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Experienced line leads way for Desert Mtn.

By Mark Heller
Tribune

The five offensive linemen stood on the home turf. They could barely stand; a couple were wringing out sweat from their T-shirts. A couple had prune hands from their gloves.

They are the elder statesmen on this year's Scottsdale Desert Mountain football team. For most of this quintet, it's their last high school go-round and their best chance at making the 5A Division II playoffs.

The journey toward that postseason began Friday night with a 14-0 victory against Gilbert Mesquite, a game chock full of penalties and miscues on both sides, but ultimately won by the Wolves' boys up front.

Pounding the ball at the larger Wildcats, the Wolves used the right side of their offensive line and some improved running by Anthony Snyder and broke through after halftime. They controlled the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball.

Matt Mitchell, Tyler Davison, Alex Lehman, Josh Simon, Robert Hamilton and Russ Estabrooks haven't been noticed much in their high school careers. It's been one losing season after another, but even though it didn't look much different by halftime, this senior-laden group steered Desert Mountain (1-0) toward a positive first step.

"We've been there before," Hamilton said of a rugged first half. "We take everything that happens on our shoulders. We want to carry this team."

That they did. On a night when both teams combined for 23 penalties, each side had a touchdown erased by a miscue and both teams had another easy score literally slip through fingers, Desert Mountain rode its defense in the first half and finally broke the game open in the second half.

Behind his big boys, Snyder finished with 77 yards and a touchdown, Dekota D'angelo ran behind them for a 44-yard touchdown and the Wolves managed 10 of their 14 first downs after halftime.

The Wolves finished with 217 rushing yards, or slightly more than 6 yards per carry.

"We figured out their weakness and killed them with it," Estabrooks said.

It was a rough night for Mesquite (1-1), which moved the ball in the first half using its spread attack, but penalties bogged them down early, and the Wolves effectively halted the Wildcats' running as the game went on.

Penalties and another dropped touchdown pass on the final play of the first half only compounded the problems for Mesquite. On a night the Wildcats matched their rushing yards with penalty yards (75), Mesquite was on the bus fewer than three minutes after the team shook hands with Desert Mountain.

The Wolves had plenty of penalties and passing-game struggles of their own but persevered with patience for a change.

"I'm proud of our resilience," Wolves coach Tony Tabor said. "We didn't let (first-half) adversity put us down. Something like that usually sinks us in the past."

LIVE IN-GAME UPDATES

It's been a defensive battle in the first half, and we're still scoreless at intermission. At the end of the intermission, Mesquite coach Mike Reardon went into the press box with his headset ; it's unusual for a coach to be in the press box and not on the sidelines.

Mesquite returns a Desert Mountain interception 70 yards for a touchdown, but the play is called back by offsetting personal fouls. Still scoreless in the third quarter.

Desert Mountain's Dekota D'angelo breaks off a 44-yard run around the end to give the Wolves a 14-0 lead with just 8 minutes left.

Mesquite turns it over on downs with under 2 minutes left; Desert Mountain still leads 14-0 and should be able to run out the clock.

Game over: Desert Mountain 14, Mesquite 0. Mesquite had 75 yards in penalties and 75 yards rushing.

PREVIEW

Mesquite (0-1) at Desert Mountain (0-0)

Time: 7 p.m.

Address: 12575 E. Via Linda, Scottsdale

Key matchup: With its running game still shaking itself out, the Wolves will need quarterback Kevin Radcliffe to make an impact. The Wildcats held Desert Ridge to fewer than three yards per carry.

Key stat: Three kicks were blocked between Mesquite and Desert Ridge last week.

The intrigue: How does Mesquite react to losing an early lead, then winning a wild one against Mesa Desert Ridge last week? Given the Wildcats injuries last year, it's a good sign in what was a sloppy night. Desert Mountain's season of expectations begins and 5A-I Mesquite is a good first lesson.



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