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Poca knocks off Nitro

Arthur's long TD run the difference in 20-14 win

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Poca's Jacob Skeens pounces on a Nitro fumble.

For Poca running back Caleb Arthur, the yards didn't come easily Friday night at Nitro's Underwood Field.

But eventually, they came - 65 of them in one glorious, game-breaking jaunt to the end zone. With the Dots' defense rejuvenated after halftime and the Wildcats making one mistake after another, that score stood up, with Poca winning 20-14.

The victory was the Dots' first in four tries since the resurrection of the Putnam-Kanawha county line rivalry. And the victory was doubly sweet for Poca players, who carried the No. 30 jersey of Christian Combs around like a prized possession.

And when Arthur blew through the Nitro defense with 9:45 left in the contest, he had Combs, who suffered several injuries in an automobile accident Wednesday, on his mind.

"It was a drive, and I was supposed to get the ball between the guard and tackle," Arthur said. "It ended up the defensive end flashed in, so I ended up outside the end. And then I wasn't going to be denied - I know Chris was listening on the radio. I knew here was my chance to turn the game around, the offensive line blocked well, the hole opened up, I made one move, touchdown.

"That was the greatest play, for Christian."

The run capped a rally from a 14-7 halftime deficit, one that could well have been larger considering the Wildcats' 220-142 advantage in total yardage in the half. The Wildcats started the first half with a 42-yard touchdown toss from Mark Chandler to Ethan Clark and finished it with a Chandler 16-yard run.

Poca had led 7-6 since the 8:05 mark of the first quarter, when Jason Cuffee hit Tyler Moore with a 48-yard pass, then scored on an 8-yard run. Nitro's late score made Poca coach Bob Lemley wonder a little bit.

"I thought we might have been spent at halftime," Lemley said. "We started getting guys banged up a little bit, and I didn't know what they would have in them in the second half, but I'm really proud of them."

The Dots responded, tracking down Chandler for several losses and holding Nitro to 22 total yards after halftime. With Arthur rushing for 119 of his 149 yards in the half, the Dots ended up outgaining the Wildcats 328-242.

And the Wildcats didn't help themselves with fumbles, dropped shotgun snaps and all those penalties.

There were 21 flags accepted in the game, with Poca marching 77 yards on 11 fouls and Nitro committing 10 fouls for 84 yards. But Nitro's penalties seemed to hurt more as the 2-hour, 47-minute game dragged on.

Case in point: Arthur fumbled on a punt and the Wildcats recovered deep in Poca territory. But wait - the Wildcats committed a holding penalty while chasing the punt, nullifying a play that could have allowed Nitro to blow the game open.

From then on, between sacks, penalties and other Nitro miscues, the Wildcats seemed to go backward with each possession. Late in the third quarter, the Wildcats had to punt on fourth-and-35 from their 8-yard line, and an Arthur 12-yard return put the Dots in business at the Nitro 24. It took seven plays, but Jake Skeens scored from the 2-yard line to tie the game at 14.

Nitro had to punt on a fourth-and-20 at the start of the fourth quarter, setting the stage for Arthur's 65-yard go-ahead run. The rest of the way, Nitro faced a fourth-and-28 and had a fourth-and-10 when Zach Cloxton's bomb was knocked down by Arthur to seal the contest.

The stifling humidity made a second-half game a welcome reprieve. But by then, players on both sides suffered cramps, including Nitro's Chandler.

"The thing that was incredible to us was the cramps," said Nitro coach Bob Gobel. "Key players down with cramps and everything. We scrimmaged down at Sheldon Clark in Kentucky two weeks ago, and it was 107 degrees on the FieldTurf, and we didn't have a single player go down with a cramp."

"It kind of took us out of our rhythm, and the [fumbles] too, of course."

The mistakes were probably more painful, though.

"We just have to work on overcoming adversity," he said. "We're young and we need to focus when our back's against the wall, and we didn't do that."

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