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Football

# Rockford bounces back with 42-0 victory over Jenison

By Don VanderVeen | Advance Newspapers  
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ROCKFORD – Austin used his powers to help Rockford regain some of its mojo with a 42-0 victory over Jenison Friday night.

One week after a 45-0 drubbing at Muskegon, Rockford senior quarterback Austin McKellar helped the Rams bounce back in a big way against Jenison.

“It's a totally different feeling than last week,” McKellar said. “The offensive line opened up holes, and our defense came back really strong, from giving up 45 points to pitching a shutout.”



Rockford's Ethan LaCourt (4) looks to pick up extra yardage as Jenison's Tony Huizenga (5) closes in for a tackle during Friday night's game at Rockford.

(KAREN WAITE | MLIVE.COM 9-20-13 )

In a running time span of just under four minutes (3:59), McKellar turned a close game into a rout as Rockford raised its record to 3-1 overall heading into next Friday's O-K Red Conference opener against Hudsonville.

The 6-0, 185-pound McKellar threw two touchdown passes in the final four minutes of the second quarter to turn a 7-0 lead into a 21-0 halftime advantage. The first was a 11-yarder to “Big” Ben Sims with 3:41 remaining in the half. McKellar also directed the Rams' “hurry-up” offense in the final two minutes of the second quarter and tossed another touchdown pass, this time to Josh Olson from 13 yards out with 35 seconds left before halftime.

After shredding the Jenison defense with his arm in the second quarter, McKellar started off the second half with another bang, running back the kickoff 90 yards for another touchdown to make it 28-0, just 18 seconds into the third quarter.

“I gained a lot more confidence over the week, and once I completed the first one, it was smooth from there on,” McKellar said. “I started out as a kick returner and receiver, and even though I'm playing quarterback now, I still want to be on the kick receive team.”

McKellar was 11-for-15 through the air for 103 yards and the two scores. He also rushed for 39 yards and had two separate carries for 18 yards apiece, along with the big kickoff return.

“I thought he was exceptional tonight,” Rockford coach Ralph Munger said. “Austin is a very gifted young man. He can play defense and he can play specials.

“We've been waiting for him to do this (at quarterback), and now we can add that part of his game to our arsenal.”

Rockford also received two 6-yard touchdown runs from Ethan LaCourt – including one that turned the running clock on with 2:01 remaining in the third quarter – and seven extra points from placekicker Drake Strehl. Backup quarterback Landen Haney completed the scoring with a 14-yard touchdown run late in the fourth quarter.

“I really liked our effort and enthusiasm,” Munger said. “The players who are the pillars of our team came to play.”

Jenison quarterback Brett Bethke (10) finds room on the outside as a host of Rockford defenders close in.  
(KAREN WAITE | MLIVE.COM 9-20-13)

Jenison, which gained a total of just 52 yards, had 12 plays that went for no gain or negative yardage. Sophomore running back Brock Bethke felt the wrath of the Rockford defense with eight carries for a minus-12 yards.

The Wildcats defense – led by Al Smith and Luke Diekevers – played well early, keeping Jenison in the game for much of the first half before McKellar went to the air and completed seven passes and two touchdowns over the final four minutes of the second quarter.

“Our defense kept us in the game in the first half,” first-year Jenison coach Todd Kolster said. “But when you only gain one first down in the first half, it's tough on the defense.”

Jenison starts five sophomores and two freshmen and plays one of the toughest schedules in West Michigan. The Wildcats play five playoff teams from a year ago. Along with Friday's game against perennial O-K Red Conference power Rockford, the Wildcats (1-3) still have to play perennial O-K White powers Lowell and East Grand Rapids, 2012 state semifinalist Caledonia and defending state champion Grand Rapids Christian. On Friday, Lowell defeated the same Muskegon team that thumped Rockford one week earlier by a score of 31-20.

“It is what it is,” Kolster said. “We're not going to go away. We've got a lot of work to do, and we'll keep working and trying to get better for next week (against Caledonia).”

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