

Coatesville's comeback bid comes up short in flag-filled affair

HERSHEY >> The anguished looks and the steady stream of tears rolling down the faces of the Coatesville football players told the entire story.

Saturday afternoon, at a rain soaked HersheyPark Stadium, the Red Raiders watched their dream of a state title vanish in a stunning PIAA Class 6A semifinal loss, as District 3 champion Harrisburg handed Coatesville its first defeat of the season, 27-24.

Harrisburg will play St. Joseph's Prep for the 6A title next Saturday at 6 p.m., back at HersheyPark Stadium.

Harrisburg (13-1), which lost its season opener, 37-6, to Coatesville, was a fired up bunch on Saturday. The Cougars bolted out to a 7-0 lead in the second quarter and never lost that advantage. Harrisburg sacked Coatesville (14-1) quarterback Ricky Ortega six times and held Michigan State recruit Aaron Young to just 68 yards rushing on 13 carries. Dionte Nichols had three of the six sacks and said the Cougars were a different team this time around.

"We got a whole lot better as the year went on," Nichols said. "And today our defense did the job and we came to play. This is a great feeling."

Harrisburg quarterback Kane Everson haunted the Coatesville defense all day. The crafty left-hander ran for 66 yards and threw for another 102 yards and kept numerous plays alive with his feet. Everson threw a perfect 30-yard touchdown pass to Donte Kent to open the scoring and give the Cougars a 7-0 lead.

"We knew that the quarterback was a special talent," said Coatesville head coach Matt Ortega. "He kept a lot of plays alive with his feet and he threw the ball well. We just did not make enough plays today. Our defense clamped down on them in the second half, giving up just six points, but it was not our day. Too many penalties and missed plays. We had a great season and these kids will grow as young men because of this."

Coatesville accumulated 16 penalties for 99 yards, while the Cougars committed 11 penalties for 100 yards in the flag fest. Many of the Red Raiders' penalties came on false starts. In fact, Coatesville lined up for a 45-yard field goal attempt with two seconds left to tie the game at 27, but a false start moved the ball back five more yards and Ortega put his offense back on the field.

Ricky Ortega was sacked to end the game, and the Red Raiders' dream.

"We just had too many penalties today," Coatesville wide receiver Dymere Miller said. "They were a whole lot better than they were early in the year. This hurts real bad but we are a family and we will stay together as one."

Miller had a big game for Coatesville, catching seven Ortega passes for 146 yards and a touchdown, but it just was not enough as the Red Raiders had to battle back from a 21-10 halftime deficit.

The Cougars' defense limited Coatesville to just 76 yards rushing for the game.

After a sluggish first half, the Red Raiders took the second-half kickoff and drove 58 yards on six plays: five straight on the ground and a 16-yard strike from Ortega to a diving Miller to cut the Harrisburg lead to 21-17.

But just as the momentum seemed to be turning in the Red Raiders' favor, the Cougar defense, which was loading the box

to stop Young, gained its feet and continued to press Ortega at every turn.

The Red Raiders' junior completed 13 of 26 passes for 246 yards, but his one mistake – a fourth quarter interception to Kent – would put Coatesville in trouble.

Things got worse when a Coatesville punt from its own end zone went just two yards, landing at the Coatesville 5-yard line. But the Red Raider defense stood tall, as Frankie De Los Santos tackled Everson on fourth down kept the Cougars off the scoreboard.

With a drive starting at its own 3-yard line, Ortega dropped back and lofted a ball down the right sideline that stayed in the air a little too long. Kent picked it off and ran the ball back to the Red Raiders' 6-yard line.

A Coatesville penalty put the ball on the 3 yard line, and one play later Jahmir Plant rumbled in for a 27-17 lead with 7:35 to play.

Coatesville came back and scored in less than three minutes, with Ortega hitting Miller – who seemed to be open all day – for a 20-yard first down catch. Two plays and a Cougar penalty later, Young went in from two yards out, and Coatesville cut the Cougar lead to 27-24 with 4:53 to play.

“Our kids never quit today,” Matt Ortega said. “They kept battling and battling and Dymere had a great game. They loaded up to stop the run and doubled Dapree so we hit some passes to some other guys. But it was not meant to be for us.”

The game and clock belonged to the Cougars as Everson and Plant combined to eat up four minutes of the last 4:53. That left the Red Raiders with 62 yards and no timeout to finish the comeback.

Miller put the Red Raiders in position for the long field goal

try, but another false start and some more Harrisburg pressure ended Coatesville's historic season.

"This really hurts, but we will stay together forever." Miller said.