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Sports



Kyle Baker tackles Wyatt Simons early in the game for Eminence.

Photos by Abby Hooven



Cooper Holland and Landon Smither celebrate a Warrior touchdown and successful 2-point conversion in the second half.

Warriors earn commanding first-round playoff victory

BY ABBY HOOVEN

Eminence earned its first postseason win since 2020 with a 42-0 victory over Nicholas County at home on Friday, Nov. 8.

The Warriors executed their game plan on both sides of the ball and limited the Blue Jackets' run game throughout the evening to claim a spot in the second round of the Class 1A playoffs.

"It feels good. It was one of the goals we had to start the year. It's one of the things we talked about moving the program forward and getting a chance to win a shot at the district and then the next goal was to win a first round playoff game," said head coach Ryan Jones. "To be able to do that when it's been a goal all year and something we talked about all off-season, it feels really good. I'm happy for the guys, especially the seniors."

Eminence kicked off the game with a strong defensive stand, slowing Nicholas County on the ground with multiple key stops at the end of the Blue Jackets' opening drive.

"Coach (Mount) Hadden does a great job of having the guys prepared with their game plan each week and making sure that the defensive guys know what's going on in our checks and where their keys are. So the big thing was we came out tonight and were ready to play from the first play all night," said Jones. "We've talked about it for a couple years but it showed up tonight and that was big because if they get a score and get up on you, with an offense like that, it puts you in a hole and it's really hard to get the ball back."

Landon Smither came up with a pair of tackles to force a punt before earning a 61-yard reception on the first play of the Warriors' ensuing possession.

Blaze Berry sustained the drive with a fourth-down completion to Cooper Holland

down the middle and capped off the series with a 1-yard touchdown run to give Eminence an early 7-0 advantage.

Eminence quickly halted Nicholas County's run attack again and forced the Blue Jackets into another punt at the end of a three-and-out drive.

Meanwhile, the Warrior offense continued to shine and Smither found an opening for a lengthy run at the end of the first quarter to put Eminence within striking distance.

He completed the drive with a carry up the middle for a 2-yard touchdown to extend the margin to 14-0 with 11:29 left in the first half.

Nicholas County kept attacking on the ground, but the Warriors forced and recovered two fumbles on back-to-back drives to slow any potential momentum for the Blue Jackets.

After Raihan Steed recovered the initial fumble, Smither scored his second touchdown of the evening to move the lead out to 21-0. He maneuvered around Nicholas County's defense into the end zone for a 22-yard touchdown run with 6:18 to play.

The Warriors recovered their second fumble just two plays into the Blue Jackets' next possession to regain control at the 25-yard line.

Jarren Beverly got in on the action with a strong run to put Eminence at the 2-yard line and scored two plays later on a short run to bring the margin to 27-0 with 4:49 on the clock.

Nicholas County kept battling and got within scoring range late in the first half after tough carries by several players, including its top two running threats Wyatt Simons and Colby Gray.

The Blue Jackets pushed to reach the 11-yard line with under 30 seconds to play. Yet, the Warriors forced two incomplete passes toward the end zone in the final seconds to stifle the threat and keep the score at 27-0 at the break.

Eminence kept its foot on

the gas offensively and scored on the first drive of the second half.

Berry avoided pressure in the backfield and connected with Holland in the end zone for a 17-yard score. He hit Smither on the 2-point conversion as well to push the lead to 35-0 with 9:25 remaining in the period.

The Blue Jackets had a couple of strong runs before fumbling for the third time and Eminence recovered to take over possession.

The Warriors bounced back from a penalty early in the drive and Trey Starks nabbed a pass down the middle and returned it untouched to the end zone for a 65-yard touchdown. With the successful PAT, the Warriors moved ahead 42-0 with 2:47 left in the third quarter.

Aside from a handful of penalties, Jones was pleased with the overall offensive performance from the Warriors during the game.

"I felt like we had a good game plan going in this week and we executed it really well tonight. We were giving Blaze time and then we ran the ball. We did a great job of opening up some holes for Landon and Jarren," said Jones.

Eminence's defense held on throughout the fourth quarter to keep Nicholas County off the board and complete the first round with a shutout win.

"To come out the way we did, prepared and playing from the start was really big," said Jones.

The Warriors (6-4) move on to the second round of the playoffs against Raceland on Friday, Nov. 15.

The Rams took down Berea 70-7 in the opening round to move to 7-4 overall and sat at fourth in Class 1A in the RPI rankings as of Nov. 9.

Raceland also averages about 31 points per game while surrendering an average of 14 points per game.

"Raceland is Raceland. They're really good. You get to the second round of the playoffs, you're going to play somebody good," said Jones. "You go give it a shot and see where you end up."

Eminence kicked off the game with a strong defensive stand, slowing Nicholas County on the ground with multiple key stops at the end of the Blue Jackets' opening drive.



Landon Smither finds an opening in the Nicholas County defense for a first down in the first half of Eminence's 42-0 win on Friday night.

Photos by Abby Hooven



Blaze Berry sends a pass down the field in the second half for the Warriors.