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Canandaigua football powers to win over Greece Athena

Nick Johnson scored three touchdowns for the Braves

GRECE — Nick Johnson found the end zone twice on runs and once on a reception as the Canandaigua Braves defeated the host Greece Athena Trojans in a Monroe County Division 3 showdown Saturday, 18-13. With the win, the Braves move to 1-1 on the season heading into next week's game against the rival Victor Blue Devils.

Initially played in windy and wet weather, neither team did much for the first quarter and a half. At least nothing good, as they combined for nine penalties in the first quarter and the still-wet pigskin led to several turnovers ... and no scoring. This was all the more surprising by the fact that Canandaigua found itself in Athena territory most of the time.

But then, with a little more than 6:30 remaining in the first half and the weather becoming sunnier, Canandaigua's Nick Johnson began to make his presence felt. As Canandaigua shifted into a power-I formation, the senior made excellent progress on several consecutive rushing plays, culminating in a 3-yard rushing score with just over five minutes left in the first half, to give Canandaigua a 6-0 lead after the point-after failed.

Canandaigua would never truly leave the power-I for the rest of the game, and head coach Jeff Welch considered it a turning point in the contest.

"It worked out for us," he said, "we were able to run the ball a lot out of that, and do some things."

After forcing Athena to punt, the Braves found themselves pinned on their own six, but the use of the ground game and a fortunate face-mask penalty on Athena allowed them to score on a 20-yard screen pass from Mitch Schafer to Johnson with about a 1:30 left in the half.

Although the two-point conversion attempt would fail, the Braves were able to hold back one final furious drive by the Trojans and get to the half up 12-0 after Athena's final shot at the end zone from the 10-yard line fell incomplete.

That stop would turn out to be important, as to open the second half the Trojans took advantage of a costly roughing the kicker penalty to drive down the field and score a touchdown of their own. Senior quarterback Nick Carnevale found Kyle Benham in the endzone to make it 12-7 after the extra point.

The Braves answered back, however, with a long drive of over seven minutes that culminated in Johnson's third touchdown of the day. That, along with some key stops and turnovers in the fourth quarter, would prove to be enough, as the Braves held on for the win.

"The blocking was fantastic," Johnson said, "[they were] pushing the guys five yards down the field, to let me get my yards. They did their job, we had to do ours, and we played as a whole team."

Carnevale threw a touchdown to Ta'Von Grandison for the Trojans' final points with under three minutes left.

The win is especially important for Canandaigua, as it allowed them to avoid an 0-2 start to the season.

"Anytime you come off a loss, it's disappointing, but it's also motivating," said Welch. "We're still trying to figure out the identity of this team, and a loss teaches you that."

Up next for the Braves is their archrival Victor. It's clearly something that is already on their minds, as they ended their post-game huddle with a yell of "Blue Devils."

"They're a very good team, always are," said Welch. "It'll be a battle with a great crowd and a great atmosphere. We are certainly looking forward to it, it'll be a tremendous challenge."



PHOTO/ JACK HALEY/MESSENGER POST MEDIA

Canandaigua's Leamon Casteen tries to run away from Greece Athena's Ta'Von Granison after a reception in the second quarter.

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