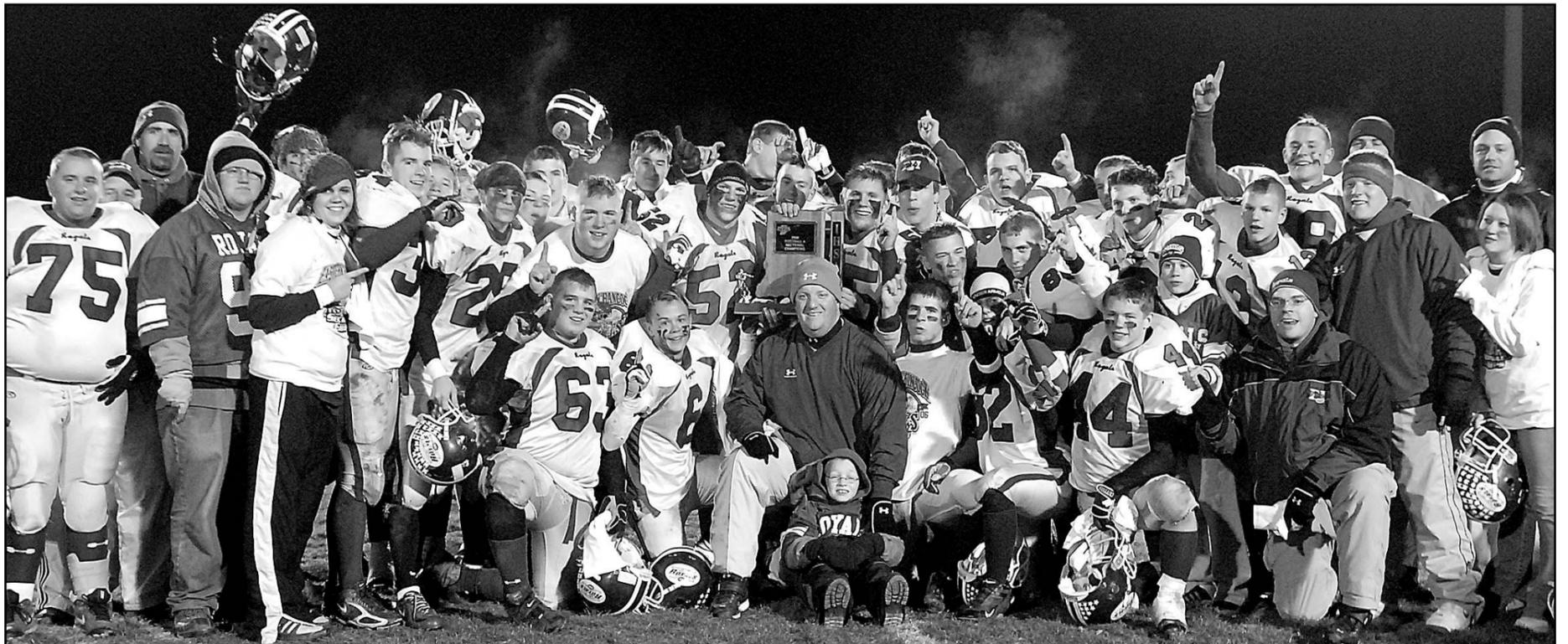


LOCAL SPORTS

Four Knightstown Turnovers, Long Touchdown Runs Carry Eastern Hancock to Title

Bragdon Runs Wild; Royals Win Sectional



Eastern Hancock players, coaches and managers celebrate the team's eighth football sectional championship Friday night on the Panther field. The Royals led from the start in defeating Knightstown 35-7. They will play fourth-ranked Indianapolis Ritter, 11-1 on the season, at home Friday night in the Class A football Regional. (Richard Sitler photo).

By Ty Swincher
Sports Editor

The cards just didn't fall for the Knightstown Panthers Friday night in the sectional championship game against Eastern Hancock.

The Royals used three big touchdown runs by senior back Brett Bragdon and took advantage of four Knightstown turnovers to win their eighth sectional title in school history, 35-7.

After a scoreless first quarter the Royals scored two touchdowns in a two-minute stretch to bolt out to a 14-0 lead. Bragdon went 38 yards for the first score with 10:22 to play in the first half. He then added a 60-yard blast off left tackle for pay dirt with 8:13 to play.

Knightstown had cut the lead to 14-7 at halftime, but on the first play of the third quarter, Bragdon again went to work. He stutter-stepped, shook one tackler, and rocketed 65 yards for his third touchdown and a 21-7 lead.

The Panthers retaliated by effectively moving the ball down to the Royal five-yard line before turning the ball over at the two. Eastern Hancock then drove 98 yards for another score to put the game out of reach.

Knightstown turned the ball over twice on interceptions inside the Royal five, and a third interception was returned 58 yards for a touchdown by Jacob Low. The Panthers also fumbled the ball away at the Royal 26 in the first half, killing another drive.

"We didn't play well enough to win a big game like that," Panther Coach Bob Prescott said. "We had too many turnovers and we gave up too many big plays."

Early on the game looked like it would mirror the first meeting between the schools, which the Royals won 15-12 after stopping a late Panther drive. Eastern Hancock changed up its defensive look somewhat, initially keeping fullback Trey McColley in check.

"We played a very good football game on both sides of the ball,"

Royal Coach Kyle Johnson said. "The plan was to stop McColley. He's a great runner - he's as good as anyone we've faced this year. We just wanted to make him change direction because he's not as effective. He's not someone you can stop if you let him run straight up."

McColley, who had burned the Royals for over 200 yards in the previous meeting, was held to 105 yards on 18 carries.

But the difference in the game wasn't the stopping of McColley as much as it was the turnovers Eastern Hancock forced, killing four Knightstown drives in the process.

On Eastern Hancock's first drive, Chris Garrett recovered a fumble at the Royal 23-yard line, setting up the Panthers in excellent field position. On second down, quarterback Joe Haase went deep toward the left corner of the end zone. Royal cornerback Gary Russell was there to intercept the ball at the three-yard line to kill the drive.

After the Royals scored on Bragdon's longest run to go ahead 21-7, the Panthers were unable to

retaliate again. On their first possession of the second half they turned the ball over on a fumble at the Eastern Hancock 26-yard line. On their next possession Joel Hungate intercepted a pass at the Royal two-yard line.

"Eastern Hancock just whipped us up front. They did what they had to do to win the game."

Panther head coach
Bob Prescott

"Turnovers are always frustrating, and they probably hurt us more than anything this time," Prescott said. "Those long touchdown runs by Bragdon were really critical. If you take away those touchdown runs, we did some pretty good things on that field. But the mistakes were the difference in the game."

Prescott was impressed with the Royals.

"Eastern Hancock whipped us up front," Prescott said. "They did a pretty good job of changing some things up, and I think we adjusted to that in the second half. But after the turnovers in the third quarter, we were down by three touchdowns and had to abandon what we wanted to do."

"I wish Kyle and his players and staff the best. They did what they had to do to win the game."

The Royals hit pay dirt first when quarterback Andy Jackson hit Russell on a 13-yard pass on a third-and-six play. The very next play Bragdon went off left tackle 38 yards for the first touchdown.

After a Panther punt, it took just two plays for Bragdon to score again on the 60-yard jaunt. Up 14-0, the Royals were in control and driving again before Knightstown was able to apply the brakes.

Tyler Smoot intercepted a Jackson pass at the Royal 47 to set up the first Panther score. After a 10-yard run by McColley, Haase hit Smoot for eight yards. McColley then broke two tackles

and rambled 23 yards to the Royal six. On second-and-goal, Haase optioned to Jordan Bearhope, who took the ball in from five yards out. Chris Garrett's kick cut the lead to 14-7 and the Panthers were again in business with just 1:16 to play in the half.

But that all changed on the first play from scrimmage in the third quarter. Bragdon's 65-yard touchdown run punched the lead to 21-7 and took the wind out of the Panthers. On their next two possessions Knightstown turned the ball over - first at the Royal 26 and again at the two yard line.

Eastern Hancock drove the ball 98 yards, eating up more than six minutes of clock and scoring on a 22-yard run by Cody Richey.

The Royals got their last touchdown on Low's 58-yard interception return with just 49 seconds showing on the clock.

Bragdon had another tremendous game for the Royals, gaining 262 yards on 25 carries and scoring three touchdowns. In the three Sectional 37 games, Bragdon ran the ball 61 times and gained 621

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