

Middleton's late run lifts Outlaws in come-from-behind win

By Seth Stringer

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He looked right, looked left, and saw nothing.

With his four receivers covered and facing a four-man blitz, Mid-Missouri Outlaws quarterback Kyle Middleton was left with few options as the pass rush suffocated him.

It's a good thing he's cool under pressure.

Facing a fourth-and-goal at the 16-yard-line with the game on the line, the veteran scrambled to his left. What was waiting for him? Daylight.

Middleton tiptoed the left sideline for the score, capping off a 43-yard drive to give the Outlaws a 41-38 come-from-behind win over the first-place Iowa Blackhawks, the defending American Professional Football League champions.

"We had a play drawn up with three men going deep and one going short to draw the safety," Middleton said. "Right before we broke the huddle, Marcus James said if you don't got it, take off and run. He was 100 percent right. They had been bringing the rush all night and I just avoided it and luckily the receivers were blocking downfield and the O-line had given me plenty of time to make a play."

Even after watching him lead the team to three straight Central Plains Football League championships, Outlaws co-owner and defensive back Chad Jackson couldn't believe Middleton's poise and versatility.

"That kid leaves his heart on the field," Jackson said. "You saw what he did. No one can deny it."

Thirty-five seconds, though, remained on the clock as the Outlaw defense that had given up four straight scores to open up the game took the field. They had settled down, though, making stop after stop in the red zone and limiting the Blackhawks to just 12 second-half points.

Still, Iowa quarterback Charles Wright's arm posed a threat.

On the first play, he almost erased the heroic drive by Middleton. With Robert Kirvin open in the right side of the end zone, he dialed in and hit the 6-foot-4 receiver for what everybody thought was the go-ahead score. But Kirvin couldn't get two feet down, and three plays later, a dropped pass across the middle ended the roller coaster of a game.

"We spoiled a win for them twice," Jackson said, referring to the Outlaws' win over the Blackhawks last year after being down 35-0. "We played some teams that were not so great in the beginning of the year, but this is a great team. We competed with the best and proved we're up there. It's something Sedalia should be proud of."

The win puts the Outlaws (5-1) even with the Blackhawks (6-1) in the league's loss column, which is important considering that a first-round bye in the playoffs goes to the regular-season champion.

But first place was far from the Outlaws' minds early. Mid-Missouri entered halftime down 26-21 and couldn't find the end zone consistently as its defense tried to keep the game within reach.

The Blackhawks' lead ballooned to 38-28 with seven minutes to play in the game, but Middleton, who went 13-for-25 with 152 yards and five touchdowns, connected with Jacob Cahill for an 11-yard score to close the lead to 38-34.

And the rest is history.

UP NEXT

Outlaws vs. Kansas

7:05 p.m. Saturday at Mathewson Exhibition Center

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