

Wildcats earn district runner-up in overtime thriller

By Abby Hooven

When Henry County's district alignment shifted a couple years ago, head coach Matt Wright received "condolence calls" telling him the Wildcats would never finish above fourth in the stacked district.

The callers may want to rethink their sentiments.

After easily taking down DeSales and Western Hills, Henry County put its shot at finishing second in the district on the line at Mercer County on Friday.

In a "Friday Night Lights" television type of ending, Ray Matthews pushed his way just inside the end zone on fourth-and-goal in overtime to lift the Wildcats to a 41-38 win over the Titans.

"It was one of those things where it was back-and-forth, back-and-forth. We knew it was going to be a close game and highly contested, and it was just a matter of, 'Were we gonna make the plays when we needed to?' We gave up a lot and we made some mistakes, but ultimately found the plays that we needed to win the game," said Wright.

The dramatics of the final play were a drastic shift from the opening minutes of the game. Henry gave up a 17-yard

touchdown run by Ashton Drakeford on Mercer's first drive and the Titans recovered a Blaik Nation fumble on the Wildcats' opening drive to regain possession.

Once the Wildcats settled into the game, both sides of the ball ramped up the intensity. The defense forced a fumble on a punt return, allowing the offense to take over five yards from the goal. Matthews punched the ball in from three yards out to score and Morgan Wilson's extra point knotted the game at 7-7.

Matthews, who had three touchdowns in last week's blowout win over Western Hills, finished with four touchdowns and accounted for several crucial stops on the defensive end, including a huge sack to force a punt in the second quarter.

When the Wildcats needed a play, they often turned to Matthews to bully his way through the defense to pick up first downs. On multiple runs, more than one Titan combined to bring him down. During one specific run, it took six defenders to bring Matthews to the ground.

"He was the hot hand the whole game. I mean, they were having a hard time tackling him when he was running hard,"

said Wright.

Mercer regained the lead on a 55-yard touchdown run by Morgan Pennington, but Henry quickly put up seven points of its own as Luke Lyons returned the kick-off the length of the field for a touchdown.

Jordan King connected with Landon Robins for an 11-yard touchdown to give Henry a 21-14 lead going into halftime.

"The offense was able to move and continue to get better throughout the game and score enough to win the game," said Wright. "That's fun."

Matthews continued his rampage early in the second half, running for a 1-yard touchdown to push the lead to 28-14.

Denim Griffeth, the main ball carrier for Mercer, cut the lead to seven on the next drive. He found an opening in the defense and ran for 18 yards to the end zone.

Matthews, Nation and Trenton Hardy accounted for most of the snaps on the ensuing drive, along with a couple passes to Lyons. The Wildcats faced fourth-and-one at the 30-yard line, but Matthews was stopped short to force a turnover on downs.

A 39-yard pass from Thaddeus Mays to Drak-

See WILDCATS page A8



Photo by Abby Hooven

Kyle Gillingham nabs a pass between two defenders for a first down. The Wildcats scored two plays later to take the lead.

Wildcats' historic season ends in quarterfinals

By Abby Hooven

Henry County's record-breaking year came to a close in a 4-1 home loss against Woodford County in the Eighth Region tournament on Oct. 10.

The Wildcats came into the matchup on a 14-game winning streak, the best in program history.

"They (Woodford) have a been a perennial soccer powerhouse in the state for a long time.

They have a mature grassroots program, and all of their players play on select travel teams," said head coach Justin Toole.

The Yellow Jackets entered Monday's game ranked second in the Eighth Region in "Ratings Percentage Index" (RPI). A team's RPI measures its strength compared to other teams

and is largely based on strength of schedule.

Woodford's tactical offense wasted no time getting on the board. Diego Leon netted a cross-goal shot to the left corner to give the Yellow Jackets a 1-0 lead two minutes into the game.

Four minutes later, Henry evened the score. Jorge Ordonez took a shot as the goalkeeper for Woodford moved forward, and the ball rolled uncontested past the goalkeeper into the net with 34:20 to go in the first half.

Both defenses clamped down for the remainder of the half. The Yellow Jacket defense swarmed Ordonez and Finn Hoepner any time the two came near the ball, making shot opportunities few and far between.

"Finn Hoepner was physical in the middle of

the field and fought hard to win the ball," said Toole.

Woodford's offense managed to control possession for most of the opening half and threatened near the goal several times. Yet, each shot was either deflected, high or wide of the goal or went straight into the hands of goalkeeper Andy Johnson.

"The defense in the first half was fine. They got one early goal because our safety was out of position and we got beat on a breakaway," said Toole.

Around the 13-minute mark, Woodford appeared to break the tie on a wide-open goal from Enrique Ayala, but the goal was waived off due to an offsidess call.

After holding off the

See SOCCER page A8



Photo by Abby Hooven

Vince Dentinger assumed the quarterback role against Berea on Thursday. Blaze Berry missed the game with an injury.

Injuries plague Warriors in loss

By Abby Hooven

A slew of injuries left the Warriors short-handed in a 43-12 loss to Berea on Thursday.

Eminence had several players ailing after its loss to Frankfort on Oct. 7, which carried over into this week's matchup.

"We had several injuries that impacted us on both sides of the ball. I don't think that we came mentally ready to play this week, and I believe that cost us early," said head coach Ryan Jones.

Most notably, starting quarterback Blaze Berry missed the game with a wrist injury.

"His absence had a big impact on us. He is like another coach on the field and has a lot of experience. It is always tough when you lose a leader, but especially when it is your QB," said Jones.

His absence wasn't confirmed until later in the week, and with the game moved to Thursday, the Warriors had a short amount of time to adjust.

"We planned to use both Tanner Malone and Vince Dentinger at QB. Vince has some experience playing quarterback in the past, so we will lean heavily on him moving forward," said Jones.

Dentinger finished 6-of-

22 for 19 yards with one interception and five carries for two yards.

Malone had two catches for five yards and four carries for eight yards as well.

Berea led 7-0 after the opening quarter. The Warriors got on the board with 9:24 remaining in the second quarter on a 5-yard touchdown run from Jarren Beverly.

Beverly left the game early due to injury but finished with 11 carries for 37 yards.

Once he exited, Trey Starks stepped up to take the bulk of the carries.

"Trey is a freshman and came in and ran the ball hard," said Jones.

He ended the game with 12 carries for 37 yards.

The Pirates held a 22-6 edge at halftime before scoring two touchdowns in the third quarter to lead 36-6.

Eminence had a huge pick six in the fourth quarter to cut into the lead. Dominic Tillett snagged a Berea pass and returned it 60 yards to score with 7:14 left in the game.

"Dominic Tillett stepped up and had a solid game. He made a big play getting an interception and running it back for a touchdown early in

the fourth quarter," said Jones.

Tillett also had two receptions for 13 yards.

After last week's loss, Jones hoped to see the effort level against the Panthers translate into the Berea game. The number of injuries, though, affected the intensity and mentality of the team.

"I think the injuries took a mental toll on us, this week. Like I said we weren't mentally ready to play, and I think that affected our effort. We played hard, but it wasn't with the same intensity and focus that we had against Frankfort," said Jones. "That is part of being a young team, and having some of our starters out. It is just another thing that we have to learn from. Unfortunately, injuries are a part of the game, and we have to understand that when someone goes down, its next man up and we have to be ready to step in and get it done."

The Warriors fall to 0-8 on the season and 0-2 in district play.

Eminence returns home on Oct. 21 for senior night against Kentucky Country Day at 7:30 p.m.



Photo by Abby Hooven

Jorge Ordonez contends with a Yellow Jacket to secure possession on a header