

Howard's big day leads Chiefs to comeback win over Haughton 42-32

NATCHITOCHES, La. – Senior running back Kelton Howard scored four rushing touchdowns to lead the Natchitoches Central Chiefs to an 11-point fourth quarter comeback to beat the Haughton Bucs, 42-32, Friday night at Turpin Stadium for NCHS's homecoming.

The Chiefs (2-3, 1-3 in district 1-5A) fell behind midway through the first quarter. Haughton scored (1-4, 1-3 in 1-5A) on an 84-yard touchdown pass (two-point conversion no good) with 6:23 left in the quarter making it 6-0.

NCHS responded with their first scoring drive as Howard scored on a seven-yard touchdown run. Amsden Pasche kicked the extra point to give the Chiefs a 7-6 lead with 5:32 left in the opening quarter.

The Bucs regained the lead on their next possession, scoring on a 15-yard touchdown run. However, they missed the two-point conversion again making it 12-7 with 3:23 left in the first quarter.

The Chiefs, once again, bounced back as they drove down the field and scored on a 20-yard touchdown reception from Smith to Semaj Thomas with 23 seconds left in the see-saw first quarter. NCHS lead 14-12 after Pasche's PAT was good.

The Bucs took the lead late in the second quarter, scoring on a 44-yard touchdown pass with 1:37 left until halftime making it 18-14 (two-point conversion failed again.)

After the Chiefs turned it over on down to start the third quarter, the Bucs cashed. Haughton scored on a 26-yard touchdown pass to take a 26-14 lead (two-point conversion successful) with 8:35 left in the third quarter.

NCHS would answer back as they quickly moved it down field, going with a no-huddle offense. The drive was capped off by a two-yard touchdown by Howard to cut the Bucs' lead to 26-21 (Pasche PAT good) with 4:30 left in third.

After Haughton scored early in the fourth quarter on a 1-yard TD run, the Chiefs had their backs against the wall trailing 32-21 with 9:51 to go in the game and facing a possible fourth straight loss.

The Chiefs had other ideas. Smith connected with Kayden Kuykendoll for a 62-yard touchdown pass with 8:30 to go making it 32-27 Bucs (two-point conversion no good).

NCHS forced a punt on the following possession, and the Chiefs got the ball back at midfield after a short punt. It was Howard, once again, doing the work as he sprinted 15 yards to cap off the drive and give the Chiefs their first lead of the second half, 35-32 (Howard converts on two-point conversion) with 5:32 left.

But ultimately, it was the Chiefs' defense that made the play that put this one on ice. With 4:20 left, NCHS Imari Speed intercepted a pass at the Chiefs' 45 and weaved in and around Bucs' tacklers and into the endzone for a game-clinching 55-yard interception return for a touchdown and 21 unanswered points.

"To be down 11 and battle back was big," said NCHS head football coach Brad Laird. "And to do it on homecoming with so many past Chiefs watching was fun to watch. I thought our guys handled the week of homecoming festivities well. And I'm glad to see them come away with a hard-fought win."

Smith finished with 176 passing yards and one touchdown pass. Howard had 113 rushing yards on 18 carries.

Next up, NCHS will step out of district play and face 4A Opelousas (0-4) Friday, Oct. 10 on the road.