

Last-minute TD lifts Jays past Vikings

Written by Jim Metcalfe

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LEIPSIC — The Drive.

The Catch.

No, it wasn't the Denver Broncos breaking the hearts of the Cleveland Browns, nor Dwight Clark catching the ball from Joe Montana.

However, they were just as effective as St. John's scored with less than a minute left to cap off a comeback and nab a 36-29 Region 22 quarterfinal victory over Leipsic before a rabid crowd at John Edwards Stadium in Leipsic.

The victory moves the Blue Jays (7-4) to a regional semifinal date with Fremont St. Joseph's Central Catholic 7:30 p.m. Friday at a site to be determined.

Leipsic (8-3) had gone ahead 29-28 with 9:30 remaining and held the lead until the Jays' defense held on a 4th-and-7 from their 21 and commenced a drive from there with 3:05 left and holding two timeouts. Quarterback Mark Boggs hit Tyler Jettinghoff for 24 yards, then ran for three. He then hit senior Will Buettner for a great 20-yard catch — perhaps the play of the game — to the Viking 32. The Blue and Gold finished it from there with six running plays. At the 3, Jettinghoff (25 rushes for 81 tough yards) took a toss around right end and would not be denied the end one with 56 ticks remaining. After taking their final timeout for the 2-point conversion, Jettinghoff took it the other way and made it 36-29.

Devin Mangas returned the kickoff 16 yards to the 31. A 1-yard loss set up Leipsic's last gasp; a long desperation pass from Zach Kuhlman that was picked off by Evan Hays at the Jays' 37 with 42 ticks left. Boggs took two kneel-downs to run out the clock.

"It was finally about making plays. We've been talking about that all year and we finally made enough, especially at the end," Jays coach Todd Schulte noted. "We had the two big passes on the last drive and that seemed to loosen them up enough for us to run the ball. It didn't look good but we just kept playing; that was key. They were getting first downs after their last score but the defense made enough stops at the end to get the ball back. Leipsic is just such a physical team and they hit us hard. They had a great game plan; give them credit."

For Leipsic coach Joe Kirkendall, "the catch" was just so big.

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"He came up the catch of his life; that's all you can say. That was a huge play and Jettinghoff also had a huge play on that drive on a defensive breakdown," Kirkendall said. "Earlier, we had a chance to maybe seal the deal with a touchdown and didn't get a break or two to go our way. We also had penalties that killed drives earlier. This was a tough loss."

St. John's took the opening kick back 26 yards (Andrew Metzger) to start at the 32. They drove the length of the field in 11 plays — all but one on the ground; a 23-yard connection from Boggs to Metzger the only pass. At the Leipsic 2, Luke MacLennan (5 totes, 72 yards) bulled his way inside right guard to paydirt. Metzger added the conversion and it was 7-0 with 6:50 showing in the first.

Leipsic gained the Blue Jay 46 in five plays but the sixth was a forced fumble by Kody White; he also recovered at the Leipsic 48. Jettinghoff ran for three and then MacLennan took a trap inside right guard, shook off a tackle at the 35 and found the right sideline, outrunning the defense to the end zone. Metzger made it 14-0 with 3:45 left in the opener.

Leipsic's next drive was short-circuited by a pair of penalties (5 for the game for 35 yards to none for the Jays) and a 21-yard punt return by Metzger and a 10-yard penalty gave the Jays starting position at the host 34. On 4th-and-9 from the 33, Boggs dropped to pass and was forced to scramble to his right. He lofted the ball into the right corner of the end zone where Jake Hays (3 grabs, 70 yards) made the catch. Metzger made it 21-0 with 11:47 showing in the half.

After Jordan Chamberlin returned the kickoff 25 yards to the 36, Zach Kuhlman, already in the gun, dropped and lofted the ball down the left side to a wide, wide-open Devin Mangas (3 grabs, 110 yards) at the Jays' 30; the senior easily finished off the 64-yarder in the end zone. Mangas tacked on the conversion for a 21-7 deficit just 16 ticks after the Jays' TD.

Leipsic's fired-up defense forced a 3-and-out and the offense commenced at the 48. An incompletion later, Brady Schnipke ran for five yards. At the Jays' 47, Kuhlman (6-of-19 passing, 175 yards), again in the gun, dropped and fired for Aric Schroeder down the right side. He wasn't as open but still caught the ball at the 10 and completed the 47-yard TD catch. Mangas made it 21-14 with 9:36 left in the half.

On the second play from scrimmage by the Jays, Boggs went deep but Derek Steffan came up with the pick at the Leipsic 25. However, the hosts could only gain a first down and had to punt. The teams traded punts and the Jays commenced on the 34. Boggs hit two passes for 29 yards and the rest of the 10-play drive was on the ground. At the Viking 2, Boggs ran an option to the left, kept it and needed great second effort to cross the goal line with 2.0 ticks showing. Metzger made it a 28-14 halftime score.

"We went up 21-0; we needed a fast start. I don't think they had given up a point in the first quarter all year, so it was big to get on the board early and see how they'd react," Schulte added. "Give them credit; they responded. It definitely wasn't over because they are explosive; sure enough, they get a TD when a defensive back slipped and another long pass and they're right back in it. I felt we had chances to put more points on the board and see if we could take the wind out of their sails but they came up big, too, to not let it happen."

The hosts gained one first down to start the second half but had to punt.

The visitors did march from the 30 to the Leipsic 35 in eight plays but the ninth was a 5-yard loss and Troy Warnecke's punt pinned the Vikings at their 1.

Kuhlman connected with Mangas for a 35-yard pass to get them out of trouble but it stalled. Mangas, the punter, then threw a pass to Edgar Ralda but it was five yards short of the first down, giving the guests great field position at the Leipsic 41. However, they had a 3-and-out as

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the Vikings' defense stood up and forced a punt.

Starting at the 15, Chamberlin (13 rushes, 140 yards) ran 68 yards on play one to the visitor 17. Three plays hence at the 1, Kuhlman took a sneak and would not be denied his way over the goal line. Mangas made it 28-21 with 11:27 remaining.

After the ensuing kickoff reached the end zone, the Jays fumbled the ball on the very next play from the 20 and Austin Brown recovered at the 15. Four plays hence at the 3, Schnipke (11 carries, 48 yards) swept left end and found paydirt. On the point-after-touchdown, Mangas, the kicker, took the snap, rolled right and found Ralda for the 2-pointer and a 29-28 lead with 9:30 left.

The guests gained a first down but had to punt and Leipsic took over at the 35 with 7:57 left. They garnered the St. John's 19 in eight plays — all but one rushing — but from there, a procedure call stopped the momentum. Chamberlin ran for three and on 4th-and-7 from the 21, Kuhlman's pass into the end zone was incomplete, to the chagrin of the Leipsic faithful.

"We didn't come out of the gate well; we got behind the 8-ball right away, with some penalties and then a turnover. We had to settle down and once we did, we started to play better," Kirkendall added. "We did not hang our heads or go away. That is a credit to a great group of seniors; they showed so much heart and played so hard for 48 minutes. They are so mentally tough. They gave me everything they had and we had chances to win this game despite our slow start."

That set up the last-minute heroics by the Jays.

ST. JOHN'S 36, LEIPSIC 29

St. John's 14 14 0 8 - 36

Leipsic 0 14 0 15 - 29

FIRST QUARTER

SJ - Luke MacLennan 2 run (Andrew Metzger kick), 6:50

SJ - MacLennan 45 run (Metzger kick), 3:45

SECOND QUARTER

SJ - Jake Hays 33 pass from Mark Boggs (Metzger kick), 11:47

LE - Devin Mangas 64 pass from Zach Kuhlman (Mangas kick), 11:37

LE - Aric Schroeder 47 pass from Kuhlman (Mangas kick), 9:36

SJ - Boggs 2 run (Metzger kick), :02

THIRD QUARTER

No Scoring

FOURTH QUARTER

LE - Luhlman 1 run (Mangas kick), 11:27

LE - Brady Schnipke 3 run (Edgar Ralda pass from Mangas), 9:30

SJ - Tyler Jettinghoff 3 run (Jettinghoff run), :56

TEAM STATS

St. John's Leipsic

First Downs 17 15

Total Yards 338 388

Rushes-Yards 44-184 38-210

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Passing Yards	154	178
Comps.-Atts.	10-10	7-20
Intercepted by	1	1
Fumbles-Lost	1-1	3-1
Penalties-Yards	0-0	5-35
Punts-Aver.	5-29.4	4-29.8

INDIVIDUAL

ST. JOHN'S

RUSHING: Tyler Jettinghoff 25-81, Luke MacLennan 5-72, Mark Boggs 14-31.

PASSING: Boggs 10-19-154-1-1.

RECEIVING: Jake Hays 3-70, Will Buettner 2-32, Jettinghoff 2-27, Andrew Metzger 1-23, Ben Youngpeter 1-4, MacLennan 1-(-)5.

LEIPSIC

RUSHING: Jordan Chamberlin 13-140, Brady Schnipke 10-48, Austin Brown 5-30, Devin Mangas 2-0, Team 1-(-)2, Zach Kuhlman 7-(-)7.

PASSING: Kuhlman 6-19-175-1-2, Mangas 1-1-3-0-0.

RECEIVING: Mangas 3-110, Aric Schroeder 1-47, Derek Steffan 1-15, Chamberlin 1-5, Edgar Ralda 1-3.