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Sr. Mustangs' superb season comes to an end

Milton District downed 27-7 by Burlington Central Trojans in Tier 2 semifinals

By MURRAY TOWNSEND

Special to The Champion

The result was as dreary as the blustery, rainy, chilly last Friday afternoon when the Milton District senior Mustangs lost 27-7 at Burlington Central in their Halton Division II semi-final playoff game.

The game was considerably closer than the scoreboard, however, and if they had posted a score for heart, perseverance, endurance and effort, then in fact, the Mustangs came home with a victory.

Despite allowing 27 points, the defense played very well. They made big play after big play and rarely allowed a big gain.

They spent a lot of time on the field, with Burlington Central just chipping away at them, getting gains of two and three yards.

Wayne Meinen, Pieter Deetlefs, Rob Skinner, Blair Pocock, Eric Liddon and Josh Suter all came up with big stops on Burlington Central's first drive of the day and almost had them on a fourth and three. But a penalty gave the Trojans another opportunity and they took it into the end zone.

Offense sputters

The Mustangs offense had problems putting together a drive and then Burlington Central came back and scored the same way they did the first time, gaining little bits of ground at a time.

Down 14-0, Milton District figured they'd take a page out of Central's playbook and gave the ball to Meinen on eight straight carries.

He pounded out gains of two, three and four yards at a time, before Kris Beal broke through for a 12-yard gain.

Then they got on the scoreboard when Mark Grimwood made a perfect pass to Ian Robinson who made a great catch about a foot into the end zone and about a foot from the sidelines.

John Melito intercepted a pass near the end of the first half but the Mustangs couldn't move the ball and the half ended with them down 14-7.

The defense remained strong in the second half, forcing third and fourth down conversion

attempts by the Central, which the Trojans, to their credit, proved very good at converting.

But, on one third and long play, the Mustangs got to their quarterback and Detleefs recovered the resulting fumble.

After a stalled drive, the backbreaker came for the Mustangs when punter, Robinson had to run back close to his own end zone when the snap was over his head.

He made a valiant attempt to get the punt away, but it was blocked and recovered by Central on the Milton District six-yard line. They scored on the next play to make it 21-7.

Forced to pass into the wind in the fourth quarter, the Mustangs were unable to sustain any drives, but the defense continued to make great plays, and continued to make the Trojans pay for their yards.

Bren Silk came up with one particular big stop on defense and Skinner knocked down a fourth down pass attempt.

Meinen and Greg van Es had to be helped off the field with what appeared to be serious injuries, but both somehow managed to get back in the game and continue what was an outstanding effort by the whole team.

'Not quite as sharp'

Coach, Ed Stavnitzky, didn't think the team was as sharp as it normally was, however, and said that Burlington Central deserved the win.

He thought it was a different play that took the wind out of his team's sails.

He called for a fake punt on a fourth down play on Milton District's first possession of the second half, calling it a "rookie coach's mistake." It almost worked, however, and if it had, it might have been the difference in the game.

Stavnitzky is a big believer in the theory that if the players don't execute properly then it's the coach's fault.

But, by the same token, somebody is responsible for the team's incredible turnaround this season. "If you look at the fact that last year we were 0-6 and this year went 5-3. I don't think anybody in the league would have expected that, and would say that was anything less than a miraculous changeabout. That was a result of the kids working their butts off for nine months."

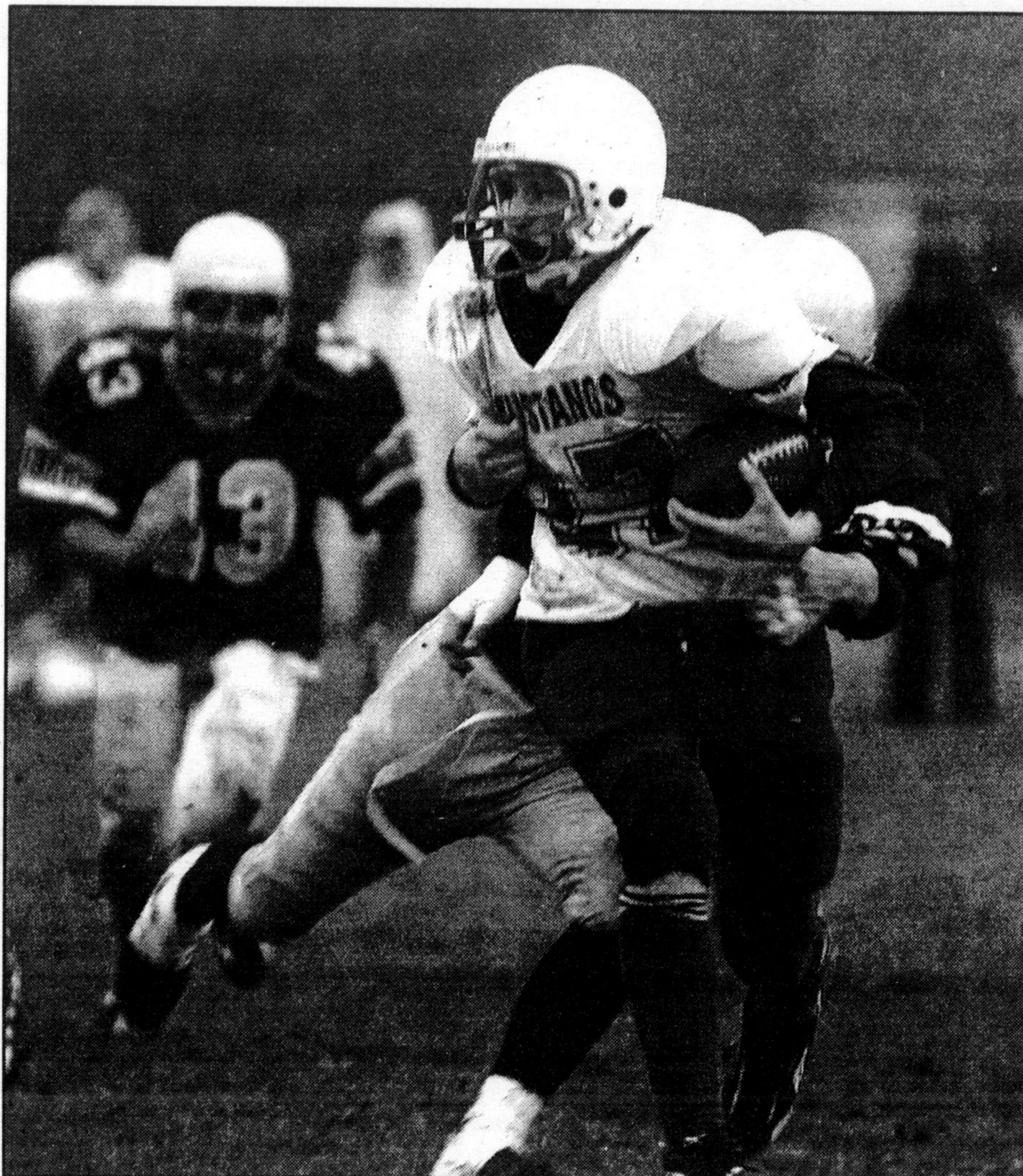


Photo by RON KUZYK

Senior Mustang Greg van Es gets hauled down during Halton Tier 2 semifinal play against the Burlington Central Trojans last Friday. MD lost 27-7.

Stavnitzky, who has coached for two decades and has won many championships at other schools in Hamilton and surrounding areas, said, "I've never pushed people as hard to achieve and had them respond so positively.

"Pushing them and pushing them to the point where you'd think they would say 'enough', but they just came back for more. That's why we did so well this year."

He said he was never as proud of any team as

he was of this one as he walked off the field after the game. "To me it was like winning a championship. I was felt very happy and proud.

There is more work to be done, acknowledges Stavnitzky, but he'll worry about that next year. The score of the final game may have been a disappointment but his message to the players is something everybody should remember no matter what they're trying to achieve: "Dreams only die when you quit."

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