

Palos Verdes runs to victory over Mira Costa

Sea Kings get a line on Mustangs' weakness, and follow it to decisive victory.

By Elliott Teaford, Staff Writer

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Palos Verdes Zach Henkhaus makes one of his two punt... (Brad Graverson, Staff Photographer)

The game plan called for a mix of passes and runs, but it didn't take long for the Palos Verdes coaching staff to decide it was better to simplify things and stick with the ground game during Friday's Bay League game against Mira Costa.

Palos Verdes ran so well there was no need to pass in a 28-7 victory at Mira Costa, a game won in the trenches by the Sea Kings' biggest and most bruising players. Palos Verdes coach Guy Gardner didn't hesitate to go with what worked.

"We had a game plan to chuck it," Gardner said, "but we were able to move them off the line really well. We worked all week to throw and to run, but the game plan changed because we were able to run so well."

Running back Carl Aguirre ran through big holes in the line, gaining 154 yards and scoring one touchdown on 18 carries. The line, anchored by center Koa Long, made things easier for Aguirre, who also had a 70-yard touchdown run nullified by penalty.

"It was definitely the line," Aguirre said when asked who deserved the credit for the Sea Kings' dominance over Mira Costa's defensive line. "You know when there's a 5-foot hole, there's going to be at least a 5-yard gain."

Palos Verdes (5-2, 2-0 in league play) didn't just grind out a victory. The Sea Kings also benefited from some fine special teams play, with Zach Henkhaus scoring on punt returns of 47 and 80 yards during the pivotal second quarter.

Henkhaus' first return gave Palos Verdes a 7-0 lead.

Mira Costa (2-5, 1-1) responded immediately, tying the score 7-all when Stephen Giovati's 2-yard touchdown capped an 80-yard drive. Running back Brandon Edmond got the drive started with a 55-yard run on the first play.

Edmond gained an astounding 390 yards and scored two touchdowns during the Mustangs' 30-28 victory last week over West Torrance. He had his moments Friday against Palos Verdes, gaining 107 yards on 16 carries.

It was a little bit different running against Palos Verdes and Andrew Bucklin, a 6-foot-3, 265-pound junior defensive lineman who spent the night clogging up all available routes. Bucklin had plenty of help whenever Edmond got free, which wasn't too often.

When Edmond did spring loose, as when he darted through the line to start Mira Costa's drive to its lone touchdown, Palos Verdes safety Robby Kolaniz chased him down from behind to prevent an 80-yard scoring run.

Palos Verdes took a 21-7 lead by halftime thanks to Kolaniz's 8-yard scoring catch on a pass from quarterback Zack Fixen with four minutes remaining in the second quarter, and Henkhaus' 80-yard punt return with 1:33 left in the half.

"It's always great if you can score on special teams, especially against a tough team," Gardner said.

Mira Costa seemed stunned by Palos Verdes' quick scores in the final moments before halftime and had little response in the second half.

Mira Costa came up empty on its best scoring chance in the second half, missing a field goal after a blocked punt gave the Mustangs the ball on the Palos Verdes' 15-yard-line with 1:47 remaining in the third quarter.

Palos Verdes put the game away with an 80-yard scoring drive on its ensuing series, with Aguirre scoring on a 6-yard run with 7:31 left after his earlier 70-yard run had been nullified because of a holding penalty.

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