

Super sophs lead Knights' surge to second in district

After a blowout loss to the Jaguars, varsity football team rebounds with two blowout victories of their own

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High school football teams don't usually wear names on the back of their jerseys, but the Knights may have to this year with only two starters returning from last year's bi-district winning team. Not only did the team lose 32 seniors to graduation but also defensive coordinator Brandon Grant and offensive line coach Brad Bernard, who both moved onto brighter horizons.

With all these changes, head coach Thomas Gammerdinger was still ready as ever for the season to come.

"We're breaking in a lot of new faces with a lot of inexperience out there, but I'm looking for players to step up as we have plenty of good players to do it," Coach Gammerdinger said at the start of the season.

"I'm excited to see how quickly everyone can settle in for this season."

The process of integrating 20 new starters did not happen as quickly as the team or coaches may have wanted. The Knights started the season 1-2 heading into district play, with a big opening loss to the rival Anderson Trojans but two much more competitive games against the Lehman Lobos and Connally Cougars. The tests continued into district games when the team had to come back from a 28-7 deficit to defeat the Crockett Cougars and then ran into a scoring juggernaut in the eventual district champion LBJ Jaguars.

With five games under their belt, some super

sophomores began stepping up, proving their head coach's early optimism and faith in his team was justified. As Coach G had foreseen, this Knights team was deeper than expected and just needed some time to gel together.

Stepping in for starter David Houston and getting his first varsity start at quarterback was sophomore Luke Dunham, heading into the Knight's homecoming game against the Northeast Raiders.

"I felt pretty prepared to start," Dunham said. "I knew we were going to keep the game plan easy for me the first time, a lot of runs."

Dunham was correct with his prediction as the two teams combined to throw only one pass through the scoreless first quarter.

Sophomore Mitchell Butler finally broke the deadlock with a 32-yard touchdown run after a methodical drive that featured big rushing gains by Butler, Dunham and Drew Andrews midway through the

second quarter. To cap off the first half, Butler ran in his second touchdown of the night, this time from one yard out.

To start the second half, the defense forced a punt, allowing Dunham to score his first varsity touchdown by running one in on the offense's ensuing drive. The defense kept up its stellar level of play until the end of the game as well, forcing two more punts and an interception that sophomore Gus Ehlers caught. To wrap up the game, Dunham scampered home on a 50-yard run for the final touchdown in the Knights' 28-0 homecoming win.

With the Knights back in the win column and Houston returning to his starting quarterback position for their next game against the LASA Raptors, the team was feeling confident.

"Practices got much more intense after the LBJ game, and we were able to execute much better," sophomore Mark Sanchez said.

The game against the Raptors started slow as the first points weren't scored until the five-minute mark when Houston ran in a touchdown. The Knights only had the ball for two minutes that quarter as the Raptors moved methodically down the field, but the second quarter is where the Knights pulled away.

The defense forced a punt to begin the quarter and within another minute, Houston was back in the end zone after a 43-yard touchdown run. The rest of the quarter is where some sophomores would leave their mark again as Butler ran in a touchdown but later fumbled, and Sanchez got his first varsity interception letting Houston end the half with a 72-yard touchdown run to give the Knights a 28-0 lead.

For the rest of the game the Knights got everyone involved with Butler scoring two more touchdowns, Andrews coming in and running another in and Sanchez topping off the game with his first varsity touchdown for a final score of 55-7 in the Knights favor.

Ending the season with three straight wins against the Navarro Vikings, Travis Rebels and Eastside Panthers the team trailed only the Jaguars in district play and therefore hosted a House Park playoff game against Waco University. The Knights led early 14-0, but the Trojans rallied to win the game 34-21 and end the Knights' season.

The playoff appearance was brief but it was significant and made possible because the brigade of sophomores stepped up their play: Dunham at quarterback, Butler at running back, Sanchez on offense and defense and Ehlers at linebacker. With everyone clicking and now getting involved, the team ramped up play at the right time of the season.

"Us Sophomores have been given the opportunity to play and we've all just capitalized," Sanchez said.

RIGHT: Imagined football featuring the super sophomores. Photos and graphics by Charlie Partheymuller.

LEFT: Sophomores: Luke Dunham, Gus Ehlers, Mark Sanchez and Mitchell Butler pose for a photo. Photo by Charlie Partheymuller.

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