

Generals regain mojo despite losing effort

By **KEITH TESTA**
Villager Sports

Somewhere in the middle of the second quarter at Hanover on Friday night, “the wheels fell off” for the John Stark football team, according to coach Jim O’Rourke. That the wheels were on to begin the game, though, was the much more significant observation.

The Generals dropped a 50-38 decision to the homestanding Marauders despite carrying a 14-14 tie into the middle of the second period, but put forth a solid and focused effort one week after crumbling emotionally against Lebanon.

Stark posted its highest point total in two years under O’Rourke, got the first 100-yard rushing game of the season out of Stefan Oesterreich (101 yards) and generally made it clear that one bad game wasn’t going to set the tone for the rest of the season.

“At the end of the day, that’s what it’s all about. Who wants to be remembered as a guy who quit? Nobody,” O’Rourke said. “Nobody wants that. If they can finish strong and compete with some pride and a little self respect, that’s all I hope happens.”

Such was the case Friday, particularly in the early going. Touchdowns from Nic Lloyd and Carson Dunn kept the Generals even with the favored Marauders into the middle of the second period before a seven-minute funk paved the way for three Hanover scores and a significant change in momentum.

An interception, a fumble and a Hanover punt return to the two yard-line set up the trio of scores, ending much of the drama before intermission.

“We couldn’t get out of our own way and couldn’t get out of our own end of the field,” O’Rourke said of the end of the first half. “It felt like we were playing at the bottom of the hill.”

But whereas such a situation led to bickering on the sidelines and a loss of focus one week earlier, the Generals responded with a spirited second half that featured a pair of touchdowns from Pat Morin, who turned in another in a growing line of steady efforts.

Signs of progress have been tangible all year for a Generals team that went winless a year ago. They have allowed almost 70 fewer points this year than last while more than doubling their offensive production. In fact, Friday’s 38-point output would have been good for better than half of last year’s total of barely more than 60 points.

But the focus remains on finishing strong in the season finale against Plymouth on Saturday. The bounce-back after the Lebanon letdown was critical, but it will mean little if the Generals can’t put together another solid effort against one of Division IV’s perennial powers.

“I want them to continue to compete hard, and I want them to do their job,” O’Rourke said. “I want them to realize how important it is to do the right thing fundamentally at all times, even if that means things as simple as stepping with the proper foot when you are going to block somebody.”

And for the seniors, O’Rourke is looking for one final signature performance. The Generals have already won two games this season, and any progress made in the next few campaigns will be a direct link to the impact being left behind by the veterans on the current squad.

“They know they are leaving a legacy, that regardless of what the team records have been, they were a part of the solution,” O’Rourke said. “I want those seniors to go out knowing they are part of the program, and but for their hard work and dedication, we would never have improved.”