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Despite struggles, Bellaire Cards continue to work

By HEATH HAMILTON

By coach Jeff Walker's estimate, his defense had a good practice the week of the Cardinals' game against Madison on Friday.

But 506 yards of Marlins' offense later, his team was at the short end of a 51-20 game.

"In high school football, two or three missed tackles can decide the outcome of a game," said Walker. The Cardinals are 1-4 overall and 1-1 in District 20-5A. "If we had made them punt instead of allowing them to score quickly, the outcome could have been different."

The Cardinals found themselves down 21-0 after the first quarter and eventually down 48-12 by halftime. But that was familiar in recent Madison-Bellaire matchups. Three years ago the Cardinals were down 28-0 and eventually came back and won. Two years ago, the Cardinals had a 28-6 lead and barely held on to win.

However, history did not hold serve in this game.

The Cardinals were without senior quarterback Max Flinn, who injured a finger on his throwing hand and couldn't grip the ball well enough to play Friday. Playing without the area's third most prolific passer, it was going to be tough for the Cardinals.

"When you lose your starting quarterback, it can have a ripple effect," said Walker. He was pleased with the job replacement Alonzo Irving did, going 13-for-29 for 143 yards, throwing two touchdowns to sophomore wide receiver C.J. Jackson and running in one from four yards out in the fourth quarter. "Nevertheless, a quarterback does not play defense."

Disappointed, the Cardinals are not giving up by any means. Flinn will be back, as will senior left tackle Jake Sigren, who Walker calls the "heart" of the offensive line. Sigren's return is much needed, as Walker and his staff continue to look for ways to improve.

He needs the line to be more physical and aggressive in its blocking schemes, and he'll have it tirelessly working on drills all this week.

"The pass protection has been a little weak as well," said Walker. "Jake (Sigren) is back and that can change the entire chemistry of that group."

The Cardinals hope to avoid the jaws of the Lobos at 7 p.m. Friday when they take on Chavez at Barnett. The Lobos are 1-1 in district and 2-3 overall after a 59-0 win over Sam Houston Saturday.

With eight starters returning on both offense and defense, the Lobos feel as though this is their year. Senior quarterback Aaron Bargas has completed 48 percent of his passes while connecting on 12 TDs and eight interceptions.



READY TO GO: Bellaire defensive end William Trumble gets ready to tackle a Madison offensive player in Friday's game. — photo by CARLOS FEBLES

"They're very experienced, and this is probably the best team Chavez has ever fielded," said Walker, who thinks they are an even match. "They were definitely picked over us in the preseason."

The issue for the Cardinals will continue to be the defense, which gave up an average of 8.5 yards per carry against Madison.

Walker plans to make junior Tahj Johnson a full-time defensive player, and is going to give (Alonzo) Irving, who Walker calls a "real hitter," a bigger role on defense. This will also be junior defensive lineman Jesse Nixon's second game on varsity.

"You never know. Sometimes one guy can be a difference-maker," said Walker.