In 2011, the Salem High School football team managed just two wins, both against a first-year program, Silver Creek.

This year, the Lions have already surpassed that win total with two games remaining. The latest win came Friday, 40-21, in Pekin against the Eastern Musketeers.

A 90-yard kick-off return by Kaleb Nicholson midway through the first half trimmed the Salem lead to 14-7, but outside of that play, the Lions were never seriously threatened.

"We lucked in here tonight," said Head Coach Mo Moriarity. "We've lost some guys, but we had some other kids step up and play big for us."

He said he wasn't sure what to expect with the loss suffered the week before to Charlestown, but said his team responded right away in practice.

"We had a really good week of practice," Moriarity said. "We had a tough week last week against Charlestown. They are an unbelievable football team. We had a couple of guys go down and it was a tough night. We played well tonight and that was the way we practiced all week."

Salem was led by the strong passing of sophomore quarterback Jordan McNeely. He was 18 of 20 for 275 yards and also tossed four touchdowns.

"Jordan is athletic and a pretty smart kid," Moriarity said. "He makes us go. I thought Klayton (Dougherty) came in at running back and helped us out there. We got contributions from both kids."

McNeely's favorite targets Friday were Kody Kramer and Tyson Thomas.

Kramer caught six passes for 83 yards and a touchdown and Thomas grabbed five balls for 88 yards, two of which went for touchdowns.

Kramer also threw for a touchdown on a trick play that saw McNeely throw a backward pass to Kramer.

Instead of running, Kramer pulled up and threw a pass to Jared Blevins.

The trick play put Salem on top 26-7 late in the second quarter.

"Kramer is an athlete," Moriarity said. "One thing I've always said about Kody is that he is a crafty kid. He is a point guard on the JV basketball team, starting catcher on the baseball team and he is an athlete. If you can get the ball to him he is going to catch and once he does, he can make some things happen."

Eastern had no defensive answer to stop the Lions and on the other side of the ball were never able to gain in momentum.

The Musketeers managed just 16 rushing yards and four first downs.

They did finally start moving the ball through the air late in the contest.

Eastern's sophomore quarterback, Austin Roberts, completed only five of his 18 attempts, but threw two touchdowns and compiled a total of 173 yards.

One of Roberts' touchdowns went to Nicholson and the other was caught by Scott Ames.

"I thought Austin threw some nice balls," said Eastern Head Coach John Dablow. "We are looking for some things we can improve on. We are struggling in all facets of the game right now, but it was good to see him stand in the pocket. That's one thing he hadn't done prior to this game so it's good see that he is growing and becoming the player we thought he could be."

Dablow said his team has been behind the eight-ball all season because they have been forced to play so many young players, who lack both game time and weight room time.

“(Our lack of strength) shows out there,” he said. “They drive us off the ball and pounded it when they need to pound it, they threw it over the top of us. It’s one of those years. The guys we are putting out there just aren’t quite ready to play just yet.

“They have to commit to getting in the weight room and getting it done, because that’s what it takes.”

With the win, Salem set up a show down with West Washington in the final week of the regular season that will decide the Washington County championship.

Before that game, they will celebrate senior night by hosting Corydon Central.

For Eastern, they will travel to Crawford County to take on the win-less Wolfpack.