

Leonard's legs boost Dons over Buena

October 24, 2008 by [Chic Perkins - - PRESIDIO SPORTS CORRESPONDENT](#)

In a football game that produced more than its share of oddities and a chest-thumping 35-18 victory for the Santa Barbara Dons at Buena Friday night, it seemed only fitting that Dons head coach Will Gonzales would designate a running back as his team's player of the game.

That would be Kyle Leonard, who to this point of the season has been overshadowed in a pass-happy offense led by record-setting quarterback John Uribe and his talented receiving corps.

But Leonard was Santa Barbara's secret weapon in the second half when the Dons broke away from a 14-11 gridlock lead at halftime to secure a critical and impressive Channel League victory on the road.

Carrying the ball just once for no gain in the first half, Leonard got the call 13 times in the second half to cover 95 yards on the ground that helped open up Santa Barbara's vaunted passing attack.

"Kyle Leonard was the player of the game for us," said Gonzales during the post-game emotion among his players that signified the importance of this league win for Santa Barbara.

"We told our kids all week," Gonzales continued, "that, when you're talking about season goals like doing well in the league and making the playoffs, you've gotta win in white (uniforms.) In other words, you have to win on the other guy's field to achieve your goals.

"We were a very focused team tonight."

Leonard, perhaps surprised that a member of the press would be talking to him after the game, would admit that this was a team win, giving credit to his offensive line that gave him running room and the defense that came up with a second straight strong performance.

"Obviously we struggled at the beginning of the season," Leonard said, alluding to the Dons' 1-4 non-league record to start the season. "But we knew we have a very, very strong team, so it's nice to get back on track."

Coupled with their league-opening 29-17 victory over Dos Pueblos last week and Friday night's stunner in Buena, the Dons are off to a 2-0 start in the Channel League and 3-4 overall. Next up — perennial league champ St. Bonaventure at Peabody Stadium next Friday.

Uribe, who certainly made his presence known with more lofty passing numbers — 24-of-37 for 289 yards and 4 TDs — noted that Leonard "had a great game." Then he added, "I can't say enough about our defense. They are the reason we won tonight. After all those points scored on us in our first few games, our defense has really come on strong. They've given up only 17 and 18 points in our last two games."

A strong case could be made that the biggest sequence of plays in the game for Santa Barbara were made by its defense. Ahead 14-3 midway through the second quarter, the Dons were quickly on their heels after Buena advanced to the Santa Barbara 7-yard line on a freakish and disheartening play. Bulldogs quarterback Rex Winslow had the ball stripped from him behind the line of scrimmage at the Santa Barbara 40, only to have teammate Jordan Anderson scoop the ball up and turn the miscue into a 33-yard gain.

The Dons' Roberto Nelson made the TD-saving stop by forcing Jordan out of bounds at the 7. Jordan followed with a six-yard gain to the 1-yard line. But Buena running back Nate Rosales was stuffed for a one-yard loss, the Bulldogs were flagged for a 5-yard illegal shift penalty, and Dons defender Stephen Pena sacked Winslow for a drive-destroying 14-yard loss.

Matt Dominick, who culminated Buena's game-opening drive with a beautiful, high-arching 45-yard field goal that cleared the goal posts by 15 yards, was then trotted in to attempt a mere 28-yard kick. This time Dominick barely lifted the kick belt-high and the ball was easily batted down, then covered up by Santa Barbara's Jesse Lucatero.

"We can put up all the points we want, but you win games on defense," said Gonzales, who singled out defensive linemen Lenny Vargas, Juan Hernandez and Juan Figueroa for their line-of-scrimmage play.

"And when you consider that we sometimes score so fast, that puts our defense on the field so long."

The Dons defense seemingly was on the field forever in the first quarter.

The Bulldogs ran 10 plays and 5:19 off the clock on their opening drive before Dominick's 45-yard field goal. Then Freddy Maldonado put Santa Barbara's defensive unit right back on the field after his electrifying 96-yard kickoff return for a touchdown and a 7-3 Dons lead 6:27 into the game.

Maldonado caught the kickoff near the left sideline at the 4, dodged an oncoming Bulldog player, and outraced the rest of the Buena special-teams unit in front of his ebulent teammates cheering him on down the Dons' side of the field.

More than nine-and-a-half minutes had been played before Uribe took his first snap. The Dons had great field possession near midfield but only advanced as far as the Buena 35 on their first possession.

Their second possession proved to be more fruitful after Buena's second punt of the night. Uribe completed four passes in a scoring drive, the third to Maldonado for 25 yards to the Bulldog 17 after Uribe artfully dodged a potential sack. On the very next play he hit Bryson Lloyd over the middle a few strides in front of the goalline, and Lloyd (7 catches for 107 yards) ran it in for the 17-yard TD.

Chase Chandler, 5-for-5 on PAT kicks on the night, made the score 14-3 Santa Barbara.

But the Bulldogs served notice they weren't going down easy. Uribe coughed up the ball on the Dons' next possession on a bone-jarring tackle by blitzing Buena defender Logan Norris, who recovered the fumble at the Santa Barbara 40.

From there Buena took five plays to reach the end zone. Michael Davis (56 yards on 10 carries) bull-dogged for eight yards to the 1, then plowed in from there for the TD with just 49 seconds remaining in the half. Back-up quarterback Robert Munoz then connected with Kevin Leiser in the left-side of the end zone for a two-point conversion that closed the Dons lead to 14-11.

Gonzales said he was unfazed at halftime.

"We knew we were in control of the game," he said.

"In the second half we knew what we had to do," said Uribe. "The offensive started opening up holes (for Leonard), our receivers got open and everything fell into place."

The Dons offensive line, comprised of Luis Obispo, Humberto Ahumada, Memo Gutierrez, Pena, Figueroa and Vargas, helped shift the momentum immediately back to Santa Barbara.

With plenty of pass protection and Leonard adding a running dimension to the attack on a guard-pulling trap play out of shotgun formation that opened up holes in the middle, Uribe directed a 77-yard, 13-play drive. Nelson, who drew a key pass interference call during the drive, scored the first of his three TD receptions in the second half from 3 yards out by catching a Uribe dart over the middle of the end zone.

Chandler's PAT kick gave the Dons some breathing room with a 21-11 lead at the 7:11 mark of the third quarter.

But Buena countered with the most unexpected play of the night. Faking a punt from their own 44-yard line, the Bulldogs scored on a 56-yard pass from Jon Beeson to a wide open Norris. Dominick's PAT kick shrank the Dons' lead back to three, 21-18, with 6:13 remaining in the third quarter.

Getting fooled only seemed to fire up Santa Barbara.

Uribe and Nelson perfected the corner pass into the end zone for two more scores from 6 yards out at 2:41 of the third quarter and from 4 yards out at 6:54 of the fourth quarter. Nelson finished the night with seven receptions for 65 yards.

Between those scores the Santa Barbara defense came up big again when Spencer Kelly, Pena and Figueroa combined to stop Davis for no gain on a 4th-and-1 at the Dons' 46-yard line.

And just for the record: Leonard can catch the ball, too. He caught four Uribe tosses, mostly on screens in the backfield, that he turned into gains totalling 56 yards. Not bad for a running back on a pass-crazed team.

SANTA BARBARA 35, BUENA 18

Santa Barbara.....7 7 14 7- 35

Buena.....3 8 7 0- 18

SCORING SUMMARY

FIRST QUARTER

B- Dominick 45 FG, 6:41.

SB- Maldonado 94 kickoff return (Chandler kick), 6:27.

SECOND QUARTER

SB- Lloyd 17 pass from Uribe (Chandler kick) 10:13.

B- Davis 1 run (Leiser pass from Munoz) 0:49.

THIRD QUARTER

SB- Nelson 3 pass from Uribe (Chandler kick) 7:29.

B- Norris 56 pass from Beeson (Dominick kick) 6:13.

SB- Nelson 6 pass from Uribe (Chandler kick) 2:41.

FOURTH QUARTER

SB- Nelson 4 pass from Uribe (Chandler kick) 6:54.

TEAM STATS SB B

First Downs 28 12

Rushes-Yards 28-130 26-91

Passing-Yards 289 146

Total Yards 419 237

Passes 24-37-1 12-23-0

Punts-Avg 1-35 3-31.0

Fumbles-Lost 1-1 2-0

Penalties-Yards 8-74 7-55

INDIVIDUAL STATS

RUSHING — SB: Leonard 14-95, Maldonado 4-17, Lucatero 2-11, Uribe 8-7. B: Davis

10-56, Anderson 7-

47, Rosales 5-6, Munoz 1- (minus) 6, Winslow 2- (minus) 12.

PASSING — SB: Uribe 24-37-1, 289 yards. B: Winslow 4-10-0, 31 yards; Munoz 7-12-0

59 yards; Beeson

1-1-0, 56 yards.

RECEIVING— SB: Lloyd 7-107, Nelson 7-65, Leonard 4-56, Maldonado 3-37, Garcia

2-15, Mendoza 1-9.

B: Norris 1-56, Davis 2-26, Perry 5-25, Padilla 2-20, Winslow 1-11, Leiser 1-8. FG- B:

Dominick 45

(good), 28 (blocked).