



Centennial vs. Chaparral (5A II Championship Game) 12.13.10

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It was billed as the 'Game for the Ages', one that had been talked about since the preseason and one many Arizona High School Football enthusiasts hoped would come to fruition.

In the end, it was all that and more-- for just over three quarters at least.

Chaparral held a narrow 18-10 lead over Centennial with under nine minutes left in the Class 5AII state championship game when the Firebirds stepped on the gas.

A fumble recovery Chaparral's Colton Bishop, the first of two turnovers for him in the fourth quarter, halted a potential game-tying Coyotes' drive with 8:45 left to play.

This key play led to a Connor Brew-to-Tim Murphy 7-yard TD pass that put the Firebirds up 25-10 and effectively iced their 32-17 win at the University of Phoenix Stadium on Monday night in Glendale.

It was Chaparral's second straight championship, both seasons finishing a perfect 14-0.

"We told the guys before the game that we were going for perfection-- to win a second straight championship and do it with a perfect record and they did that," a very pleased Chaparral head coach Charlie Ragle said.

After a toe-to-toe battle for nearly all of the first quarter, the Firebirds would get on the scoreboard first.

First, a long run of 45 yards by Lucas Petrullo (10 carries, 87 yards) got the Firebirds into Centennial territory. Next, Brewer found Alex Holmes (2 catches, 39 yards) three plays later on a 25 yard strike to put Chaparral inside the red zone. Zach Skeen (23 carries, 107 yards) would cap the 11-play drive with a 3 yard run up the middle for 7-0 lead with just 24 ticks left in the opening stanza.

And then on the ensuing kickoff, an inadvertent fair catch started the Coyotes deep in the territory, something Chaparral took full advantage of.

A gain for no yards, then a false start penalty, had Centennial facing a 2nd-and-13 from their own 4-yard line.

Enter Sean Kamela.

The big tackle, who was a disruptive force all game, sacked Coyotes' quarterback Justin Sanchez (7 of 16 for 63 yards) in the end zone for a safety and a 9-0 Chaparral lead. It would be the first of two safeties, a state championship record, for Kamela.

"I never thought (the safeties) would happen. Those were the first and second safeties of my season," Kamela explained.

Instead of crumpling under the pressure, though, Centennial did what few other teams could do against Chaparral

all season, that is to answer with a score of their own.

The Coyotes would force the Firebirds to punt after the safety free kick and Sanchez and company went to work.

On 2nd-and-17 from the Centennial 31 yard line, Sanchez scrambled for 39 yards and into Chaparral territory.

A few moments later, with the Coyotes facing a 3rd-and-7 from the Chaparral 27 yard line, Sanchez found Gary Ross (3 catches, 24 yards) for nine yards and a first down.

But it would be a 17-yard toss into the endzone from Sanchez to Ross that will be one of the most memorable plays on the game, as Ross leaped high in the air over the Chaparral defender and snatched the ball out of midair.

Suddenly, the Chaparral lead shrunk to just 9-7.

And when junior kicker Alex Kammayer nailed a 43-yard kick as time expired in the first half, Centennial had completed the comeback and led 10-9.

The lead for the Coyotes, however, wouldn't last long.

A beautiful punt by Holmes for Chaparral, forced the Coyotes to start a drive inside its' one.

On the very first play, Kamela busted through the Centennial line for his other aforementioned safety, and the Firebirds took an 11-10 lead, one they would not relinquish.

"Give (Chaparral) credit. They beat us on the line today and it was a factor," said Centennial Head Coach Richard Taylor.

But even after a Petruzzo 1-yard plunge pushed the Firebird lead to 18-10 with 3:56 remaining in the third quarter, Centennial was anything but out of it.

When the Coyotes' Jebron Harrington recovered a Chaparral fumble on the Firebirds' own 37 yard line, Centennial had a golden opportunity to get back on the board and potentially tie the score up.

But the previously mentioned fumble recovery by Bishop on the 42 yard line of Chaparral, allowed the Firebirds to weather the Centennial attack enough to gain the title.

"We all thought we had a good chance to win but we just didn't get it done" junior standout safety Zach Hoffpauir, who was a force all night for the Coyotes' defense.

A 1-yard run by the Firebirds' Davonte Neal (3 catches 39 yards, 9 carries 30 yards) and a 66-yard TD pass from Centennial's Troy Hawthorne-to-Julien Singleton would close out the scoring.

Hawthorne looked sharp in relief of Sanchez who injured his ankle late. The junior was 4 of 4 for 114 yards against the first team defense of Chaparral.