

St. Max Mustangs hold off Newmarket Raiders for YRAA final berth



By Jake Courtepatte

Talk about a close call.

Holding a fifteen point lead heading into the fourth quarter of Friday's clash with the Newmarket Raiders, the St. Maximilian Kolbe Mustangs had to muster up their best defensive efforts to book their spot in the York Region Athletic Association Tier 1 football final.

The Mustangs picked up the first point of the game early on a kick that left the Raiders' endzone, taking a small lead on their first drive. But a fumble two drives later gave the Raiders the ball in Mustang territory just past midfield, taken full advantage of by Newmarket. Two long rushes down the left-hand side later, the Raiders led 7 ? 1, with just under a minute left in the first quarter.

A blustery, fall day, strong winds played a major factor in this one as gusts blew directly towards one end of the field. On the ensuing kickoff, the wind forced the Raiders to inadvertently kick an onside kick, which they would actually recover to start the second quarter.

The Mustangs defence was able to put an end to the drive deep in their own zone, but quarterback Ben Langlois led the team with a couple of long-gain passes to get St. Max to the Raiders' 20. It would end, however, with Langlois scrambling and giving up a fumble.

With the ball back in their possession and time running out in the half, Langlois led another long and grueling drive for the Mustangs, moving the chains to third-and-inches at the Raiders' 10. Two plays later, a quarterback sneak by Langlois put the Mustangs up 8 ? 7 at the half.

An opening drive in the second half was once again capped off by a Langlois major, from the one-yard line for 15 -7 lead. After denying the Raiders a first down to get the ball back, St. Max lucked out on a pass interference call on third and ten, moving them deep into Raider territory where Langlois would go to the air to Jacob Fenchak for a commanding 22 ? 7 lead.

It was a grueling fourth quarter for the St. Max Mustangs. The defensive line made an impressive effort to stop the Raiders on first and goal, but not without conceding a safety after the turnover. With the ball back, Newmarket was again pressing in the red zone, leading to a six-yard touchdown by Jack McRogers to bring the score to 22 ? 16.

Tragedy seemed to strike the Mustangs with under two minutes to go when a blocked punt gave the Raiders the ball around the St. Max 40. They moved the chains to the 14-yard line with 40 seconds to go before quarterback Noah Craney was picked off by

Matthew Vassos.

St. Max ran out the clock to book their ticket to Saturday's final, on home field no less.

They will be facing Newmarket's Huron Warriors, who dominated the defending champion, Markham's Bill Crothers, by a score of 69 ? 0.