

Tigers survive nailbiter with McKinley, win regional title

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The Independent

AKRON, OH – In the span of two minutes of game action Saturday night, the Massillon Tigers took an emotional roller-coaster ride which would have rivaled anything offered at Cedar Point.

But in the end, the ride ended with the Tigers earning their first state semifinal berth in nine years – as well as a ton of revenge – by beating McKinley 10-7 in a Division I regional final in front of an announced crowd of 13,121 at the University of Akron's InfoCision Stadium.

Leading by three, the Tiger marched 74 yards in 14 plays, reaching the McKinley 6. But with just under two minutes, Massillon fumbled the ball out of the end zone, giving the Bulldogs life at their own 20.

"It was a thriller," Tiger quarterback Robert Partridge said. "We just wanted to get down and run the clock out. It was a mistake, but I knew our defense was going to come out and stop them. We have great players on defense."

McKinley took advantage driving down to the Massillon 16 less than 45 seconds remaining. But faced with a third-and-4, Massillon's Tyler Miller came up with his second interception of the game – the third for the Tiger defense on the night – at the Tiger 2 with 33 seconds remaining to send Massillon into next Saturday night's state semifinal against 12-1 Glenville at InfoCision Stadium.

"We put ourselves in position," McKinley coach Ron Johnson said. "We went down and made plays and got into the scoring zone. We just didn't finish."

A big reason why McKinley wasn't able to finish was the Massillon defense.

After allowing McKinley to score 35 points and rack up 364 yards in the Bulldogs' regular-season win over Massillon, the Tigers clamped down on the Bulldogs in the playoff rematch. Massillon surrendered just the one touchdown - an 8-yard pass from Kyle Ohradzansky to Angelo Powell with 8 seconds left in the half - and 219 total offensive yards to McKinley, which bows out at 8-5.

The Tigers turned the Bulldogs away three different times in the second half after McKinley had reached deep into Massillon territory. Massillon blocked a 39-yard field goal attempt on the first drive of the third quarter, while Miller picked off a pass in the end zone with 8:37 left, then closed out Massillon's win just over eight minutes later.

"They did have the ball on our side of the field pretty much the whole second half," Tiger safety Bo Grunder said. "You know, we just have to stay up and stick with what we're doing, read our keys and make plays."

Massillon finished with three takeaways on the night, as Grunder also had an interception midway through the third quarter.

"We're playing good defense," Massillon coach Jason Hall said. "We're holding good teams to one touchdown or 10 points."

Massillon may have felt a bit disappointed only having 10 points on its side of the scoreboard going into the locker room. Of course, that was still enough for the Tigers to hold a 10-7 lead.

The Tigers drove onto McKinley's side of the 50 on their first four first-half possessions, and inside the 20 on three straight possessions. They were able to take a 7-0 lead when Jake Reiman's 1-yard plunge capped a 10-play, 69-yard drive at the 3:51 mark of the first quarter.

Reiman matched his career high rushing with his second straight 127-yard rushing performance.

After a missed field goal on its first second-quarter possession, Massillon made it 10-0 on Jeremy Geier's 21-yard field goal with 4:04 remaining in the half.

The Tigers had 182 total yards in the first half. They finished the game with 269 yards.

"We just executed our plays," Partridge said of the first-half offense. "We did our keys. Offensively, we mixed it up with the run and the pass. We ran the ball really well this time."

That was especially true on the Tigers' fourth-quarter drive which appeared on its way to icing the win. After getting the ball at their own 20 on Miller's first interception, the Tigers ran it 12 times for 74 - including 11 straight runs after back-to-back pass plays left Massillon with a fourth-and-1 at its own 29.

That's when Hall turned riverboat gambler. Eschewing the punt, he went for it deep in his own territory, getting it when Clayton Mattox fought forward for two yards.

"Everybody keeps asking me about that," Hall said of the fourth-down call. "But to me, it was a situation where after the first McKinley-Massillon game in Week Ten, a lot was said about them winning the game physically. That was our focus. ... I think in general, I wanted our kids to win the game, so I put it in their hands because I know they can do it."

And in the end, the Tigers did just that. Only not before going on one more emotional roller-coaster ride.

Massillon 10

McKinley 7

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SCORING SUMMARY

Mas - Reiman 1 run (Geier kick)

Mas - FG Geier 21

McK - Powell 8 pass from Ohradzansky (Forsythe kick)

	Mas	McK
First downs	16	12
Rushes-yards	41-178	33-150
Comp-Att-Int	12-22-0	10-24-3
Passing yards	91	69
Fumbles-lost	1-1	0-0
Penalty yards	1-5	0-0
Records	10-3	8-5

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

Rushing:

Massillon - Reiman 27-127 TD; Nalbach 2-24; Partridge 6-19; Grunder 2-10.

McKinley - Wilder 18-89; Ohradzansky 7-61; Farrakhan 7-11.

Passing:

Massillon - Partridge 12-22-91.

McKinley - Ohradzansky 10-23-69 TD, 3 INTs; Team 0-1-0.

Receiving:

Massillon - Olack 7-60; Reiman 2-15; Allman 1-8; Smith 1-5.

McKinley - Powell 3-24; Wilder 3-7; Parton 2-21; Ogletree 1-16.