



## Strong first half propels PV over PENHI

By Nick Ingram Special to the News  
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For one squad last Friday afternoon, it was the end of what began as a promising season.

For the other, it was the last regular season test before heading into the postseason.

When the dust settled, host Palos Verdes High School emerged victorious against rival Peninsula High School, using a strong first half en route to a 35-3 Bay League victory and wrapping up a perfect league schedule.

“I’ve dreamed about this day since I was in Pop Warner,” senior Robby Kolanz said. “I am happy to be a part of this team, and proud to be a Sea King. It feels like it all came together today.”

After getting off to a slow start in last year’s rivalry game, the Sea Kings (8-2, 5-0) came out firing on all cylinders, as senior Salvatore Vitale capped a nine-play, 65-yard drive with an 8-yard touchdown score and giving PV High a 7-0 lead just 2:38 into the ballgame.

“Our offensive line did really well today,” senior lineman Chase Eldredge said. “We stuck to the ground game, and having our running backs and quarterback make all these great decisions, it really helped us out.”

On that opening drive, it looked as if an unsportsmanlike penalty might derail PV High’s offense after Fixen’s 15-yard run put the Sea King offense into Panther (5-5, 1-4) territory, putting the hosts back where it started, the PV 38.

But a 16-yard completion from Fixen to Kolanz extended the drive, and after Vitale picked up 18 yards on the next two plays, Fixen’s 5-yard run and a 15-yard penalty on PENHI took the offense to the 8, before Vitale punched the ball in.

With both teams running on emotion early in the annual rivalry game, the PV High defense nearly shot itself in the foot, committing two penalties for 20 yards and extending the banged-up Panthers’ initial drive. But after passing midfield, a PENHI false start pushed the ball back 5 yards, forcing the first of four punts on what was a long afternoon for the visiting offense.

“Their offensive and defensive lines played better than ours,” PENHI senior tailback/linebacker Tommy Webster said. “They had a lot of long run plays that hurt.”

After an incomplete pass began the ensuing drive, a 28-yard up-field burst from Vitale and a 26-yard completion from Fixen to senior tight end Matt Costa, wrapped around a 4-yard Vitale run put the Sea King offense at the Panther 20.

Again, it looked as though penalties might slow PV, as a 10-yard holding call put the ball on the 25.

But the PV High offense kept clicking against the Panther D, as Fixen found receiver Donovan Ward on a 7-yard completion before Fixen called his own number at the 1, sneaking the ball into the end zone for a 14-0 lead nine seconds into the second quarter.

The Panther offense continued to run into a wall that was the Sea King defense, as senior quarterback Matt Imwalle was sacked by senior Will McPhee on the drives second play, forcing PENHI to punt once again on fourth-and-9 from the 21.

While the Panther running attack fluttered, PV High's ground game took the game by the horns, as senior Carl Aguirre began the Sea Kings third drive with a 62-yard run, moving the ball from the PV High 20 to the PENHI 18, four plays before Fixen scored on another 1-yard quarterback sneak and a 21-0 lead.

"Our zone read was working well," Fixen said. "Our coaches did a good job of reading their defense and took advantage of it."

Dug into a hole, the Panther offense finally got its motor going, as senior tailback Okumah Idah took the ensuing kickoff from the PENHI 1-yard line down to the PV High 34.

After a 15-yard unsportsmanlike penalty moved the Panthers inside the 20, and another 5-yard penalty moved the ball closer to the end zone.

But after Webster's 5-yard run put the ball at the 1, a pair of false start penalties on the Panther offense moved the line of scrimmage back to the 11.

Even as PENHI lined up for a 28-yard field goal, PV High's defense was ready for a surprise.

When sophomore holder Ian Escutia picked the ball up, instead of leaving it for Tony Bumatay to kick through the uprights, he tried to find an open receiver in the end zone.

Unfortunately for the Panthers, Kolanz stepped in front of the pass, intercepting it and taking any momentum the PENHI offense had gained on the drive.

The Sea King offense took full advantage of the turnover, moving the ball fluidly 80 yards down field before Fixen's 15-yard scramble made it a 28-0 ballgame with 52 seconds to go in the first half.

"Coach told us to do what we do, and not to get outside of ourselves," Fixen said. "We got away from it with all the penalties, but we still did what we do really well."

PV High put the finishing touches on the game at the outset of the second half, forcing the Panthers third punt before Vitale capped a 47-yard, four-play drive with his second touchdown of the game, this time a 1-yard run with 8:37 left in the third quarter.

The Panthers finally cracked the scoreboard with 8:43 left in the ballgame, as Butamay hit a 39-yard field goal, but it was too little, too late.

"We knew we lacked depth," Webster said. "Guys got hurt, guys got sick. We had a good team, but it was hard to keep us all on the field."

The Sea Kings were penalized 10 times, totaling 125 yards, as the Panthers racked up just 30 yards on four penalties.

"I was disappointed in the amount of penalties," coach Guy Gardner said. "I know the emotions were high, but you can't do that, especially in the future. They got a verbal shellacking at halftime."

Fixen finished with 86 passing yards, completing five of his 10 passes while also running for 52 yards on 10 carries. Aguirre led the Sea Kings with 107 yards on five carries, while Vitale gained 89 yards on 14 carries. Idah led PENHI with 30 yards on 10 carries, but the Panther offense gained just 39 total yards, as Webster averaged a yard per each of his 10 carries.

For PENHI, it was an end to a season that began with high expectations, as the senior-led squad reeled off four victories in its first five games, doubling its total over the previous two years.

“The senior class picked us up from the bottom rung and are the foundation of what’s to come from this program,” co-coach Adam Boyd said. “They didn’t learn to win from the seniors before them, and they taught the underclassmen how to win games.”

But a tough league schedule and untimely injuries derailed PENHI’s playoff hopes, leaving the senior class to wonder “What if?” after being forced to learn to how to win throughout the season.

“We were snake-bitten with injuries, and were down to our fifth-string running back last week against Mira Costa \[High School\],” Boyd said. “We need to finish better. Finish blocks, plays, quarters and games. Nothing more than finishing. Hats off to the guys who were on the field at the end, they played their butts off.”

After finishing the league schedule undefeated, PV High now enters the CIF Southern Section playoffs looking to erase the memory of last year’s 48-21 playoff exit against Westlake High School.

“That game will be playing over and over in my head,” senior lineman Patrick Scoggins said. “It was a horrible loss, and we all want to come back from that.”

Tomorrow, the Sea Kings host Valencia’s Hart High School, a program rich in football history with eight CIF Championships.

“Hart High is a very good football team,” Gardner said. “They are a big and physical team, and are a program with a great football tradition.”

With all playoff contests set for 7:30 p.m., tomorrow night’s contest will be held at Mira Costa High School.

“We were a better team than what we put on against Westlake \[High\] last year,” Kolanz said. “We are just getting started. The league title is really nice, but we are going to have to bring it all in the playoffs.”

*Nick Ingram is a freelance writer and a frequent contributor to the News.*