

Dons fall in season opener, 48-21

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By the numbers, no one was working harder against the Santa Barbara High School football team last night in Peabody Stadium than the Dons themselves.

SCORE

Oxnard, 48

Santa Barbara, 21

Yellowjackets about 30 seconds to reach the end zone, and like that, the tempo for the rest of the evening was set, and Oxnard rolled to a 48-21 rout of the Dons.

And when the crowd wasn't gasping because of a Santa Barbara turnover, they were ringing their hands over Oxnard's Sam McGowan, who played nearly the entire game on both sides of the ball, and effortlessly stitched through the Santa Barbara secondary for four touchdowns in the first quarter.

It wasn't the way Santa Barbara Head Coach Will Gonzales wanted to start the season, but it wasn't all bad, either.

"Our team knows we're not as bad as we played," Gonzales said. "Our nerves got in the way a little bit — first game jitters. Anytime you turn over the ball like that you're not going to be successful."

Gonzales also said it wasn't so much that his squad played bad, but that Oxnard is really good.

"They got a lot of seniors that can make plays," he said. "They're an excellent team and you can't take that away, [but] we have a lot we can build on."

Before a minute could tick off the clock in the first quarter, Santa Barbara running back Kyle Leonard fumbled the kickoff near the Santa Barbara 19-yard-line. After a couple of quick plays, McGowan, who racked up 109-yards of offense on the night, punched it in for the first touchdown.

Santa Barbara's first offensive set was

promising, with quarterback John Uribe immediately taking the air and finding his favorite target, Bryson Lloyd for a quick two-yard gain. Uribe connected with Lloyd two more times on the 11-play, 51-yard drive, which featured two fourth-down conversions and ended with a 4-yard touchdown pass to Lloyd.

This would be as close as the Dons got to victory, as the Yellowjackets' unleashed a vicious offensive attack led by McGowan and Oxnard quarterback Dasmien Stewart.

With 8:57 remaining in the first quarter, Stewart connected with McGowan on the first play of the drive for a 21-yard gain. The four-play drive was capped with a 12-yard touchdown pass to McGowan. A blocked point after attempt kept the score at 13-7.

The Dons punted away on the next play, and two minutes and 66-yards later, Stewart connected with McGowan for the third time, good for a 22-yard touchdown.

Uribe and Lloyd got into a solid rhythm

during the Dons' next possession, but two plays after converting another fourth-down conversion; Lloyd fumbled the ball at the Dons' 42-yard line.

Oxnard reeled off three straight first downs, one on a 16-yard reception by McGowan before Stewart found the speedy receiver for a 15-yard touchdown, McGowan's last of the night.

After the game, Oxnard Head Coach Mark Beckham pointed out that McGowan notched 1,000 yards in just nine games last season, and is dangerous anywhere on the field.

"Sam is an amazing player," he said. "He does an incredible job. Anytime he touches the ball he has a chance to score."

With the score sitting at 27-7, the Dons took over with 51 seconds remaining in the first quarter. Uribe found Lloyd twice for 13 yards before the quarter ended, but on the fifth play of the second quarter, just as the Dons appeared to be finding a groove, Lloyd fumbled.

See **DONS**, page 20

DONS

FROM PAGE 17

bled coughed up the ball while trying to stretch for more yardage.

Gonzales said at least two of his team's fumbles came as a result of players attempting to do too much, which he said isn't necessarily the worst occurrence.

"You can't falter kids for trying," he said. "They were trying to make plays and that's a good problem to have."

The Santa Barbara defense sparked to life after the fumble and forced the Oxnard to make its first punt of the game with 9 minutes remaining in the half.

But on the first play of the next drive, Uribe handed off to Leonard, who also stretched for extra yardage and turned the turned the ball over.

The next score came with one minute remaining in the half after Oxnard marched down the field, notching four first downs during a 96-yard drive that ended with a 10-yard touchdown pass from Stewart to Jamal Smith, which put Oxnard up 34-7 going into halftime.

The first-half totals didn't do Santa Barbara's offensive effort justice. Uribe tallied 117 passing yards and completed 19 of 33 passes.

Lloyd racked up 105 yards on 12 catches.

Oxnard started with second half the way they ended the first: with a 58-yard touchdown pass from Stewart to Smith.

Santa Barbara's first offensive drive of the second half stalled, and the Dons turned it over on downs at midfield.

Oxnard blocked a punt by Uribe, which was nearly run back for a touchdown by Yellowjackets' linebacker Bryant Jones. On the first play, Stewart handed off to Jones, who punched it into the end zone to give Oxnard their final score of the evening and lengthen the lead to 48-7.

With three minutes left in the third quarter, Santa Barbara unleashed a 15-play drive that included five first downs and five flawless passes by Uribe before he connected with Lloyd for a one-yard touchdown pass.

The Dons forced a turnover on the next Oxnard play. However, after two

quick plays, Uribe threw an interception.

Santa Barbara's offense seemed to come alive late in the fourth quarter when Gonzales went with the speedy Nelson, who is also a basketball standout for the Dons, at quarterback.

Nelson completed three passes on his first drive behind center, one of which was a 20-yard bomb to Leonard. The drive stalled and Santa Barbara turned the ball over on downs.

Oxnard punted away with 1:28 remaining, and on the first play, Nelson lofted an 80-yard touchdown pass to Freddy Maldonado, which rounded out the scoring.

Santa Barbara forced another Oxnard fumble on the Yellowjackets' first play of the next drive, and made it within 10 yards of the goal line before the last second ticked from the clock.

Gonzales credited his squad's improved defensive game in the second half and said he's not worried, since Channel League play doesn't begin until Oct. 17 against Dos Pueblos.

Santa Barbara will be back on the turf next Friday at Beverly Hills.