

Salem swats Jackets in season opener 36-6

Written by George Browning
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Just 11 offensive plays in the first 24 minutes Saturday morning against visiting Mitchell was a very frustrating statistic for Salem Head Coach RJ Hartsfield.

His team overcame the slow start and managed a 36-6 win, but he wasn't talking like a coach who opened the season with a win by 30 points.

And he was having nothing to do with blaming the weather delay that pushed the game back to Saturday morning for his team's slow start.

"I don't think it was the weather delay," he said, "we just shot ourselves in the foot every chance we got. We had 11 plays and came away with 14 points and two turnovers. That tells the tale."

In the second half things got better, but the Lions were still not playing at the level Hartsfield wants them to play at,

"We played better in the second half, but we still made a ton of mistakes," he said. "Honestly, (we win that game because) we were just a deeper football team than they were. We have some guys who came off the bench to give us solid minutes and Mitchell didn't have that. Physically, I thought we were in better shape, but are not where we need to be in that area."

Hartsfield said besides the depth, it his team's ability to make big plays on offense that led to the win.

"We had 37 offensive plays for 425 yards of offense," he said. "We averaged 15 yards a play. Defensively, Mitchell is just not where Coach (Troy) Pritchett wants them. Offensively, they moved the ball. They ran the ball over our face and we have to get better at stopping the run or it's going to be a long year in the Mid Southern Conference for us."

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Salem's offensive highlights includes a much improved passing attack.

Hartsfield said his line was able to protect senior quarterback Jordan McNeely and that to two touchdown passes to Christian Lamb.

Being able to pass the ball, should open things up for the Salem offense

"McNeely did a nice job of running the offense," Hartsfield said. "He got hit in the backfield a few times, but was able to make plays on his own. He does stuff like that, which is what you want from a senior leader. He has worked his tail off and he knows exactly what I want him to do. He rushed for 168 yards and threw for 90 in basically two quarters of football."

The improved passing attack should give McNeely even more options on the ground, but Hartsfield cautioned that Mitchell's defense isn't up to the level of some of the better defenses in the Mid Southern Conference.

"We threw the ball six times and he was four for six," Hartsfield said. "He had one ball dropped and threw one in the dirt. With us being able to stretch the field a little more through the air than we were last year, it gives us a new outlook offensively. We did pretty good protecting our passer, but we won't get too excited because we didn't play against a Brownstown-defense type of team. We played a team that is going through a re-build and is not where their coach wants them to be."

Salem will return to action this Friday when they host Silver Creek.

The Lions beat the Dragons 21-20 last year.

This is not the same Silver Creek team from a year ago as first-year Head Coach Jason Hawkins, who had a very successful run at Charlestown is now at the helm.

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Hartsfield said some of the strategy in scouting against the Dragons has been to look back at what Hawkins did when he was leading the Pirates.

“We know what he (Jason Hawkins) did at Charlestown and we know Silver Creek is always going to have athletic kids who can run,” he said. “They will be a load and it’s going to be a challenge. It will come down to this for our team – are you willing to sacrifice every piece of yourself to make this team better. We have to have maximum effort, players need to be perfect in giving maximum effort.”

Friday’s game is scheduled to get underway at 7 p.m.