

Painful memory provides winning edge

BY DON RICE, THE STARPHOENIX NOVEMBER 4, 2014



The Marion Graham Falcons defeat the Bishop Mahoney Saints in the 3A high school city final at SMF Field Monday.

Photograph by: Richard Marjan, The Starphoenix, The Starphoenix

Marion Graham 8, Bishop Mahoney 7 The Marion Graham Falcons weren't about to let last year happen again.

A painful 21-3 loss in last year's 3A high school football city final to the Bishop Mahoney Saints didn't sit well with the Falcons all season.

Head coach Bill Eng posted a photograph of last year's score in their gym. They studied the image before they headed to Monday's rematch at Saskatoon Minor Football Field.

The motivation worked as the Falcons eked out a tight 8-7 victory over the fourtime defending champion Saints to claim their first 3A title since 2009.

"Our coach kept a picture of the scoreboard when we lost last year and every time we looked at it we knew we didn't want that same outcome, so we came out and hit it even harder," said Falcons star running back Andrew Pocrnic, who ended with a game-high 199 yards rushing.

The Saints scored first when their defence forced a fumble and Reed Murphy scooped it up, running 64 yards to pay dirt. After the Michael Gerber convert it was 7-0 Saints, a lead they carried into the half.

The Falcons finally hit the scoreboard on their first drive of the second half. Following the longest pass of the game, a 55-yarder from Ben Thomas to Tanner Rhode that set the Falcons up at the Saints fiveyard line, Pocrnic busted a three-yard touchdown run.

After the Rhode conversion it was tied at seven.

A few minutes later a Falcons drive stalled at the 19-yard line, but a 26-yard missed field goal attempt by Rhode provided the decisive point of the game.

The defence came up huge for both sides on the night, but the Falcons showed the winning edge. Following the Saints 64-yard fumble return touchdown they had another 50-yard fumble return to the Falcons five-yard line. The Falcons defence held strong stopping a third-down gamble from the two. They had another third-down stop inside their five earlier in the game.

"Oh my goodness, the defence was glue tonight," said Thomas, who played his final city game. "They did not allow any yards. They were a wall, and that is what held our team together tonight was our defence."

The game was the first high school championship played on the new SMF Field and the turf received rave reviews from the players who remembered the awkward footing on last year's grass turf.

"Incomparable. This turf that we have now is incredible. The chance of injury has decreased so much - it's a safer game. It's a more fun game to play," Thomas said.

The city champion Falcons advance to the 3A provincial semifinal game versus the Moose Jaw Peacock Tornadoes Saturday in Moose Jaw. The 4A City Championship is set for Thursday at 6:30 p.m. between the Holy Cross Crusaders and the Centennial Chargers at SMF Field.

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