Coming off two tough losses, the Holyoke Dragon football team wanted to taste victory last Friday night. Opening North Central Conference play in Ault Friday, Sept. 14, they did just that and left with an impressive 40-0 win over the Highland Huskies.

A great performance on both sides of the ball led to the blowout victory.

On defense, Holyoke held Highland to just 69 total yards of offense. The Huskies didn't convert a first down until the final play of the third quarter. They ended up with only two first downs the entire game.

"Our defense came through in a big way," coach John Zilla said. "They did a great job."

On offense, Holyoke pounded the ball with their strong running attack. The Dragons racked up 314 yards on the ground and 66 through the air.

If a flaw could be found in the win, it would be turnovers. Zilla said those mistakes will come back to bite the Dragons against certain teams.

At halftime, the coach said they focused on telling the team to cut down on the fumbles and it seemed to work. Holyoke didn't lose one fumble during the final two quarters of play.

Dragons score early and often

Highland won the toss and deferred to the second half which gave Holyoke the ball to begin the

game for the first time this season.

After a decent return of the opening kickoff, Holyoke rushed the ball down to the 16 yard line on the legs of Brett Cumming, Bradley Cumming, Dylan Kotch and TJ Gertner. With just over eight minutes left in the opening quarter, the younger Cumming brother punched the ball into the end zone. The PAT by Saul Ramos was good to give the Dragons the early lead.

The Dragon defense forced Highland into a three and out situation on their first drive of the game. The three and out was the first of seven for the game. Holyoke forced Highland to punt eight times in all.

Holyoke's next score came with 5:48 left in the game when Bradley Cumming again hit pay dirt. This time it was from five yards out. Ramos again added the extra point.

On Holyoke's next drive they were moving the ball well before Gertner was picked off by Highland. Not hanging his head, the young sophomore quarterback got revenge on the very next play, and while on defense, intercepted the ball right back.

Two plays later, Brett Cumming broke loose for a 31-yard touchdown run. Ramos added the PAT to give Holyoke a 21-0 lead with just under a minute left in the first quarter.

Again, the stingy Dragon defense held the Huskies to a three and out.

Brett Cumming returned the punt to Highland's 43 yard line to set up the next drive. He then moved the Dragons down to the 19 after a huge first down run. On the next play, the senior tailback was stripped of the ball, ending the drive.

Highland again couldn't get anything going and was forced to punt. With around nine minutes left until halftime, Gertner found a wide open Brett Cumming in the end zone for the fourth touchdown of the game. On the PAT attempt, the snap went over the head of holder Taylor

Mayden who scooped the ball up and tried to toss it to the end zone. The try was unsuccessful leaving the scoreboard to read 27-0 in Holyoke's favor.

The Dragons would get the ball back with 6:37 left in the half and move it deep inside Highland territory to the four yard line but a turnover ended the drive.

With just over two minutes left, they would get the ball back but again the drive ended up with a fumble.

The half ran out with Highland facing a fourth and long.

The Dragon defense picked up right where it left off, holding the Huskies to a three and out to begin the second half.

Holyoke began near midfield and drove down to the 11 yard line. From there, Bradley Cumming took it in for his third score of the night. Ramos added the PAT for a 34-0 lead.

Senior Logan Zeiler kept the momentum rolling and intercepted the Highland quarterback on the first play of the next drive. He returned it 18 yards to set Holyoke up at the Highland 27.

On the very next play, Bradley Cumming broke loose for his fourth touchdown of the game. A bad snap on the extra point attempt kept Holyoke from tacking on the extra point but it didn't matter. Holyoke had reached that all important total of 40 which made for a quick rest of the game. Up by 40, the running clock began.

On the last play of the third quarter, Highland finally managed to record a first down. It didn't last long as the Holyoke defense stiffened and forced the Huskies to punt.

With Holyoke up big, coaches got some of the younger second team players valuable varsity experience. With 6:50 left on the clock, Holyoke was forced to punt.

Highland moved the ball some on their final drive, but the Dragons didn't quit and made sure they wouldn't score. On the final play before time ran out, the Dragon intensity shined as Jesus Martinez nearly picked the ball off.

Holyoke will ride the momentum into this weekend's game against Cornerstone Christian Academy in Westminster.

The Bulldogs also own a 1-2 season record. Their lone win on the young season came against Nederland, a 26-7 season-opening win.

Zilla still wants the Dragons to put forward four quarters of hard work. He felt they let up a little in the second quarter last week and that is when the mistakes began to creep into the game.

Zilla noted Cornerstone Christian will be another test. The roster only shows 14 team members but Zilla said the Bulldogs have had chances to win but have shot themselves in the foot one too many times.

"We've got to eliminate mistakes and we'll be fine," Zilla said.

The next two or three weeks should be a good indicator of what kind of team the Dragons are this year, according to the coach.

Stats recorded

In only his second start, Gertner completed five of seven passes for 66 yards and one touchdown. He did have one interception.

Logan Tharp hauled in three passes for 46 yards. Brett Cumming had one catch for 20 yards which happened to also be a touchdown catch.

On the ground, Brett Cumming led the way with 150 yards on 11 carries. He had one rushing touchdown in addition to his touchdown catch.

Younger brother Bradley Cumming had 111 yards on 10 carries. He finished with four touchdowns.

Also carrying the ball were Dylan Kotch who had 32 yards on six carries, Gertner, Nick Ortner, Tito Fierro and Marques Harvey.

The Dragons turned the ball over five times and intercepted the Highland quarterback twice.

Defensively, Jesus Hermosillo led the team with 16 tackles. Tharp was the only other player to reach double digits with 11. Nineteen different players recorded at least two tackles for the Dragons.

Other North Central action reported for football

Other North Central Conference teams played last week. Wiggins beat Resurrection Christian 28-7 and Wray slapped Yuma 43-0. Cornerstone Christian Academy was off.

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