

St. Francis Football Picks Up Where it Left Off

By Nick Ostiller
The Outlook

When a high school football team loses its star quarterback to graduation and watches its star receiver transfer to another program, expectations for the following season naturally become tempered. But for St. Francis High School, the 2015 campaign commenced on the right foot as the Golden Knights came from behind to defeat visiting West Covina High School, 36-24, last Friday at Friedman Field.

"They showed me that they have their own expectations," said St. Francis head coach Jim Bonds. "People keep talking about last year and who's graduated, and we want to focus on this year. We're glad to get the season started and get a win under our belt. They want to prove that the 2015 Golden Knights are a team to be reckoned with."

St. Francis will look to keep up its winning ways as the team travels to Moorpark High School on Friday, Sept. 11, for a 7 p.m. game against the Musketeers from the Marmonte League.

BIG SHOES TO FILL

Last year, quarterback Jeremiah Martin led the Golden Knights to an undefeated Angelus League championship before breaking his collarbone in the second round of the playoffs. He finished with 2,460 passing yards, 29 touchdowns and no interceptions while rushing for 595 yards and 10 scores. When Martin — now a preferred walk-on at UCLA — had to leave that quarterfinal battle against Whittier La Serna High School last fall, backup signal-caller Miles Bryant was thrown into the fire as a sophomore. The Golden Knights ended up losing the game, but Bryant gained valuable experience competing in such a high-stakes environment. Although St. Francis' season was over, Bryant's momentum was just beginning.

He spent the spring and summer working out and studying the playbook, preparing for the opportunity that lay ahead of him.

Fast forward to Friday night. With his homework completed, Bryant aced his first test as the team's starting quarterback. The junior completed 16 of 22 passes for 244 yards and two touchdowns against West Covina, guiding the Golden Knights (1-0) to a season-opening victory over the defending Hacienda League co-champions.

"I thought he managed the game well," said Bonds. "We didn't ask him to do too much early and then he made some big throws when he needed to. I thought he got more and more comfortable as the game went on. I thought he was playing better in the second half than he did in the first quarter. That's just going to come with experience and playing time. There [are] a lot of expectations on him and some big shoes to fill. I thought he did a great job."

Bryant's first pass of the game was a 3-yard touchdown connection with senior receiver Jasher Foster that tied the game, 7-7, at the 3:39 mark of the opening quarter. The Bulldogs (0-2) had taken an early lead when junior Prentis Busby caught a 10-yard pass in the end zone five minutes earlier. Bryant completed his next three passes as well, each thrown to a different receiver.

"It feels good," said Bryant. "Through the summer, we struggled a little bit trying to find our identity. But it's much easier to find our identity after a win than it is after a loss. So I think that this win is going to help us a lot."

SENIOR STALWARTS

One of Bryant's favorite targets throughout the game was Foster, who is also expected to fill a void this season. Last year's star receiver, Dylan Crawford, transferred to Santa Margarita High School after hauling in 44 catches for 1,006 yards. As the new No. 1 receiver this year, Foster did not disappoint under the weight of



Photo courtesy Eric Danielson

St. Francis receiver Jasher Foster hauled in seven catches for 135 yards and two touchdowns against West Covina High School. The senior also added a 34-yard run to help the Golden Knights to victory.

his extra responsibilities.

The senior caught seven passes for 135 yards and two touchdowns, displaying elite foot speed after the catch and a knack for being in the right place at the right time.

With the Golden Knights trailing 14-7 early in the second quarter, a St. Francis offensive play broke down and Bryant was left to scramble. Realizing his quarterback was in trouble, Foster strayed from his route and streaked across the middle of the field. Bryant spotted the safety valve and hit Foster with quick pass. The reigning CIF-SS Division 3 champion in the 110-meter high hurdles immediately took off down field, leaving several West Covina defenders in his wake. The 40-yard gain set up sophomore Gabriel Grbavec's short touchdown run that tied the game at 14 with 8:16 left in the first half. The Golden Knights would never trail again.

"It felt great," said Foster. "First game of the season, loved the energy. A great team effort from everybody. Miles was on point throwing. The linemen, they were blocking well. I'm glad we came out with a win."

Foster added another touchdown reception in the third quarter that extended St. Francis' lead to 28-17. The 5-yard score was set up by his own 23-yard catch on the previous play.

"I had a 7 route and I just kind

of settled in the hole and Miles saw me," said Foster, who also broke off a 34-yard run in the second quarter. "That's the chemistry we were talking about."

Fellow senior Areg Nazarian picked up where he left off last season as St. Francis' lead running back. The 5-foot-7, 185-pounder rushed 15 times for 87 yards, including a 16-yard touchdown scamper in the second quarter that gave the Golden Knights their first lead of the game at 21-14. Nazarian left a West Covina defender on the ground following a devastating fake.

"Sophomore year, I sat behind [running back] Joey Mudie," said Nazarian. "I learned a lot from him. I learned how he opens the passing game. So now I'm just trying to do the best I can to make everyone shine. I'm going to do my best and hopefully other people do their best and we just come out with Ws."

Nazarian also caught four of Bryant's passes for a total of 25 yards through the air.

"Our big-play guys — our returning starters, Foster and Nazarian on offense — are going to have to make big plays for us early in the season while we bring some of the younger guys along," said Bonds.

Junior kicker Matt Bazarevitch contributed a 41-yard field goal that extended St. Francis' lead to 31-17 early in the fourth quarter and then tacked on a

27-yarder to push the advantage to 34-24 on the team's next drive.

DEFENSIVE CRACKDOWN

The Golden Knights' defense suffered several breakdowns early in the game. West Covina scored on its first drive. Bulldogs junior receiver Anthony Parada then sneaked behind the St. Francis secondary for a 70-yard touchdown catch later in the quarter to give the visitors a 14-7 lead.

But that's when the Golden Knights defense tightened down the screws.

West Covina would not score another touchdown until the fourth quarter, when junior Steven Cantero's 1-yard touchdown run brought the score to 31-24. The Bulldogs' other points arrived via a field goal.

"The defensive side of the ball, I thought they made some great adjustments at halftime and really shut them down in the second half — except for the big play that got them down there," said Bonds, referring to Parada's 74-yard reception that preceded Cantero's score.

The most important defensive plays occurred during West Covina's final two drives as quarterback Aaron McCorkle (13-20, 264 yards) tried to keep his team's hopes alive. Golden Knights junior lineman Anthony Khoshrozeh sacked McCorkle for an 8-yard loss on third down, but the talented senior was able to complete a 20-yard pass on fourth down to achieve a first down.

"They were putting pressure on the quarterback" said Bonds. "I think our four guys up front on defense wore them out a little bit in the second half, and they were relentless pursuing the quarterback. That's what we loved, and we were hoping that our defensive line would kind of carry our defense, because the guys behind them are pretty young. So I thought that was the case tonight, especially in the second half."

Khoshrozeh dropped McCorkle again for negative yardage on third down, and then Grbavec sacked him for an 11-yard loss on fourth down. St. Francis took over on downs but had to punt it back to the Bulldogs with 1:30 remaining. After an intentional grounding penalty pinned West Covina on its own 10-yard line, Grbavec and Khoshrozeh delivered the knockout blow by taking down McCorkle in the end zone for a safety that increased the Golden Knights' lead to 36-24.

"First half, we let up a lot of yards," said Nazarian. "[After] our adjustments, [in the] second half we held them to less than 100 yards. So, we had good adjustments. Our sophomore D-lineman [Grbavec] stepped up to the plate. He's a monster. He's been working his tail off."

Flintridge Prep Football Suffers First Setback



Photo courtesy Eric Danielson

Flintridge Prep's Kory Hamane ran for 50 yards and a score against La Jolla Country Day on Saturday, but the first-half double digit deficit was too much to overcome for the Rebels in a 48-26 loss at Occidental College. Prep (1-1 overall) will face Blair High in a nonleague game at Muir this Friday, Sept. 11, at 7 p.m.

ADIDA

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season schedule, but Adida said it didn't bother his coach.

"He told me that if it's something I really want to do, then go do it," said Adida.

The Spartan started a page to help him get to Santiago. He

must raise \$2,400 to achieve his goal. Visit www.gofundme.com/mg34gvhs for more information about Adida and the Pan American Maccabi Games.

"It's an incredible opportunity for Jewish athletes of all ages," said Steinbach. "I had an opportunity to coach in the European games and enjoyed it so much

that I threw my hat in again for the games in Santiago. I wanted to share the experiences I had with the Maccabi Games and bring along new athletes to share in those meaningful experiences. Sports are just a platform. These competitions and events are meant to focus on strengthening Jewish pride."