



Centennial vs. Pinnacle 11.12.10

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When playoff time arrives, the margin for error always shrinks-- to usually next to nothing.

So when Pinnacle took on Centennial in the opening round of the 5A II playoffs, the Pioneers knew they had to play that perfect game in order to pull off the shocker.

That margin for error slipped away late in the second quarter for Pinnacle when the Coyotes' Gary Ross caught a Justin Sanchez 20-yard pass for a touchdown with just 35 seconds left before halftime for a 14-6 lead.

Two more quick scores midway through the third period and the Coyotes (10-1) were well on their way to a 28-6 win in Peoria on Friday night.

With the win, Centennial advances to next week's quarterfinal round against Marcos de Niza a 47-10 winner over Perry.

It is the same program that eliminated the Coyotes in a stunner in last year's semifinal round. "There are now eight teams left and all of those teams are hungry so we cannot make mistakes," Centennial coach Rich Taylor explained after watching his team commit a pair of errors in the first half, which led directly to a measly 14 points.

A Sanchez-to-Zach Hoffpauir 4-yard pass with 3:04 left in the opening quarter put the hosts up 7-0. Sanchez would finish the night with a productive 5-of-7 passing for 100 yards.

But the Pioneers (6-5) showed they were not going to be intimidated by Centennial, when they cut the score to 7-6 on a Jonathon Miller run up the middle from 29 yards out.

A huge three-and-out defensive stand, however, with less than three minutes in the second quarter, gave the Coyotes time to open the margin with the aforementioned Ross TD. And the intensity was ratcheted up after a halftime pep talk by Taylor, leaving the victory in no doubt.

"We just all of a sudden dominated in the second half. We just turned it on and put them away," explained Centennial linebacker Jebron Harrington, who would use his offensive prowess to blow open the game for good in the third quarter.

Another three-and-out performance by the Centennial defense gave the Coyotes the ball near midfield just barely two minutes in the second half.

On the next sequence, Vegas Johnson, who had his most productive day of the season with 158 yards rushing (on 14 carries), raced 30 yards to the Pinnacle 27 yard line. The ensuing play saw Harrington bully his way down the right sideline for a 21-6 lead.

A Caleb Newman scoop-and-score on a Dominique Hodge blocked punt on the very next series upped the lead to the 28-6 final.

"Coach Taylor tells us all the time that special teams will change a game. I just practice this all the time during the week and it paid off tonight," added Newman. The Pioneers were able to keep Centennial on their heels a bit in the first half, piling up 90 yards rushing. But the run game was completely stymied after intermission gaining only 17 yards on 15 carries.

Cody Gibson led the way for Pinnacle with 60 yards on 23 carries, while Miller had 33 yards on 4 totes