

Sep. 9 Football: Hamilton starts with a win



With just one last Hightstown hand reaching out to try and stop him, Bret Stroman flies into the endzone for a 29-yard touchdown run that proved to be the game-winner with 2:55 remaining in tonight's game. It also put Stroman over 200 rushing yards (Photo by Dennis Symons Jr./purchase photos at www.denissymons.com)

Hornets utilize clutch plays by Stroman and Williams for opening-night success

By Rich Fisher

Fish4Scores.com

Sep. 9: On a night when Hightstown's football team kept coming up with big plays, Hamilton West came up with the two biggest when they counted most.

One on offense, and one on defense.

The result was an exciting 28-22, season-opening victory over the Rams in a game that was not decided until Greg Williams' interception at the Hornets 24-yard line with 1:23 left to play.

West had the lead it needed thanks to a monster night by cramp-ridden Bret Stroman. The senior running back rushed for 201 yards and three touchdowns, and had the big offensive play of the fourth quarter on a 29-yard TD run up the middle that proved to be the game-winning score with 2:55 remaining. All in all, a nice night for a team still trying to find itself after graduation losses.

"This will give us a lot of confidence to work harder to get more wins like this so we keep the same feeling," Stroman said. "Some of our character came out tonight, but not all of it yet."

Make no mistake, however, this was indeed a character-building victory. "Both sides of the ball did great," said coach Tom "The Lord of Lambeau" Hoglen. "A lot of things are new right now with us, we're still trying to figure them out. We're just gonna keep getting better as the year goes on and play better football."

"But it's nice to figure it out and win. I can go to some games tomorrow and enjoy myself."

Hamilton's relatively young offensive line was outstanding as it paved the way for 306 rushing yards on 47 carries. Javed James chipped in with 53 yards, Ruben Desane added 25 and quarterback Mark Acquaviva picked up 27 and ran the offensive smoothly in his first varsity start.

"He did a good job," captain Stroman said. "He was very good mentally, he didn't make any mistakes. We just stayed on him to make sure he didn't get down on himself if he threw a bad pass or something, and he kept his head up."

As did the rest of the Hornets.

After Hightstown took a 6-0 lead on a stunning 74-yard touchdown pass, Jamar Hall's 32-yard kickoff return to the Hightstown 39 set up Acquaviva for a 3-yard touchdown run. Darius Miller's PAT made it 7-6.

On the Rams next possession, Mark McKenzie's fumble recovery and 8-yard return gave Hamilton possession at the Hightstown 23. It didn't take long for Stroman to score on a 4-yard run and Miller added another extra point.

But Hightstown showed a lot of spunk and tied the game on Lawrence Mendies' one-yard run after Hamilton had held on three straight running plays from inside the three.

With the score tied 14-14 Hamilton had a chance for the lead before intermission but Miller's 21-yard field goal attempt went wide left.

Hightstown regained the edge on its first possession of the third quarter on a 7-yard touchdown pass from Dustin Kollman to Cameron Harper. A 46-yard run by Mendies – one of three plays of 28 yards or more by the Rams – helped set up the score.

But Hamilton responded with a methodical 10-play drive that covered 59 yards and was capped by Stroman's second TD, as he virtually walked into the endzone. Acquaviva ran in the conversion to tie the game at 22.

Both defenses stiffened for the next few series before Hamilton took over at its own 35 with 4:50 remaining. Stroman provided a spark on first down when he was nearly stopped at the 36, but broke free for a 30-yard gain.

"I just broke a tackle and kept my feet moving," he said. "That's all I did all night, just try to keep moving my feet and do the best I could."

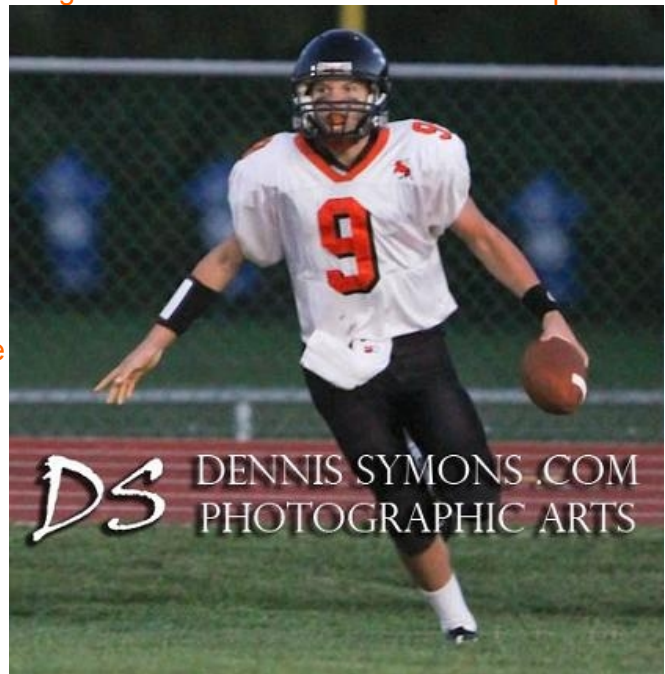
Two plays later, he burst up the middle for a 29-yard touchdown run that proved to be the game-winner.

"I just saw the hole and took it in," he said matter-of-factly.

There was just 2:48 left but it wasn't over yet.

Kollman, just a sophomore, drove his team from its 45 to the Hornet 29. But on second-and-one, his intended slant-in pass to Kevin Lenart was picked off by Williams.

Hightstown coach Pete Brescia said they called that play because there had rarely been a safety up top during the game. But there was this time.



Mark Acquaviva rolls into the endzone for Hamilton's first touchdown of the season during the second quarter of tonight's victory. Acquaviva tallied on a three-yard run (Photo by Dennis Symons/purchase photos at dennisymons.com).

“They did the same thing all night,” Hoglen said. “We were trying to give him some safety help and he took away the inside. He made a great play.”

“He came up very big,” Stroman said. “I’m very happy for him. He stepped up at the end of game.”

Ironically, Stroman and Williams are both replacing last year’s stud, Jamie Williams, at running back and cornerback.

Stroman certainly looked ready to don the mantel with tonight’s effort.

“He had cramps at halftime, and we rested him to get him some good carries in the second half,” Hoglen said. “I think he could have had a lot more yards, obviously the cramping came into play but we’re gonna work on that this week.

“We didn’t run him a whole lot in the pre-season and maybe that attributed to tonight. At this stage we’re trying to keep kids healthy for the season and a lot of guys picked each other up tonight and we found a way to win.

“Ruben Desane came in and ran hard for us, Mark Acquaviva made some big first downs, Javed James ran hard at fullback, our offensive line came together and Greg Williams came up with a big pick.”

Add it all up, and it equates to 1-0.

“That’s what we came here to do,” Hoglen said. “We know there’s a lot of things we need to improve on. We just have to get better as the season moves on. The bottom line tonight is we came out with a W.”

And they did it in a big way. . .at the right time.