

Redbirds hold on against Riverside

Metamora fans breathed a collective sigh of relief after Friday night's game. The Redbirds defeated the Riverside-Brookfield Bulldogs 52-41 in a game that could only be described as long and wild. The game, which lasted well over 3 hours, was not nearly as close as the score would imply.

Metamora offense started the game but quickly went 3 and out as the anxious Redbirds seemed to let their emotions get the best of them. Riverside took advantage of decent field position and scored on a 31 yard pass play. Metamora's Tom Bieneman (#11) provided a spark for the Birds by blocking the extra point attempt to keep the score at 6-0 Bulldogs.

Riverside would only hold the lead for 1:06 as running back Aaron Peters (#47) scored the first points for Metamora on a 47 yard run off the right side. Kicker Brennen VanMieghem (#26) added the extra point and the Birds took the lead 7-0 and didn't relinquish it the rest of game.

Metamora's defense held Riverside on the next series and quickly put another touchdown on the board as Peters scored from 7 yards out. It appeared the Redbirds would take control of the game but the Bulldogs responded by scoring on their next possession. Metamora's defense held on the two point conversion leaving the score at 14-12 with 10.5 seconds left in the first quarter.

Metamora then scored 14 unanswered points in the 2nd quarter on a 10 yard rush by quarterback Michael Fay (#15) and Peters' third TD rush from 31 yards out. Fay was injured on the scoring drive and was removed from the game. Fay was later diagnosed with a mild concussion but appeared fine on the sideline in the second half. The Redbirds went into the half with a 28-12 lead.

The Birds kept up the defensive pressure by shutting out Riverside while collecting 17 points of their own in the 3rd quarter. Senior Dan Burk (#13) started things out with a nice 35 yard run. Backup quarterback Beau Geier (#12) then showed everyone why the Redbirds just may have the top two quarterbacks in the conference. Geier moved a pile of Bulldogs from 8 yards out to collect the Redbird's second TD of the quarter. VanMieghem added a 30 yard field goal with 2:18 left in the 3rd to give Metamora a commanding 45-12 lead.

Riverside head coach Otto Zeman then created a bit of controversy by keeping the majority of his offense and defense starting team in the game while Metamora began substituting en masse. The Bulldogs outscored the Redbirds 29 to 7 in the 4th quarter as Metamora's reserves could not contain Riverside's passing game. The Birds seemed to fade on offense until senior Grant Whittington (#4) recorded a couple of outstanding hard fought rushes. Geier then scored from 16 yards out to give Metamora its 52 points.

The Redbirds starting offensive line, which seemed to be a question mark coming into the game, proved to be a strong point for Coach Pat Ryan. Metamora's line handled the Bulldogs up front with ease despite their smaller size. The Birds used a committee of at least 10 defense linemen throughout the game with seniors Dane Kempf (#2), Sean McKee (#42) and Joe Wyzlic (#44) leading the way. Metamora recorded a total of 430 offensive yards for the game but gave up 487 total yards to the Bulldogs. 456 of those yards came through the air giving the Redbirds defensive backfield a major workout.

Metamora seemed to be the "walking wounded" by the end of the game. Along with Fay, several key players came off the field with injuries including Whittington and Kempf. Kempf returned to game after being examined by team trainers but Whittington's injury with just a minute left in the 4th quarter appeared to be more serious. Whittington's injury was later diagnosed as a very bad ankle sprain and will be evaluated day to day.

Metamora (1-0) takes it on the road Friday night September 4th against the Washington Panthers (1-0) in what could easily prove to be the best Mid-Illini Conference matchup of the year. Metamora and Washington are early season picks for #1 and #2 in the conference respectively. This key game is scheduled to start at 7:30pm at Washington High School. The Panthers easily defeated Springfield Lanphier in their opening game 40-9. Emotions will no doubt run high as these two rivals battle for the early season conference lead.