinas, the all-purpose football player might have done even that, except the Quakers were playing at home.

So all the 5'9" senior did was run for two touchdowns and 107 yards on 23 carries, and register 11 bone-crunching tackles in Franklin's 16-3 win over the Little Irish in a key City-Catholic Division 1 contest.

It was just another day's work for the Quaker tailback, linebacker, kicker and punter, who was also a factor in Franklin's romp of Aquinas in last year's Section 5 Class AAA basketball final last March.

What can't this guy do?

"He (Griffin) is the type of athlete who will play for you no matter how tough it gets out there," said Franklin coach Ben Nix, who until Saturday had found getting a win against Aquinas tough. Nix was 0-9 against the Little Irish since taking over the football program at Franklin.

"It's been a long time, but we did it," he said. The victory was Franklin's first since a 19-0 shutout in 1972, and upped its record to 2-0-1 league, 3-1-1 overall. Chris Battaglia's squad dropped to 3-1, 3-2 overall.

Aquinas had led 3-0 before Griffin's heroics in the second half, when Kevin Juif ended the first half with a 36-yard field goal. The only drive which culminated in points for the Little Irish was set up by an interception of an Audley Hendricks pass with :54 seconds remaining in the second quarter.

Aquinas was unable to stop the much-talented runner in the second half. The senior halfback established the running game in Franklin's first drive of the second half, which ironically did not lead to any points. Griffin was stopped on fourth-and-one from the one when a host of Little Irish tacklers greeted him just before he crossed the goal line.

After Aquinas took over on downs, it fumbled the ball to the Quakers four plays later.

The turnover on the Aquinas 10-yard line proved to be the Little Irish's demise, as it allowed Griffin to assert himself and the Quaker ground game.

On first and goal at the 10, Nix called for a draw play to Griffin, who shredded three Little Irish tacklers in putting his team up 6-3. The touchdown run wowed the home crowd, which until the touchdown play had little to cheer about. Quarterback Hendricks ran the ball in for the two-point conversion, upping the lead to 8-3.

The touchdown and subsequent conversion seemed to take the wind out of the sails of Battaglia's squad on the sunny and crisp afternoon.

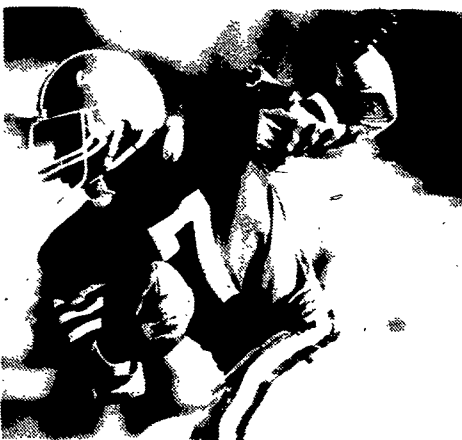
After Aquinas couldn't get anything going in its next possession, a pattern which repeated itself numerous times in the second half, the Little Irish were forced to punt.

Franklin began its second touchdown drive at the 45-yard line of Aquinas. The combined running of Griffin and Calvin Collier proved too much for the Aquinas defense, which showed signs of fatigue in the latter stages of the contest. The two backs grinded out six and seven yards a play, a factor Nix attributed to the work of his offensive line, a Trailways bus with feet.



Franklin's Rodney Griffin is stopped by a host of Aquinas tacklers during the second quarter.

Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal



Rodney Griffin rumbles for some of his 107 yards against the Little Irish.



Aquinas sophomore Jermaine McGowan tried to cut between two Franklin tacklers during last Saturday afternoon's win by the Quakers.

"My offensive line did a heck of a job in the second half," Nix said. "They opened up holes so we could run five or six yards at a time."

And when Nix's line didn't open up the holes, Griffin made his own. The senior's second TD was a gem. On third down from the 19, he took a handoff from Hendricks and appeared to racked up for no gain.

But the senior trucked the ball into the end zone, giving his team a 14-3 bulge. Hendricks threw for the two-point conversion, closing out the scoring for the day.

Offensively, Griffin was done for the day but defensively he was brutal, and then some.

With Aquinas in obvious pass situations down by two touchdowns, Griffin almost by himself kept the Little Irish from mustering any offensive drives.

Just another day in the life of Rodney Griffin, who unlike the other Rodney, is getting a lot of respect wherever he goes.

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