

Dons become own worst enemy

Mistakes cost SBHS in 48-21 loss to Oxnard

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It probably wouldn't be fair to say that things went against Santa Barbara from the very start of their season opener Friday against Oxnard at Peabody Stadium. But the host Dons were at times their own worst enemy, turning over the ball four times in the first half and committing various miscues that enabled a powerful Yellowjacket squad to storm its way to a 48-21 victory.

"Make no mistake, that was a very good Oxnard team that we played," said Santa Barbara head coach Will Gonzales. "But we had a lot of positives from this game, and the players know that they are not as bad as they played at times tonight."

From the opening kickoff, it was clear that this game would bear no resemblance to last year's bruising 9-6 defensive struggle won by the Dons. The Yellowjackets' kickspun in the air and fell short, and Santa Barbara was unable to cover the ball, giving Oxnard a first-and-10 at the Dons' 21. Two plays later, senior tailback Sam McCowan scored on a 16-yard run up the middle.

Santa Barbara showed it had some explosiveness of its own, as Freddy Maldonado returned the ensuing kickoff to midfield. From there, Dons quarterback John Uribe completed six passes in 11 plays, the last connecting with Roberto Nelson for a 4-yard touchdown pass.

But the Dons botched an intentional onside kick, giving the Yellowjackets another start in Santa Barbara territory. It took only four plays for McCowan to find the end zone again, this time on a 13-yard run.

It was all McCowan, all the time in the first quarter, as the Yellowjackets runner capped off the next Oxnard drive with a 23-yard touchdown run. Then after another Santa Barbara fumble, McCowan caught a 15-yard swing pass from quarterback Desman Stewart for a 27-7 Oxnard lead.

Santa Barbara showed the Peabody Stadium crowd that it could move the ball, as Uribe mounted an effective passing game. But four fumbles, three of which were lost, put the Dons in a deep hole.

Even when things went well for Santa Barbara, Oxnard found a way to turn their own misfortune into points. After a second quarter punt by Uribe dribbled its way down to the Yellowjacket 4-yard line, Stewart hooked up with 6-foot-3 senior wide receiver Jamal Smith for a 45-yard pass play on first



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Dons wide receiver Roberto Nelson is helped up by Andrew Mendoza after scoring the only TD in the first half for the Dons.

Dons' Lloyd catches team-record 17 passes

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down. Smith and Stewart finished off the drive eight plays later, as Smith made a diving over-the-shoulder catch from 11 yards out with just over a minute left in the first half to complete a 96-yard scoring drive.

Smith, who finished with four catches for 110 yards, caught a middle screen pass from Stewart at midfield, then accelerated past the Dons secondary for a 58-yard touchdown play.

Bryant Jones blocked a punt late in the third quarter, then took the ball over himself to put the

Yellowjackets up 48-7.

Santa Barbara got on the board again twice in the fourth quarter, as Uribe finished off a 13-play, 78-yard drive that ended with a one-yard touchdown pass to tight end Bryson Lloyd. Uribe picked up where he left off last season, throwing 46 passes for 212 yards and two touchdowns with one interception. Maldonado got the Dons' final touchdown from Nelson on a 57-yard pass play late in the fourth.

The loss overshadowed a strong performance by Lloyd, who set a new Dons team record with 17 receptions for 155 yards. His 17 catches put him one behind the all-time mark set by Joe Gutierrez of San Marcos in 2005.

Maldonado had two catches for 85 yards and a score, and was also an effective kick returner for the Dons. Nelson stepped in at quarterback in the fourth quarter and threw for 107 yards and a touchdown.

"Our offense was able to play well and move the ball. Sometimes, our kids were trying a little too much when they lost the ball, but that's a good problem to have," said Gonzales. "I think that Oxnard is better than they were last year."

Santa Barbara will try to get back on the winning track Friday on the road against the Beverly Hills Normans.

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Dons tight end Bryson Lloyd tries to break an Oxnard tackle in the first half