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"FHSU Defends its Turf on Season Opener" - Hays Daily News

Terry Gaston
Hays Daily News

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TOM ELLISON / Hays Daily News

Fort Hays sophomore running back Clint Bedore races to the end zone for his second touchdown of the game in Saturday's season opener against Emporia State at Lewis Field Stadium.

FHSU defends its turf in season opener

By TERRY GASTON
Hays Daily News

No matter what type of field it plays on, and how many or few starters are back each season, it appears that defense may always be the strength of Bob Cortese-coached Fort Hays State University football teams.

In the Tigers' debut on their new artificial surface Saturday night at Lewis Field Stadium, FHSU denied Emporia State University several scoring opportunities and made a halftime lead stand to take a 17-7 win over the Hornets.

The victory was the first home-opening win for Cortese in four tries and the first season-opening win for FHSU since it won Cortese's first game at the school in 1990.

And while the Tigers had nine returning offensive starters to begin this season, the defense — with just four returning first-stringers — was the unit that led Fort Hays to the victory.

FHSU took a 14-7 lead early in the second quarter on the second of two touchdown runs

by sophomore tailback Clint Bedore, who had a career-best 195 yards on 22 carries.

But the Tigers had given Emporia excellent field position on two occasions after committing turnovers deep in FHSU territory early in the first half.

"We put our defense (inside) the 30-yard line twice after that fumble and interception," said Cortese, recalling the situations that led to ESU's only score of the night. "And we miss a tackle, otherwise they don't score. Our safety was there and doesn't make a tackle."

"How do you make the mistakes we do and still win the game?"

You force the other team to make mistakes, and the Hornets had three turnovers of their own.

Emporia, which had beaten the Tigers in the teams' last two meetings, then got to the Fort Hays 28 in the final two minutes of the first half.

But sophomore middle linebacker Aaron Foist denied Emporia with a sack of soph-

omore quarterback Chris Montgomery and ended the drive by making Montgomery hurry for an incompletion on fourth down.

In the third period, Emporia drove to the FHSU 15 before Tiger sophomore defensive tackle Daren Organ intercepted a pass at the 6 from junior Brian Hill — who went in for an injured Montgomery.

The Fort Hays defense came up big twice in the final quarter. Tiger junior outside linebacker Jose Salcido ended a Hornet drive at midfield with an interception.

"They were driving on us," Cortese said of ESU, which took possession after Bedore lost the ball at the Hornet 2. "They got us off-balanced, and good calls by defensive coaches, (defensive coordinator Jay) Hood and (Tim) O'Connor — they do a good job of scouting."

Then with less than four minutes remaining and the Tigers up 17-7 after a 33-yard field goal by freshman Ryan Achilles, senior defensive end Jared Marshall stopped Hill twice after ESU had advanced to its own 45.

Fort Hays broke a scoreless tie on its third possession of the game.

Tiger senior outside linebacker Jeff Cunningham recovered the ball at the FHSU 30, and seven plays later Bedore took a pitch and swept down the right sideline for a 30-yard touchdown with 2:08 left in the first quarter.

After recovering a fumble Bedore fumble at the Tiger 27, ESU freshman tailback Rodney Cleaver broke two tackles and went 19 yards on second down for the score, helping forge a 7-all tie with 13:35 left before halftime.

"That Cleaver kid can run," Cortese said of the Hornet tailback, who had 142 yards on 28 carries.

The Tigers took possession two drives later at their own 18, but Bedore broke loose again on another pitch for an 82-yard dash with 10:43 remaining in the half.

■ The game's summary is in scoreboard, page 14.