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Sports

Bulldogs Bite Vikings, 31-10

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Emerald offensive linemen Chris Dell, left, and Robert Laster check their wristbands to see what play the Vikings will be running out of their no-huddle set Friday night. (Staff photo by R. Shawn Lewis)

The Pendleton High School football team is known for its Wing-T offense that is still capable of moving the ball in the air, but that didn't stop everyone on Emerald sideline's jaws from hitting the field when the Bulldogs executed a 44-yard touchdown pass 21 seconds into Friday's game.

Pendleton had plenty of time to move the ball on the ground in the second half once it had a big lead, but in the first two quarters, Emerald found itself giving up big play after big play in the air, falling 31-10 in both teams' Region 1-AA opener at Frank Hill Stadium.

Friday's loss, which dropped Emerald to 1-5 overall, was the Vikings' third straight loss in a region opener with coach Mike Clowney at the helm. "We talked about it all week that they run a Wing-T, but they'll spread the football out,"

Clowney said. "We've kind of got to get ourselves in better position to make plays, but, you know, like I say, I coach these guys, it's my fault."

Even with Emerald's woes defensively, the game didn't turn until the last five minutes of the first half with Pendleton ahead 17-10.

The Bulldogs managed to score two unanswered touchdowns in that span to go into halftime with a huge wave of momentum.

"That enabled us to be much more ball control in the second half," Pendleton coach Paul Sutherland said. "You do that, though, with a three-touchdown lead, not a two-touchdown lead."

With just over five minutes remaining in second quarter, Emerald finally scored a touchdown on a 2-yard run by Kent Kelley, pulling the Vikings within seven points.

Emerald managed to force Pendleton into a three-and-out series in the ensuing drive deep in the Bulldogs' own territory, but the Vikings then did the same as running back Dee Parks struggled with his footing on two plays and quarterback Zane Newton, in his first start under center since injuring his shoulder in Week 1, threw an incomplete pass on third down.

The Bulldogs then completed a 68-yard drive that was highlighted by a 47-yard pass from Pendleton quarterback John Michael Gibson to running back Tye Burke, putting the Bulldogs on Emerald's 20-yard line.

Pendleton completed the series with a 3-yard run by running back Morris Williams with 48.1 seconds on the clock. Emerald then had the ball for two plays before Newton threw an interception to the Bulldogs' Anthony Eubanks, which he brought back to the Vikings' 32-yard line.

Following a 26-yard pass on first down to Eubanks, Gibson threw a 6-yard touchdown pass to running back Reggie Earle, who had a game-high 149 rushing yards. "We really wound up giving up two stops in less than a minute and we wound up finishing kind of right there," Clowney said. "The biggest thing is we've to make sure we don't give them the ball back in that situation."

The Bulldogs' running game is the backbone of their offense, but with Emerald's secondary depleted due to injury, Sutherland was confident in his team's ability to pass the ball. "We're very comfortable in our passing game," Sutherland said. "We're a little bit different than most Wing-T teams. "I've got a lot of confidence in John Michael and all our seniors to make plays for us. The key for us is throwing the ball when we want to."

Pendleton managed to stun Emerald at Frank Hill Stadium right off the bat Friday when a favorable opening kickoff return allowed the Bulldogs' to start on the Vikings' 44-yard line. They then took a 7-0 lead when Gibson threw a 44-yard touchdown pass to C.J. Gleaton that left Emerald's sideline dumbfounded.