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Sports

Playoffs Possible for Vikes

By KEVIN FIORENZO/Index-Journal sports writer

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The Emerald High School football team played its most complete game last Friday in shutting out Crescent on the road 36-0, but that impressive performance doesn't change the fact the Vikings are still in a must-win situation for at least two of their final three regular season games.

One of those matchups is at 7:30 p.m. today, when Emerald plays its homecoming game at Frank Hill Stadium against Region 1-AA foe Liberty in what could be a postseason play-in game.

The winner of tonight's game will likely lock up the fourth seed in the region for the Class AA playoffs. The Vikings will be heavy underdogs against Abbeville next week, but they could move up to the third seed in the regular season finale against Walhalla, which is now without star quarterback Rob Middleton, who was injured last week against Abbeville. "It's a situation now where we knew once we lost to Pendleton that we had to make sure that we win now to be able to get into the playoffs," said Emerald coach Mike Clowney, who has not taken the Vikings to the postseason in his first two years with the team.

The Red Devils run their offense out of the Wing-T, a scheme that generally can cause problems for opponents, but Emerald has had success against teams that run similar offenses, like Ware Shoals and Crescent, so the Vikings have reason to feel optimistic.

Liberty will throw a wrinkle into its scheme by running many of its plays out of the option, something Emerald also likes to do when Zane Newton is playing quarterback. Clowney said preparing for the option has been something that has been heavily emphasized in practice this week. "The option is something that you kind of have to prepare for it all year, and we haven't seen it at all this year offensively," Clowney said. "The biggest thing is it forces you to play assignment football where you can't play someone else's position."

The Red Devils haven't been able to have much effectiveness running out of the option because of turnovers, which led to them being outscored 95-24 over past two games. In a 45-0 loss to Pendleton last week, Liberty turned the ball over three times in the first half and gave up 31 points on just 116 yards allowed. "We know what we're doing wrong: we just have to get physically tougher," Liberty coach Curtis Middleton said. "(Pendleton) scored three times off turnovers in the first half last week and you just can't do that against any club."

Emerald junior Billy Pooser will line up at quarterback tonight. Newton started the season under center, but suffered a shoulder injury in the season-opener, and he started the Vikings' Week 6 game against Pendleton, but Clowney thinks Pooser is currently more effective.

Newton has also proven to be an asset at other positions, lining up at slot receiver, running back and on defense over the past few weeks. "(Zane) came in and threw pretty well (against Pendleton), but he still wasn't getting everything on the ball," Clowney said. "The other reasoning is just that he's been such a plus at other positions just because he's so competitive."