

Boyle clips Corbin 34-33 to reach state finals

By MIKE MARSEE

Contributing Writer

DANVILLE — Boyle County got back to Lexington by getting it right.

The Rebels were far from perfect Friday, but the things they did well more than canceled out the mistakes they made, and that made the difference.

From big plays on offense to takeaways on defense to two pivotal special teams plays, the Rebels made enough plays to eke out a 34-33 victory over Corbin in a closely contested and controversial Class 4A semifinal.

“We feel like it came down to just doing the right things,” said Boyle tight end Seneca Driver, who scored three of the Rebels’ five touchdowns.

The victory sends Boyle to the state finals for the seventh time in nine seasons and the fifth time in six seasons under coach Justin Haddix.

“Nobody gave us a chance starting out the year with all we lost, and I’m just proud of our bunch and they way they kept fighting and made plays,” Haddix said.

Boyle (13-1) will play Franklin County for the Class 4A championship at 8 p.m. Friday at Kroger Field in Lexington as the Rebels bid for their 13th championship in their 15th appearance in the finals.

The Rebels improved to 15-3 in semifinal games and have never lost one at home, but this one was very much in doubt at



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Seneca Driver of Boyle County leaves a Corbin defender behind as he runs for a 15-yard gain while Boyle’s Ji’Dyn Smith-Hisel (4) and Jhet Raleigh (2) look on during the fourth quarter Friday.

several points during the second half at packed-to-capacity Rebel Stadium.

That was never truer than in the moments following a Boyle fumble late in the game that resulted in a dispute that will forever be linked to this game.

An inadvertent whistle blown while the ball was live negated a possible Boyle turnover and allowed the Rebels to maintain possession and run out the clock.

Corbin (10-4) had just scored to pull within 34-33 but was denied a chance to tie the game when Boyle’s Bubby McPherson blocked the extra point attempt, and the Rebels took over at the Corbin 46-yard line with 3:19 remaining after an unsuccessful

onside kick attempt.

On the next play, Boyle quarterback Jhet Raleigh mishandled the snap and was attempting to corral the ball when a whistle blew. But the ball was still loose, and Corbin’s Mason Salmons appeared to recover it at the Boyle 37.

However, high school rules state that an inadvertent whistle ends the play at that point, and the down was replayed from the original line of scrimmage.

There was plenty of cause for concern in the Boyle camp even before that.

The Rebels feared that a botched extra point attempt early in the third quarter would come back to haunt them. But when Corbin scored just 4 1/2

minutes later to tie the game at 27-all, Darryl Yancey blocked the Redhounds’ extra point kick.

And when the Redhounds were poised to tie the game again after scoring with 3:19 to play, McPherson came flying in to block a second kick and preserve the Rebels’ lead.

McPherson had just been flattened by Corbin’s Cam Estep on Estep’s 25-yard touchdown run, but he redeemed himself on the conversion attempt.

“He ran me over ... and my dad came up to me (and said), ‘It’s not over. You’ve got a chance to get (the kick),’” McPherson said. “So I looked at it and I saw the blockers and I went and got it.”

Haddix said he would have

expected nothing less from McPherson or anyone else.

“That’s just football,” he said. “Things don’t go good, you’ve got to make a play and make something happen.”

A loss in the third round of the playoffs kept Boyle away from the finals last year, and McPherson said they were determined to get back to Kroger Field.

“Man, look at the fans around us,” he said. “We’ve got to do it for the community, we’ve got to do it for the seniors that lost last year and we can’t end our career like that. We’ve got to get the culture back.”

There was more offense in this game than was expected between two teams with sound defenses. Boyle scored on three of its first four possessions and five of seven overall, Corbin also scored on five of seven series and neither team punted.

“We didn’t have the best defensive game, but we still ended up winning the game,” Driver said.

The Rebels’ two defensive stops came in the first half, as Brady Edwards recovered a Corbin fumble moments after Boyle’s first touchdown in the first quarter, then intercepted a pass at the goal line — and returned it 76 yards before he was run down — on the final play of the first half.

Ji’Dyn Smith-Hisel followed his 440-yard rushing performance a week earlier against

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Rebels head off to face Franklin in state finals

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DANVILLE — A few weeks ago, Justin Haddix might have offered you a ride to Lexington in his truck this week. But now the Boyle County bandwagon is filling fast.

Boyle is on its way back to the state finals once again, and Haddix is happy to have anyone who wants to come along for the ride.

It’s a trip the Boyle coach knows few fans expected the Rebels to make after their early season loss at Lexington Catholic.

“My pickup truck holds six people, and I think you could have put everyone in there who thought we could do this on the bus ride back from Lexington Catholic. I think you may have had some open seats,” Haddix said. “But we worked hard and deserved this and earned it, and we’ve got to work hard this week.”

Boyle will battle Franklin County, the last in a string of familiar foes, for the Class 4A championship at 8 p.m. Friday at Kroger Field in Lexington.

It’s the Rebels’ fifth trip to the state finals in six seasons under Haddix, its seventh trip in the past nine seasons and its 15th overall.

This will also be the third postseason meeting in the past six years between Boyle and Franklin, and the second in which a champion is crowned.

That means Haddix is very familiar with what coach Eddie James, a former Boyle assistant, and the Flyers do well. And beyond any offensive or defensive schemes, what he said is Franklin’s best quality is one it shares with Boyle.

“Their guys are winners. They’ve won a lot of games, and they know how to win,” Haddix said.

Franklin (14-0) became one of four undefeated teams to reach the 12-team state finals following its 21-14 victory over Paducah Tilghman on Friday.

The Flyers have lost only two of their last 44 games, to Boyle in the 2023 semifinals and to Tilghman in the 2024

semifinals. They have reached the semifinals in each of the past six seasons, and they made the finals in 2020 before falling to Boyle 31-28.

Franklin boasts the highest scoring offense in Class 4A — and the fourth-highest among all teams — at 46.1 points per game, though the Flyers were held below 30 points by Bullitt East, Lexington Christian, Bowling Green and Tilghman.

Sophomore quarterback Knox Barrett, in his second year as a starter, powers the Flyers with 3,035 passing yards, 37 touchdown passes and only six interceptions.

“He gets the ball out of his hand quick ... and they don’t take many negative plays,” Haddix said. “They’ve got some good receivers who catch the ball and make things happen.”

Seniors Jacob Taylor (73 receptions, 903 yards, 10 TDs), Delano Collins (52 receptions, 888 yards, 12 TDs) and LeDarius Simmons (48 receptions, 559 yards, 7 TDs) are the top targets for Barrett, who has a completion percentage of .716.

Boyle (14-0) will also start a sophomore quarterback in Jhet Raleigh, who was pressed into service in the Sept. 5 loss at LexCath and has started every game since — 11 consecutive wins. Raleigh has a .721 completion percentage and has thrown for 1,965 yards and 22 TDs with two interceptions.

Seneca Driver has a team-high 47 catches for 852 yards and 10 TDs for Boyle, and Kain Logan has 34 catches for 396 yards. Leading rusher Ji’Dyn Smith-Hisel has 1,609 yards and 16 TDs for the Rebels.

Haddix said Franklin’s style of play on defense is similar to Boyle’s.

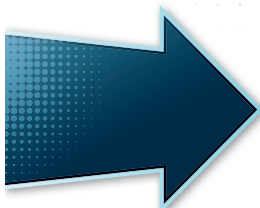
“They get downhill, they’re physical, they make the game tough,” he said.

When it’s all said and done, however, the Rebels’ focus in practice this week won’t change because of what the Flyers do.

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