

Defense Determines Destiny: Falcons Win Third Consecutive City Title

Nov 7, 2009

In front of 1200 spectators at Gordie Howe Bowl, the mass equally divided between support for Marion Graham and Bishop Mahoney, the Marion Graham Falcons captured their third consecutive city crown. In a defensive battle, largely due to gusty winds, a full week of preparation and two programs very familiar with each other, the Falcons earned the title with a 18-10 victory. In two previous championship appearances, Marion Graham won titles on the strength of solid offense. This time despite lots of attention given to both talented offenses, the defenses sparkled and in the late going the Falcons earned the decision.

In the past two seasons, Marion Graham and Bishop Mahoney have played some entertaining contests, the winner not being decided until late in the fourth quarter. That was the type of game the spectators expected, and the teams delivered once again with the defenses controlling play and the outcome. Late in the first quarter, Marion Graham kicked a 38 yard field goal to give the Falcons an early 3 point lead. Soon thereafter, Bishop Mahoney's back Derek Bell scampered into the endzone from 9 yards out to give the Saints a 7-3 lead. Largely keeping things on the ground in the first half, the defenses stiffened in the second quarter, stalling drives and stopping third down gambles. With 2 minutes remaining in the second frame, Dylan Hart hit Falcon receiver Dane McDougall on a 10 yard play action pass to give Marion Graham a 10-7 lead going into the break.

It appeared early in the third quarter that Bishop Mahoney was ready to take control of the contest. Using good field position to their advantage, the Saints were sniffing the endzone, inside the Falcon 20 yard line. Quarterback Brad Schnitzler went back to pass, but was rushed by an aggressive Falcon defense, his pass over the middle being intercepted, and delaying momentarily the joy of the Bishop Mahoney faithful. The Falcons could do little on offense and again with good field position, the Saints were able to kick a Michael Bandula 29 yard field goal, knotting the game at 10. The SSSAD turning point of the game came in the final minutes of the third frame when Marion Graham had a 7 minute 8 play drive that stalled on the Saints 10. Though the Falcons came away with only a single point and a one point lead on a missed 17 yard field goal by Casey Mah, the Falcons were able to win back the field position lost early in the third quarter, important real estate the Saints were never able to get back.

Backed up deep in their own zone in the fourth quarter, the Saints could do little against the improved defense of the Falcons and contributed to their own woes with untimely offensive penalties. Likewise, the Falcons were struggling moving the ball against the stubborn Saints defenders. With time ticking away, just over 2 minutes to play and a 11-10 Falcons lead, the Saints executed well a third down punt run gamble, getting the necessary yards for a first down. An offside call on the play turned the fortunes of the Saints around and they were forced to punt. 2 plays later Matt Kopperud ran outside for 19 yards and into the enzone for a 18-10 lead with

85 seconds remaining on the clock. The Saints, however, were unable to move the ball consistently to mount a serious threat, and the Falcons celebrated their third consecutive City Championship.

It was a well played contest by both teams and enjoyed by the large crowd of students, parents and alumni. Marion Graham, favored to win the title in preseason polls, will now attempt to win a Provincial 3A Football Championship, something which they have been unable to do in two previous attempts, losing in the Provincial semi final in each of the last 2 campaigns. Marion Graham will face the Weyburn Eagles, 1 PM at Gordie Howe Bowl in the Provincial 3A Football Championship on Saturday November 14. Another large crowd is anticipated to support Marion Graham in their efforts to bring home the banner. Good luck to the Falcons.