



PV falls in first round

By Nick Ingram Special to the News
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Palos Verdes High receiver Robby Kolanz pitches the ball on a trick play that would have gone for a touchdown if he was not ruled down last Friday. PV lost 15-14. Robert Casillas/Staff Photographer

It was a bittersweet ending to an otherwise memorable season for Palos Verdes High School's football team last Friday night against Newhall's Hart High in the opening round of the CIF Southern Section playoffs.

Clinging to a 14-7 lead late in the fourth quarter, the Sea King defense was unable to stop the Indians' offense one final time as the visitors drove 80 yards on five plays in 1:30, scoring on a 51-yard touchdown pass before converting the ensuing two-point attempt, handing PV High a 15-14 loss in Division III Northern action at Mira Costa High School.

"We needed to get the ball out of a powerful offense's hands like theirs as much as we could," senior receiver/safety Robby Kolanz said. "I think we outplayed \[Hart High\]."

On the same field, where earlier in the season PV High handed Mira Costa High its first Bay League loss in 17 games, the Sea Kings (8-3) jumped out to a 7-0 lead in the second quarter when senior tailback Carl Aguirre found a hole on the left side of the offensive line and raced upfield for a 64-yard touchdown.

"We knew \[Hart High\] was going to come out strong, but we prepared for it," said Aguirre, who finished with 183 yards on 18 carries. "Our offensive line opened up a few holes, and I just hit them."

But the Indians answered back three drives later, eating 5:39 off the clock while driving 73 yards before Riley Stauffer's 11-yard touchdown reception knotted the contest at 7 with 1:09 remaining in the first half.

"We knew their offense was similar to West \[Torrance High\] and other spread offenses," junior safety Matt Lopes said. "We knew we had trouble against those offenses, so we studied them, worked hard and tried to figure them out."

After the defense forced Hart High to punt on its first drive of the second half, the Sea Kings retook the lead, as Aguirre racked up runs of 17, 30 and 26 yards before senior quarterback Zack Fixen put PV High up 14-7 after finishing off a 13-yard quarterback rollout with a dive that broke the goal line.

"I was excited," Fixen said of the touchdown. "We knew we could win this game, we just had to keep going."

All signs pointed toward PV High's defense shutting the Indians down, as Lopes grabbed two interceptions on consecutive drives in the third quarter.

"We knew we had to force turnovers against a good team like \[Hart High\]," said Kolanz, who had an interception in the first quarter. "We did more turnover circuits at practice, but things didn't go our way at the end."

A costly unsportsmanlike conduct penalty on the Sea Kings' second-to-last drive of the game took any momentum the offense had built, pushing the ball back to its own 48 before a punt three plays later ended the drive, giving Hart High one last chance with 2:08 remaining.

"Key penalties in key offensive situations hurt us," coach Guy Gardner said. "You can't do that against good football teams."

After being penalized 10 times for 125 yards the week before against rival Peninsula High School, the Sea Kings committed just five penalties for 45 yards, but each of those penalties came in the second half.

It looked as though PV High might hold on, as the defense forced Hart High into a third-and-6 at the Indian 24.

But a 25-yard reception by Conner Wolven extended the drive before quarterback Connor Wingenroth found Trent Irwin wide open down the sideline on the very next play for the 51-yard touchdown reception.

"Our kids played really hard, and that's what makes this one a toughie," Gardner said. "Hart \[High\] didn't do a whole lot the whole game, but that's high school football. It stings because you want to play another game, but the seniors are who I hurt for. We don't get to play another week."

The Sea Kings had one last chance to get into field goal range after the Indians took the 15-14 lead, but were unable to pass to its own 40, as Fixen's final two passes of the season fell incomplete.

"I was kind of hoping for something to happen to give us another shot, hoping for a miracle," Fixen said. "I was disappointed when that last pass fell to the ground."

Fixen finished completing nine of his 16 passes for 88 yards, while also running for 16 yards on nine carries and a touchdown.

For those 25 seniors, it was the end of a memorable four years, and a time each will never forget.

"I'll remember the family; it's what our team is," senior linebacker Chad Mensinger said. "Everyone loves each other."

"I am a blessed kid to play for this team, and I wouldn't have it any other way. I am brothers with every single one of these guys, and the coaches are like fathers to me," said Kolanz, who had five interceptions in the year. "I'm proud to be a Sea King."

And whether the seniors are around or not, the underclassmen learned more than what meets the eye.

"Those seniors have been great role models," said Lopes, who led PV High with six interceptions. "They showed us exactly how to win. We know we need to work as hard as we can in the off-season and try to take it further next season."

The two other Bay League teams that joined PV High in the playoffs, Mira Costa and Redondo Union High Schools, both fell. Redondo Union High lost at home to St. Bonaventure High, 19-10, while Mira Costa High lost to Oaks Christian High, 43-10.

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