

SPORTS

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HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL



JAMES J. NESTOR/Gazette

HOMER-CENTER'S LANDON HILL was stacked up by the Muncy defense in Friday night's non-conference game at rainy Memorial Field.

Playoff Mode

Muncy holds off Wildcats in interdistrict clash

By **MIRZA ZUKIC**
moz@indianagazette.net

**MUNCY 17
HOMER-CENTER 16**

HOMER CITY — The playoffs arrived two weeks early for Homer-Center. Or so it felt, anyway.

In a game worthy of a PIAA playoff game, the Wildcats welcomed District 4 power Muncy on Friday for an inter-district clash of 7-1 teams, and even though the result didn't go their way, they gained a valuable lesson ahead of the playoffs.

Muncy slowed down the Wildcats' offense and escaped with a 17-16 victory to extend its winning streak to eight games while snapping Homer-Center's streak at seven.

"It was a great battle," Homer-Center coach Greg Page said. "I'm telling you, it was just a tremendous battle of wills with both teams. Both teams

made some mistakes. We made more costly mistakes that ended up costing us points, or giving them points.

"But I can't say enough about our kids, and Muncy's kids. It was so, so physical. I didn't know that it would go that way, and it did, but I'm proud of our kids. I mean, it stinks to lose the game. Hopefully this shows us what we need to do in the playoffs."

The Wildcats (7-2), who sandwiched seven wins between the season-opening loss to Cambria Heights and Friday's game, wrap up the regular season with Berlin Brothersvalley next week before embarking on the District 6 playoffs.

"The guys are probably going to be

really upset," sophomore Landon Hill said. "It's not the outcome we wanted at all, but I feel like we're really good at keeping our heads up and moving forward and staying strong as a team. Obviously, we're going to get back to the chalkboard ... and we're going to come back even better and stronger next week."

Following a scoreless but cleanly played first quarter, Homer-Center patiently grinded out an 11-play, 58-yard touchdown drive to open the scoring early in the second. The Wildcats capped their second possession with Hill's 3-yard touchdown run. Hill also ran for the two-point conversion, giving his team an 8-0 lead with 9:00 remaining in the second quarter.

Page hoped it would be a sign of See **WILDCATS: D-3**

Indiana stays in hunt with romp

By **TYLER HOWE**
sports@indianagazette.net

INDIANA 46, MARS 10

MARS — It's fitting that Zach Herrington and the Indiana Indians played in Mars on Friday night because their running attack was out of this world.

In a game that was extremely important to each team's WPIAL playoff hopes, Indiana's rushing attack was unstoppable. The Indians went off for 488 yards, and it all came on the ground, in 46-10 victory in a Class 4A Greater Allegheny Conference game.

The game started off exactly as you'd think, with Indiana (5-4, 3-3) pounding the ball down the Mars

Fightin' Planets' throats. On seven plays, the Indians drove 80 yards, and the drive was capped off by Devin Flint 38-yard touchdown run.

The duo of Flint and Herrington put up more than half of Indiana's entire offense, with 331 rushing yards and five touchdowns combined. Herrington's first touchdown came early in the second quarter when he pounded the ball 26 yards up the middle and was tripped up into the end zone. It was his first of three.

"He's just a football player, and I think if you went across the WPIAL

tonight, you won't find a quit who played harder, tougher or better than Zach tonight," Indiana coach Brandon Overdorff said. "It was an unbelievable performance from where I was standing, and he's just the heart and soul."

Mars did fight back after going down 14-0, but after driving the ball all the way down to Indiana's 5-yard line, the Palnets had to settle for a field goal.

There were multiple points in the game where it looked as if momentum was with the Fightin' Planets, but they lost it almost immediately. The first came on the drive after their field goal, when they recovered a See **INDIANA: D-4**

Building Momentum

Steelers looking for smoother road after rocky start

By **WILL GRAVES**
Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Matt Canada keeps insisting he's got the best job in America. The first-year Pittsburgh Steelers offensive coordinator has quickly learned it might also be among the most scrutinized, at least in his chosen profession.

All Canada's been asked to do in his first go-round as an NFL play-caller is fix a running game that's spent the past few years ranked among the league's worst, figure out how to mesh with a future Hall of Fame quarterback used to having plenty of say in the weekly game plan and do it all while hoping a completely overhauled offensive line learns quickly enough to make it all go.

The early results are mixed.

Rookie running back Najee Harris looks every bit as good as advertised, at least when given room to do his thing.

Ben Roethlisberger spent the first four weeks fending off questions about whether his 18th season was one too many, but has responded by showing flashes of his vintage self during a two-game winning streak that has the Steelers sitting at 3-3 heading into their bye week.

The line remains very much a work in progress, though it has shown signs of cohesion of late. The number of times Roethlisberger is being hit each week is going down. The number of yards Harris is gaining on the ground is going up. Pittsburgh has topped 100 yards rushing in each of its past two games, something it hadn't done since last October.

"We're just closer to being better," Canada said. "I think we're not where we want to be. With the bye week right now, we're doing a lot of work, looking at ourselves. Some things aren't good enough at all, some

things are close."

Maybe very close.

Right tackle Zach Banner's return from the torn ACL in his right knee suffered in the 2020 season opener is imminent. His re-immersion into the lineup would allow Chuks Okorafor to move back to left tackle and send rookie Dan Moore Jr. to the bench, giving the line more size and experience in front of Roethlisberger.

While Canada is quick to praise the work of Moore — who was thrust into a starting role along with rookie center Kendrick Green — he also added the team will "play the best tackles" whenever Banner is available.

Whoever is out there will be tasked with cleaning up some of the mistakes that have short-circuited drives. The Steelers have been flagged for 10 false starts, tied for the second most in the league, and four times for offensive pass interference as wide receivers get too eager to block on the quick throws that are a staple of Canada's offense.

"We've got to be more consistent," Canada said. "It felt like we moved the ball well last week (against Seattle), but we can't have the self-inflicted issues."

Mostly because the offense's margin for error isn't what it was during last year's 11-0 start.

The defense that led the NFL in sacks and turnovers forced in 2020 has looked far more ordinary in 2021. While outside linebacker T.J. Watt remains a force of nature — he became the first player in NFL history to have two sacks and a forced fumble in overtime when he almost single-handedly helped the Steelers escape an upset bid at the hand of the Seahawks last Sunday — the defensive line has been decimated by injury and the secondary has struggled to play with physicality.

See **STEELERS: D-5**

No timetable for Sid's return

By **The Associated Press**

CRANBERRY TOWNSHIP — Pittsburgh Penguins star Sidney Crosby still isn't sure when he will be cleared to return after he had left wrist surgery last month.

Crosby skated with his teammates for more than an hour Friday in the latest step in his recovery from surgery in early September. The team announced at the time of the procedure that Crosby would miss a minimum of six weeks. The six-week mark passed on Wednesday with Crosby still inching his way back.

The three-time Stanley Cup winner has been dealing with pain in the wrist off and on since shortly after the 2014 Olympics. He initially hoped offseason rest would give it time to heal properly, a strategy that worked for him during previous summers. But as training camp for the 2021-22 season loomed with symptoms still lingering, he opted to have surgery in hopes of fixing the problem for good.

"So I think we all felt like it was something I wouldn't have got through this season if I didn't take care of it," Crosby said. "Unfortunately end up missing some time here early, but I guess the other side of that was missing a lot more games,

probably, in the middle of the year."

Crosby called surgery the "last resort," but felt it became unavoidable this time around. He said the procedure was different from the arthroscopic surgery he had on the wrist on Aug. 31, 2020.

"It was something I was able to manage (for years)," he said. "There were points where it bugged me more than others. You just get used to it. ... It became more of a factor last year and then into the summer. Just had to take care of it."

The next part of Crosby's recovery will be figuring out when the wrist is good enough to handle a heavy load of faceoffs. He typically takes 20 to 25 a game, a movement that can put a lot of pressure on the joint.

"I haven't really had any force, whether it's faceoff, lifting sticks ... battling, pushing around," he said. "Those are things I haven't been able to do. When I'm able to do that comfortably or do it without pain or being able to manage those things, I think that'll be a big step."

Crosby, who turned 34 in August, does not expect to need surgery on the wrist again.

The Penguins have gotten off to a solid start without Crosby and longtime See **CROSBY: D-5**

SECTION CHAMPIONS



Submitted photo

THE INDIANA HIGH girls' volleyball team wrapped up the WPIAL Section 3-AAA girls' volleyball title with a 3-1 win over Kiski Area on Thursday. Indiana, 12-2 in section play, opens the WPIAL playoffs next week. Team members are, first row, from left, Emily Madey, Alex Ball, Lily Cunningham, Lauren Brocius, Hannah Mogle and Natalie Schaeffer; and second row, Audrey Josephson, Maycie Lorelli, Sarah Madey, Peyton Ream, Katie Kovalchick, Mia Ciocca, Lizzy Lubold, Abbie Huey and Julia Rungie.