

## Last-minute heartbreak for Trojans at L'Anse

Written by Peter Nocerini

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As the L'Anse Hornets swarm over him, Forest Park's Derek Aberly hugs the ball tightly as he crosses the goal line for a second quarter touchdown. QB Jeff Johnson celebrates.

L'ANSE—What a tough way to go!

A 32-yard touchdown pass with 41 seconds left decided an intense and exciting battle for survival in the Division 8 playoffs, as L'Anse pulled off a 34-28 win over Forest Park here Oct. 26. \_\_\_PUBLIC\_\_\_

The Trojans' season ends with a 7-3 record. L'Anse, now 8-2, advances to face North Dickinson in the district finals at ND on Nov. 2.

Just one card: L'Anse's late score was the third and final lead change of a frantic fourth quarter. The turning point, said Coach Bill Santilli later, came early in the quarter when Derek Aberly injured a knee and had to be helped off the field. He never returned.

From there, with the Trojans' running game nearly depleted, Forest Park had just one card to play: quarterback Jeff Johnson passes from shotgun formation. L'Anse defensive backs were waiting and picked off three passes in the final minutes.

It wasn't just the loss of Aberly—RBs Dennis Mongar and Zach Painter didn't even dress for the game, leaving L'Anse to focus solely on Raymond Tomasik.

"We just ran out of bodies," Santilli said.

On the move: L'Anse's vaunted running game struck early. Brandon Kemppainen broke out for a 43-yard gain on the game's second play, and a 14-yarder by Cody Goldsworthy made it 1st and goal at the Trojan 8. FP's defense didn't let them get closer and got the ball back on downs.

But soon, L'Anse attacked again. With Goldsworthy and Jimmy Veker running the ball, L'Anse moved downfield and scored on Veker's eight-yard run. L'Anse, 6-0.

FP needed four plays to even it up. After passing 25 yards to Aberly down the right side, QB Jeff Johnson and Aberly connected again for a 42-yard TD—6-6.

Promising drives by both teams ended with turnovers, but Forest Park put it together midway through the second quarter. The 68-yard drive featured Johnson's 11-yard pass to Brett Hietala and Aberly's 23-yard run to the L'Anse 5. He scored from the 2 and ran in the two-pointer. FP led 14-6 with 2:02 till halftime.

Enough time for L'Anse: Veker ran for 36 yards and later caught a seven-yard pass from QB Jacob Ostermeyer for the score. The two-point pass failed—FP led 14-12 at halftime.

Back and forth: Taking the second half kick, the Trojans drove 66 yards to score. Fifteen-yard runs by Johnson and Tomasik were the big plays. Johnson scored on a four-yard keeper, and his pass to Tomasik for two. Trojans by 10, 22-12.

Again, the Purple Hornets struck right back. On their fourth play, Goldsworthy crashed through the right side for a 41-yard TD. Trojans, 22-18.

L'Anse then got the ball on downs and started moving early in the fourth quarter. Ostermeyer's 23-yard pass to Jeffrey Roth and a 19-yard Veker dash to the Trojan 17 (the play on which Aberly got hurt) led to Kemppainen's five-yard TD on a pitch. Ostermeyer and Veker connected for two, and L'Anse had its first lead, 26-22.

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Five plays later, Forest Park was back in front. Johnson passed to Austin Snell down the right side for 52 yards and six points. The convert missed—Trojans, 28-26, with 6:37 left.

Frantic finish: From there, it was a mess of short possessions and turnovers. L'Anse, two plays before Colton LaChapelle fell on a fumble. 5:56 left. FP gained 22 on a Johnson-Snell pass to the Hornet 21, but Johnson was intercepted on fourth down. 3:07 left.

The Hornets buzzed up to midfield—interception by Snell. 1:52 left. Three plays later, Johnson was intercepted by Veker. L'Anse ball at the Trojan 35—55 seconds and no time-outs left. On 3rd and 8, Ostermeyer passed to Jonny Magaraggia down the middle for a 32-yard TD with 41 seconds left. Veker's convert made it 34-28.

Backs to the wall, the Trojans battled for their lives. Johnson's passes to Snell gained 18 and seven yards. Then, on 3rd and 3 near midfield with 8 seconds left, Johnson threw downfield to Snell. The ball bounced off his shoulder pads, and Veker caught it.

L'Anse's warbling horn signaled Purple Hornet heaven and Forest Park heartbreak. The Trojans took the loss very hard. "All of us felt we had a chance to win that game down the stretch," Santilli said.

Ad lib offense: Before he got hurt, Aberly was a stat monster: 17 tackles, an interception, a forced fumble, 67 yards receiving, 53 yards rushing. In just three quarters. The Trojans' Superman.

"Put an 'S' on that guy's chest," Santilli said. "I can't think of a better individual performance in the last several years by any one player. He was our go-to guy, our catalyst on both sides of the ball."

After Aberly got hurt, "We were in disarray offensively. We had players playing who didn't know where to line up, who had never been on the field before."

Big freshman Ryan Silva put on a new number so he could play tight end for the first time ever "because we needed a blocker." LaChapelle, L.J. Burns and Adam Hilberg were all pressed into service with the season on the line. "They did a pretty good job. I think we held it together real well."

But Santilli's cupboard of running backs was bare. With no experienced fullback or tailback, "We went to shotgun and tried to let Jeff Johnson and Snell do what they did best all year." L'Anse's secondary was waiting.

"Johnson's going to beat himself up" for his interceptions, Santilli said. "But we were forced into that situation to try to make plays."

Big guys: As they prepared, the coach said, Forest Park couldn't simulate the size of L'Anse's backs or linemen—they had a size advantage. Coaches stressed how important it was to improve their technique or else they'd get run over.

"I credit our guys. We stayed low, we played better on the line. Yeah, we gave up a lot of yards, but that's characteristic of our defense this year. We have not been in a situation where our defense has played like some of our teams in the past—partly because we were young."

L'Anse ran for 347 yards against Forest Park. "Those running backs run hard. All in all, that's a nice looking team. They earned their keep last night."

Santilli noted that L'Anse really came out on the good side of penalties. The Trojans were called for seven penalties for 65 yards; L'Anse, just two for 10. "That tells you a lot.

"It seems all of these games that we end up losing, we're getting murdered on penalties. They kill our drives or keep the ball in the opponent's hands. Those are other things to overcome, in addition to all the turnovers."

Numbers: Offensive yards: FP, 425 (43-221r, 11-20-204p), L'Anse 422 (46-347r, 5-11-75p).

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First downs: FP, 17; L'Anse, 15.

Rushing: Raymond Tomasik, 16-72; Jeff Johnson, 15-69; Derek Aberly, 8-53; Austin Snell, 5-27. Receiving: Snell, 5-102; Aberly, 2-67; L.J. Burns, 3-24; Brett Hietala, 1-11. Passing: Johnson, 11-20-204, 2 TDs, 5 ints. L'Anse rushing: Cody Goldsworthy, 21-136; Jimmy Veker, 13-116; Brandon Kemppainen, 8-85.

Defense: Derek Aberly, 15t-2a; Tomasik, 6t-5a; Zach Aberly, 4t-4a; Colton LaChapelle, 3t-5a. Interceptions: Derek Aberly, Snell. Fumble recoveries: LaChapelle, Adam Hilberg.

Coming up: "All in all, our young kids came along extremely well," Santilli said. As for Forest Park's younger players, he hopes the taste of playoffs "will motivate them enough to get into the weight room in the offseason.

"I really think if the guys put forth the work ethic that I've seen from previous teams, we can have a pretty good team next year."

If.

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| Trojans   | 6 | 8 | 8 | 6  | -- | 28 |
| P.Hornets | 6 | 6 | 6 | 16 | -- | 34 |