

American Football- Wolves win thriller and banish finals defeats



The Wolves defence stuffs a Nighthawks' drive

Edinburgh Wolves have made it difficult for themselves this season, often falling behind before coming back to win or giving up the lead very late on. This weekend was no different as they staged a comeback that banished the memories of two finals defeats to the Merseyside Nighthawks.

This past weekend with just seconds on the clock they took the lead on a rushing play into the corner as Callum Davidson broke through a crowd of players to hand the Wolves a six-point lead. Merseyside drove down the field quickly afterward, using their signature long passing game but failed to come up with the points they needed, throwing an interception as time expired.

The sidelines and stands erupted as the memories of two lost finals (2014, 2015) were replaced by jubilation of such a dramatic win. This was no more evident than in the post-game huddle where Coach Don Edmonston was drenched with the customary water cooler.

These two teams have met on three occasions, prior to this in the past few years and developed a rivalry that has seen some classic matchups. This weekend added another.

The game started with a fumble by the Wolves on only their second play leaving the Nighthawks with a very short field. The Nighthawks, a dominant offensive force for the past four seasons, failed to take advantage.

The Wolves Jamie Morrison, clearly happy with the strong defensive show on the first drive decided to give the ball back to the Nighthawks as he threw an interception. Again with a short field, the Nighthawks failed to score, this time electing for a field goal after stalling near the goal line they attempted a field goal that was blocked.

Edinburgh, clearly shaken from two early giveaways, reverted to a more conservative approach, electing to run the ball more often. It worked. They moved the ball slowly and patiently down the field controlling the clock and using a mixture of running, passing, and sweeps. The drive ended with a passing play as a receiver made a slant run across the end zone, picking a pass off his shoelaces, while falling to his knees. With the extra point put wide right, the Wolves had taken a 6-0 lead.

With a long field to play with Merseyside showed their strength using a long pass on their first play and moving the ball 60 yards. The Nighthawks made light work of being in the red zone this time as they run the ball up the middle smashing through the line and adding the extra point, taking the lead 7-6.

This pattern continued through the first half as both offenses moved the ball, the teams alternating leads until halftime when Edinburgh led 21-20.

With some injuries being attended too over halftime, the game was delayed as the medics dealt with the downed players. The second half started similarly to the first ending with Merseyside moving the ball quickly on the first drive and scoring on a pass to Great Britain wide receiver Harry Routledge for his second score of the game. Looking to stretch their lead to a seven point margin Merseyside elected to go for the two-point conversion, but the pass fell incomplete leaving the score at 26-21.

Edinburgh thought they had scored on the next drive, but a fatal mistake by the offensive line meant the play was pulled back and the score wiped off. With the ball inside their own 10-yard line, Merseyside was in the ideal place to take advantage with their effective long game.

After a couple of plays moved the ball forward they faked a hand-off and the Edinburgh secondary bit. The secondary stepped up a few yards and had (hawks 89) blew passed and hauled the ball in, only some last ditch tackling brought him down just yards short of the score. It took only a few more plays before Daishawn Honahan, broke through with a strong run and with the added EP Merseyside stretched their lead to 33-21. The rest of the 3rd quarter became a stalemate as Merseyside took fewer risks and Edinburgh tried to regain momentum.

That momentum came in the form of a long sustained drive as they moved the ball in small chunks ending with a well-managed play to wide receiver Dave Orr in the corner and kicked the extra point to make it a one-score game at 33-28 to Merseyside.

Merseyside replied typically with a drive built around a long

downfield pass but once again failed to convert from inside the 5-yard line. After stopping the Nighthawks with a brilliant goal-line stand the Wolves held the Nighthawks to just a field goal, stretching the lead to 8 points.

A long return on the kickoff from Callum Davidson gave the Wolves an immediate chance to draw level, but a looping pass came down and found the arms of a Nighthawks defender and hope seemed to seep away for the Wolves. But not to be outshone just two plays later the Wolves defense came up with, probably, the most important turnover of the game as got the ball back deep in Merseyside's half.

A well-worked play led to Dave Orr again, finding space as a ball arched over the top of the Nighthawks defense and he used the two yards of space to make it count. Edinburgh attempted a two-point conversion to tie the game but the play was stopped short, and they remained behind, 34-36 with just 3 minutes to play.

After an attempt to disrupt the Nighthawks return game with a looping squib kick failed Merseyside used another long pass to set them up with good field position but with the drive stalling and just outside of field goal range they tried to run it on 4th down. A solid hit from a Wolves defender and the ball came loose with the Wolves recovering it.

The Wolves were set, knowing they had to move the ball 45 yards to get a potentially game-winning field goal or more. A couple of plays and the energy in the stand was electric as the Wolves surged downfield looking for a score that could give them the win.

The score came as #34 received the ball and bounced outside, stretching the Merseyside defense and sneaking just inside the corner. For the first time since the start of the second half the Wolves had the lead and the and with the extra point and 50 seconds to go Merseyside received the ball 41-36 down.

Merseyside moved the ball downfield and with the time expiring threw a ball into the end zone, only for a Wolves player to go up and come down with the ball. The sideline erupted as did the stands as this win clearly meant a lot to the players and fans after some tough losses in the past.

After the game, both coaches talked about a game of football being played the right way, by two excellent teams and how excited they were to match up again later in the season.

Edinburgh host Sheffield in their last home game of the season next Saturday at Meggetland Stadium.