

Mustangs Ground Palos Verdes

By Gregg McMullin

The football match-up between Mira Costa and Palos Verdes was to be one pitting the Mustangs' vaunted defense versus the Sea Kings' ball control running game. The Mustangs (5-2, 2-0) came into the game the top-ranked team in the CIF Southern Section Western Division, while Palos Verdes (4-3, 1-1) came in ranked eighth. So with a full crowd settled in for the game that would give the winner the inside track for the Bay League title, the Mustangs built a 14-0 first quarter lead and went on to defeat PV 21-7.

Early on you just knew this would be a game of defense with costly turnovers, but Palos Verdes paid mightily for theirs. The Sea Kings muffed a punt by Mira Costa's Brendan Sofen and the Mustang's Deon Morris recovered the fumble near the seven yard line. Two plays later, J.R. Tavai caught a short pass from Kyle Demarco and ran untouched into the end zone from eight yards out to give the Mustangs a lead they wouldn't lose.

The Mustangs' defense stopped the Sea Kings from doing anything special on their next possession. Marcus Probasco came up with his second sack of the year on a key third down play that forced Sea Kings to punt back to Mira Costa. Demarco dumped off a pass to Kyle Nunn and the senior wide out stretched the field with his speed down the sidelines for 43-yard gain. On first and goal from the four-yard line, Demarco scored his seventh rushing touchdown of the year to make it 14-0.

The Mustangs took a conservative approach to keep the ball away from the Sea Kings the rest of the first half. Mira Costa did threaten to score once more before halftime, but a fumble cost them a chance to widen the lead. Demarco hooked up with junior wide receiver Sam Stekol for a long gain, but the Sea Kings' Dylan Moore stripped the ball from Stekol and the Sea Kings recovered the fumble on their own 12-yard line with under a minute to play in the first half.

The Mustangs conservative grind-it-out approach on the ground continued in the second half. When you have a stable of confident and competent running backs like the Mustangs have, it's easy to give the ball to your running backs and eat up the clock. Kellen Lockwood led all Mustangs gaining 70 yards on 10 carries, while Rico Wright carried 11 times for 52 yards and Morgan Reece picked up 48 yards on 10 rushing attempts. Add to that Demarco running the option and you can see that the Mustangs took a more ball control approach, especially in the second half. "They are an extremely talented team with a good running back and they can get back into the game pretty quickly if you're not careful," said Mustang coach Don Morrow.

The only time the Mustangs gambled cost them on defense. Midway in the third quarter with the Mustangs leading 14-0, the Sea Kings struck pay dirt. Max Baiz's pass to Robby Kolanza on the sideline was meant to be a short yardage gain. But Mira Costa's Jackson Morrow went for the interception and came up empty as Kolanza raced down the sidelines for 74-yard gain. That long pass

play set up Palos Verdes' highly touted running back Victor Mancusi's one-yard plunge to cut Mira Costa's lead to 14-7.

The Mustangs' defense hounded Baiz all night long and that helped prevent the Sea Kings from doing much of anything in the air. Baiz was just 7-for-19 for 123 yards, but he was sacked four times for minus 37 yards. As for the Sea Kings' running attack, the Mustangs shut down Mancusi by holding him to just 88 yards on 19 carries. The diminutive senior power running back came into the game as the leading rusher in the South Bay with 803 yards in 136 carries and an average of 5.9 yards per carry plus nine rushing TDs. "We knew going in we had to stop the running game and we did a pretty good job of doing that," said defensive coordinator Ray Lee.

To eat up the clock, the Mustangs stuck with their ground game in the fourth quarter. Demarco led the offense on a 79-yard drive in eight running plays that was complimented by Rico Wright's 15-yard run and capped by Kellen Lockwood's 34-yard touchdown run. Lockwood was hit a number of times by PV defenders, but he shook them off and made another tackler miss on a spectacular juke move on his way to the end zone.

With the Mustangs leading 21-7 with 8:03 left in the game, the defense came on strong again. They forced the Sea Kings to punt the ball back on downs twice before the Mustangs ran out the final three minutes of the game for the win. "They're a quality team and the main objective is to keep the ball away from them. When we were leading 14-7 and 21-7, you tend to go into a more conservative approach," said Morrow.

The Mustangs travel to play Peninsula (0-7, 0-2) today (Friday) for a 3 p.m. game. The Panthers have struggled so far this season, but routinely battle the Mustangs closely. Morrow doesn't anticipate the Mustangs playing anything but their best game leading up to a showdown with Leuzinger (6-1, 2-0) next Friday night on the road.

Mustang News and Notes

Mira Costa's girls' cross country team has been one of the top teams in the South Bay for years.

And for the past couple of years, the Mustangs have had an amicable rivalry with Saugus at a number of prestigious meets, including last year's CIF and state meets. Though Saugus won both events going away, the Mustangs have been closing the gap.

This year top-ranked Saugus, the defending national, state and CIF champions, have a number of their top runners back. But Mira Costa's Savannah Pio and her teammates made their own statement by placing two runners in the top 10 at the Mount San Antonio College Invitational and closing in on a once wide gap with Saugus. "Our rivalry is friendly; they have a good team and we kid each other at the meets," Pio said.

The Sixth Annual Mustang Classic, benefiting the Mira Costa boys' and girls' golf teams, takes place on Monday, November 16 at the Candlewood Country Club. For more information on this event, you can contact the school or go online to Westerberg1@verizon.net.

'Costa Boys' Polo Soars



Jake Miller shoots and scores against Redondo. Photos by Shelley Kemp, www.kemp.photorelect.com

By Kelly Kemp, USA Water Polo Hall of Fame Coach

The Mira Costa High School boys' team beat Los Alamitos High in a tough inter-sectional non-League game at home this week 9-7. More importantly, it won two League games against Redondo Union and Peninsula High Schools to remain at only one loss in Bay League play and stay at number two in CIF Division IV.

Against Peninsula, the Mustangs had balanced scoring with three goals each from Bryce and Jake Miller and Conner Davidge, and Britton Cole with one goal, to finish strong in the 10-7 win. Goalkeepers Deven

Ram and Dana Tuttle each had six saves per half for the defensive gem.

Earlier in the week in the Los Al game, backup goalie Tuttle, in relief for Ram, earned 12 tough saves to spark the defense, while Jake Miller had three goals. A flurry of Green and Gold scored one each: Evan Bronner, Britton Cole, Conner Davidge, Alex Gasperian, Bryce Miller and Spencer Neste. The Redondo encounter was an 18-3 landslide with eight Mustangs scoring. Mira Costa, 15-4 (4-1 in League), next plays away against undefeated Palos Verdes, the top-ranked team in the division, prior to the CIF playoffs. Go Mustangs! •

Mira Costa Wins 3-0



Alex McBride tips ball to Redondo side. Photos by Shelley Kemp, www.kemp.photorelect.com



Fonoimoana and McBride team up to foil Redondo kill.

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