

03/21/2021

Mansfield Leans On Defense To Deny Scarlet Hawks

Ryan Lanigan HockomockSports.com



Mansfield's Cincere Gill tries to break free from the grasp of Milford's Tyler Lane in the first half. (Ryan Lanigan/HockomockSports.com)

MILFORD, Mass. – In last week's season-opening win, Mansfield's explosive offense was on full display with five touchdowns.

In week two, it was all about the Hornets' defense.

Going up a powerful Milford offense that put up 34 points in their first game of the season, Mansfield's defensive group was near perfect. The Hornets forced four turnovers, limited the Hawks to under 200 yards of offense, and pitched a shutout for the final three quarters to earn a 20-7 win on the road.

It marked the first meeting between the two squads since Milford joined the Hockomock League for football in 2013 with the Hawks making the switch to the Kelley-Rex division at the start of the 2020 school year.

"Story of the day, the defense played lights out," said Mansfield head coach Mike Redding. "Scoring a touchdown for us, which in this game, was huge. Instead of just a six-point lead, it's 13. The defense did a great job against a very good collection of receivers and [Brady] Olson can throw the ball. We gave them a few but nothing big, they popped the one run but after that, we were lights out, and thank goodness because this was really one of our sloppiest offensive performances in a long time."

Mansfield forced a turnover on Milford's first possession of the game, Anthony Comer grabbed back-to-back interceptions with the first returned for a touchdown, and Hornets added another pick in the early moments of the fourth quarter.

The Hornets opened the game in style with freshman CJ Bel giving the visitors good field position at midfield after a good return. From there, Mansfield needed just six plays to find the

end zone. Cincere Gill (20 carries, 117 yards) broke free for a 16-yard run on third down (his longest carry of the game), and three plays later, Gill — out of the wildcat — handed it off to Comer on a sweep to the left for an 18-yard touchdown and a 7-0 lead less than four minutes in.

Milford completed a third down pass on its opening drive but Mansfield corner Nick Bertolino punched the ball free and recovered the fumble, giving the Hornets the ball back at the Hawks' 20-yard line. But as good as Mansfield's defense was throughout, the Milford defense had a strong outing as well.

Hampered by a fumble and a holding call (Mansfield was flagged 10 times in the game), the Hornets offense stalled and Milford forced an incomplection on fourth to get the ball back. The momentum carried over to the offensive side of the ball and the Hawks cashed in just two plays later. With the offense spread out with four receivers, Milford handed it off to senior Dom Schofield up the middle and he found a hole and went the distance for a 69-yard touchdown, tying the game 7-7 with 3:45 left in the first quarter.

From that point, there weren't many offensive highlights for either squad.

Mansfield had to punt on its next two possessions, but the second one off the foot of Gill took a favorable bounce for the Hornets and was downed at the Milford 5-yard line. On second down, Mansfield's Caden Colby and Mark DeGirolamo came flying in at Milford quarterback Brady Olson (9/28, 91 yards), who fired a short pass to the right side. Comer read the play, stepped in front and intercepted the pass, and sprinted into the end zone for a 14-yard return.

"It was a hard game, it was hard with our penalties, and they have a very good offense but we just executed on defense," Comer said. "We held our guys to short-yardage and covered our guys. On the pick-six, I saw green. I was just running for the hills, I wanted the touchdown. We watched a lot of film, watching how they execute so we were ready."

Milford started to orchestrate a response as Olson hit Max Martin for 13 yards on first down, and then a late hit on the Hornets moved the ball 15 more yards to the Mansfield 39-yard line. TJ Guy stopped the Hawks for a loss in the backfield but a holding call in the secondary once again moved the chains for the hosts, getting to the Mansfield 24-yard line.

Guy helped stuff another Milford run on first down, and on second down Olson's pass hit off a receiver's hands and Comer was able to come down with the deflection for his second straight interception, putting an end to another Milford drive.

"Anthony played a great two-way game for us," Redding said. "We felt we really needed him on defense today to cover, he's one of our quicker guys and made some big plays for us. We've played two good spread teams and held them each to 7. We still have to get sharper on offense but the next couple of weeks it will be more about defending the running game. Taunton and KP are big, they're going to try and bang, run the ball."

Mansfield capitalized on the interception with its best drive of the game. The Hornets traveled 82 yards on 10 plays, taking off five minutes of game clock, and cashed in with another touchdown with under a minute to play in the half.

Gill had three straight runs that combined for over 20 yards early in the drive, and when the Hornets were backed up by a delay of game call, Gill hauled in a 21-yard pass from quarterback Matt Boen, just eluding the Milford defender along the sideline.

Comer turned a broken play into 18 yards, Nico Holmes burst up the middle for 7 yards, and on second and goal from the three, Boen sold the option and kept it himself, leaping across the goal line for a touchdown, giving Mansfield a 20-7 lead with 0:49 left in the first half.

“That was big, I thought we wasted [an opportunity] before that...we came down and scored, got the ball back but we didn't convert and they come down and tie the game,” Redding said. “We fortunately got a couple of more before half, and I thought the one right before halftime was a big turning point.

“When we do things right, we're good but we didn't do things right very often today. We're getting way too many penalties and we just really have to work hard on offense getting sharper and executing because we're too good not to score in a half no matter who we're playing.”

Mansfield, 20 @ Milford, 7

1st Quarter:

(Mans) Anthony Comer 18-yard rush, James Gilleran XP good;

(Mil) Dom Schofield 69-yard rush, Nicholas Araujo XP good.

2nd Quarter:

(Mans) A. Comer 14-yard interception return, J. Gilleran XP good;

(Mans) Matt Boen 3-yard rush, XP failed.

Mansfield's defense proves to be too much for Brady Olson, Milford

By Nate Weitzer Globe March 20, 2021



Mansfield's Anthony Comer scores one of his two touchdowns Saturday, despite the tackle attempt by Milford's Grant Scudo.

MARK STOCKWELL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

MILFORD — Taking risks often is required in order to take down a defending champion, and No. 15 Milford did just that in Saturday's competitive 20-7 loss to second-ranked Mansfield.

The Hawks were right in the contest after Dominic Schofield broke a 69-yard touchdown run to make it a 7-7 game late in the first quarter, but Brady Olson and his receivers were off on their timing in a few key spots, leading to three Mansfield interceptions that propelled the 2019 Division 2 state champion Hornets to victory.

"Our kids played really well," Milford coach Dale Olson said. "[Mansfield is] a dynamic team, one of the top teams in the state, and I think we went toe-to-toe with them. Our defense played really well. We just made too many mistakes."

Mansfield (2-0) struck first on its opening drive when Anthony Comer took a jet sweep off left tackle 18 yards for a touchdown. Milford's first drive ended with a fumble recovered by Nick Bertolino, but the Hawks defense held strong inside their 20-yard line and Schofield broke his big run to tie the game minutes later.

But defensive end T.J. Guy and the Hornets defense proved impenetrable from that point.

With Milford (1-1) unable to sustain success on the ground, Olson tried to make something happen out of the pocket from deep in his territory, and instead found Comer for a 13-yard pick-6.

Later in the second quarter, Olson's pass deflected off receiver Max Martin and was intercepted by Comer at the Mansfield 18. The Hornets capitalized with an 82-yard scoring drive, capped by a 4-yard touchdown run from quarterback Matt Boen right before the half.

"Fortunately we got a couple more before the half," Mansfield coach Mike Redding said. "That was a big turning point. I thought we could've taken control early and [the Hawks] were right back in it with momentum, but our defense was just lights out after that."

Mansfield maintained possession by riding Cincere Gill (21 carries, 121 yards), who also came up with another interception early in the third quarter.

Milford's defense blanked the Hornets in the second half and Mansfield committed eight penalties on offense, but was able to hold on thanks to its defense.

"I think we're in a good place here with Milford football," said Olson, who coaches alongside his brother, offensive coordinator Dana Olson. "The kids played hard for 48 minutes, and the outcome wasn't what I wanted, but that's all I could ask for today."

Stingy 'D' sparks feisty Hornets again

Milford held to single TD as Mansfield turns in another dazzling performance

By PETER GOBIS

MILFORD — Presented with the task of putting pressure on, arguably, the best quarter-back in the Hockomock League and the accompanying best aerial attack, the Mansfield High football team's defensive secondary certainly received an "A" grade in its accomplishments.

The Hornets limited UMass Amherst-bound Brady Olson to merely nine complete passes and to fewer than 100 passing yards, while intercepting three of his tosses in taking home a 20-7 victory.

The Hornets kept Brady and the Scarlet Hawks off of the scoreboard through the final three quarters in winning their second game of the season, taking definitive action to repeat as Kelley-Rex Division champions of the Hockomock League and certifying their spot as one of the premier teams in the commonwealth in the abbreviated Fall-II season for spring football.

Senior two-year starting cornerback Nick Bertolino, senior safety Cincere Gill, and senior Anthony Comer moved from a "nickel" package to the other cornerback role, with sophomore Ryan DeGirolamo at safety, and it proved to be the winning formula in the defensive secondary for the Hornets.

From Bertolino's fumble recovery to put a halt to Milford's first offensive set of the game, to Comer's pair of aerial thefts on back-to-back Scarlet Hawk series and Gill's pass interception in the fourth quarter, Mansfield pulled the plug on Milford's intent to beat the Hornets in their first-ever meeting since joining the Hockomock League in 2013. "We moved Comer (5-foot-10, 170) over to corner for this game and that proved to be a good move,"

Mansfield coach Mike Redding said. "Against their receivers, we felt that it was a good matchup because their receivers are all kind of small, quick kids — like (Julian) Edelms — and

he was good for us. “The Hornets never trailed, taking the lead on the first of Comer’s two TDs: an 18-yard run four minutes into the first quarter on a “wildcat” hand-off from Gill. Mansfield regained the lead at 14-7 on Comer’s second TD, the pass interception return — 14 yards four minutes into the second quarter — and the second of James Gilleran’s two conversion kicks.

“We didn’t sack him (Olson), but we chased him out of the pocket a lot and covered really well,” Redding added of Mansfield’s defensive schemes. “He made some nice throws, but we made him move quite a bit and we tried to bang their receivers at the line to kind of throw off the timing. “It was Comer’s second pass interception which set up Mansfield’s third TD.

Most importantly, too: the Hornets tallied their third TD of the first half when senior QB Matt Boen polished off an 82-yard, 10-play series with a 3-yard run with 49 seconds left until intermission. In that drive, Mansfield kept its forward motion alive as Gill hauled in a pass from Boen for 21 yards and Comer polished off an 18-yard romp. Notably, neither team scored during the second half.

Gill rushed for 117 yards on 20 carries for the Hornets while Comer (45 on eight carries) and Nico Holmes (43 yards on six carries) were instrumental in Mansfield being able to control its destiny. “We played two good spread (offense) teams (also Franklin), and held them each to one touchdown,”

Redding said. “I think Milford has the best quarterback in the league and some great receivers, as talented as any team in the division, so it was a must-win game for us” to win the Hockomock League title. “Our defense played great, we gave up that one long run, but it was lights-out after that,”

Redding said. Milford never advanced inside Mansfield’s 35-yard line during the second half. “Comer and Gill’s pass interceptions were both third-down plays from around our 40, and they picked them off at the 20 — that was big,” Redding said. “As the game went on, we felt we had to keep making stops.

“We couldn’t finish a drive. Our offense was out of sync, penalties (10) were killing us, we were sloppy executing. We felt that every time that Milford got on offense, we had to get a stop or it could be 20-14.”

Next up for the Hornets is a 4 p.m. kickoff Friday at Taunton.

Mansfield 20, Milford 7

Mansfield	7	13	0	0 — 20
Milford	7	0	0	0 — 7

SCORING SUMMARY

First Quarter

Msf. — Anthony Comer 18 run (James Gilleran kick), 8:09.

Mfd. — Dom Schofield 69 run (Nick Araujo kick), 3:45.

Second Quarter

Msf. — Comer 14 pass interception return (Gilleran kick), 8:38

Msf. — Matt Boen 3 run (kick failed), 0:49.