

Firebirds rally past Marshall County in fourth

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NASHVILLE — For about two and a half quarters, Thursday night's Region 5-AAAA matchup between Pearl Cohn and Marshall County (6-1, 4-1) played right into the Tigers' game plan.

But the game evolved into a tale of two halves as the Firebirds (6-2, 6-0) outscored the Tigers 28-3 in the second half and escaped with the key 35-23 region victory over Marshall County.

"We felt like for two and a half quarters, we executed our game plan as well as we could. I hate we couldn't figure out a way to get another score on the board in the first half," Marshall County coach Thomas Osteen said.

Out of the gates, the Tigers forced the Firebirds offense to go three and out and took just 48 seconds off the clock.

An 18-yard punt set the Tigers up at the Firebird 35-yard line and moving the ball at a snail's pace, playing the clock game.

It was a second-down, 18-yard run by senior tailback Demari Braden that put the Tigers on the board first with 8:49 left in the first.

Pearl Cohn answered the early Tiger score in short order when Javion Kinnard broke a 38-yard touchdown run to even the score at seven apiece, barely three minutes later.

The Tigers continued to get a short field and on the next four drives, found themselves inside the Pearl Cohn 10-yard line.

But on those possessions, the Tigers managed just one touchdown—an eight-yard pass from junior quarterback Silas Teat to sophomore Aja Jones.

That touchdown pass gave Marshall County a 17-7 lead with 8:45 left in the half.

While the offense was able to stay on the field and keep the chains moving, defensively, the Tigers wreaked havoc on the Firebirds in the second quarter, holding Pearl Cohn to two three and outs and an interception by senior linebacker Montai Vaughn, which set up the touchdown pass from Teat to Jones.

With the chance to really blow the game wide open, the Tigers orchestrated a four-minute drive that pressed to the one-half yard-line and on fourth down, Marshall County appeared to cross the goal line, but an illegal substitution penalty by Pearl Cohn called the score back.

On the next play, the Firebirds got off the field with a goal-line stand.

"That would have changed the complexion of the game," Osteen said.

Pinned deep in their territory, the Tigers were able to force a punt with 1:34 left and once again pressed inside the 10-yard line, but were held to a 23-yard field goal by Joyce as time expired, giving Marshall County a 20-7 lead at the half.

Even with the opportunity to put the game out of reach, Marshall County still held a two-possession lead entering the second half.

But while the Tigers were able to play the clock control game and



Demari Braden picks up a block and scrambles forward for a short gain. He had 90 yards on 23 carries against Pearl Cohn on Thursday.

rely on effectively moving the chains throughout the first half, Pearl Cohn's defense began to stiffen up and with 5:02 left in the third, Kamari Thompson picked off a pass by Teat and returned it to the Firebird 42-yard line.

On the next play, quarterback Keshawn Tarlton went to the air and connected with Kinnard on a 58-yard touchdown pass.

Luck bounced the Tigers' way on the next possession following a muffed punt return by Pearl Cohn that set Marshall County up well within Firebird territory, but for the fourth time inside the 10-yard line, the Firebirds held the Tigers out of the end zone and forced a 26-yard field goal by Joyce, once again making it a two-possession game with 11:01 left in the game.

While known for their warp-speed offense, the Firebirds took the following drive to the Marshall County 30-yard line and took over three minutes off the clock before the Tigers forced a turnover on downs with 7:45 left in the fourth.

Leading by nine, momentum bounced back in favor of the home team as Pearl Cohn intercepted Teat for the second time in the game and set up a one-yard touchdown run by Kinnard to pull within two points.

With the momentum shifting to the home team, it was Jones who came up with a 66-yard



Jayden Randolph barrels forward after hauling in a pass from quarterback Silas Teat. Randolph had six catches for 51 yards against the Firebirds.

kickoff return to the Pearl Cohn 23-yard line that appeared to set the Tigers up to either run the clock out or find a score to put the game out of reach.

The drive, however, stalled around the Firebird 20 and on a 37-yard field goal try, it was Pearl Cohn that broke through, blocked the kick and returned the ball 70 yards to take its first lead of the game, 28-23, with just over three minutes left.

Needing to move the ball quickly Antomme Cowthorn returned the following kickoff to the 29-yard line, but again the drive struggled to gain traction and on fourth and eight, a Tiger fumble gave the ball to the Firebirds on the Marshall County 15-yard line.



Tiger quarterback Silas Teat fires a throw despite heavy pressure by the Pearl Cohn defense. He had one touchdown pass to Aja Jones on Thursday night.

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Antomme Cowthorn (15) keeps his balance as he stumbles through the pile to pick up a handful of yards in the first quarter.

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