

Figueroa runs for 338 yards, 7 TDs as Fitchburg beats Algonquin

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FITCHBURG -- Usually, the Fitchburg High School Athletic Hall of Fame requires at least two years -- the junior and senior years -- of competition in the famous Red and Gray to qualify a student-athlete for induction to the second floor. It's a must. It's practically Biblical.

After Sal Figueroa's performance Friday night -- heck, his entire senior year as a body of work -- the selection committee may have to make an exception in his case.

The senior tailback -- who didn't play for the Arn-How roaders a year ago -- had a night never before seen in the 123-year history of Fitchburg High School Football.

In short, Figueroa -- like other tailbacks wearing Fitchburg's No. 1 jersey, such as Perkins and McCall -- made visiting Algonquin Regional stare at the back of his jersey for two-plus hours as he piled up 338 rushing yards and an unheard-of seven touchdown runs on 23 carries, leading the Red Raiders to a 47-26 win over the Tomahawks in the penultimate game of the 2017 season at historic -- and rather frigid -- Crocker Field.

Fitchburg (5-5) is now off until Thanksgiving morning, when the Red and Gray will host archrival Leominster (3-7).

"He did a great job," first-year Fitchburg coach and Fitchburg Hall-of-Famer Tom DiGeronimo said. "He's been doing that all year, and our guys up front played well. This was a great team effort, and everyone did their job.

"I'm happy with our effort against a good team; (Algonquin) has been in a lot of games this year. This was back and forth. We're going to enjoy this."

To put in succinctly, the Tomahawks truly had no answer for Figueroa. With marionette-like moves and that extra burst of acceleration once he got into the open field, Figueroa spoke with his feet, putting on a performance usually reserved for the rookie level on the Madden video game series.

Of his 23 carries, 14 went for 10 yards or more -- and three for 20 yards or more. Two of the carries were 50 yards or longer.

"I'm just going to congratulate the line," Figueroa said after his amazing game. "They opened up the holes and gave me enough room to make the moves out there. My coaches gave me the ball and the freedom to run the ball."

Fitchburg jumped out to a 7-0 lead as Figueroa carried five times in the opening series for 60 yards, capping it off with an 18-yard TD run. He went right up the middle on second-and-8, and the Tomahawks couldn't touch him.

Damien Savaadra's kick was good.

After Algonquin (2-8) ran a 53-yard opening play, the Red Raider defense held the fort inside its own 10. And while the Tomahawks fell just short of the end zone, FHS wouldn't when it took over on its own 1.

Fullback Damien Nadal (9 carries, 80 yards) took the first handoff in this second series. He went off the left guard and didn't stop running until he had gained 66 yards to the T-Hawk 33.

Four plays later, Figueroa danced through the line and tiptoed away from the defenders as he went in, untouched for the second time, this time from 23 yards.

The kick doinked off the upright, leaving FHS leading 13-0 with 2:08 left in the opening quarter.

"We played a great first quarter, but we needed to make some more stops," DiGeronimo said.

The Tomahawks struck on the first play of the second quarter, as John Polymeros scored from 58 yards away with a little sweep to the left. Fitchburg's Mike Nowd nearly stopped him at the Raider 30, but Polymeros shook him off and headed into the end zone for the score.

The kick failed.

The Red Raiders got the points back two plays later, and Figueroa swept the left side and waved tootle-oo to the Algonquin defense as he scored from 65 yards away.

That run gave the senior tailback 150 yards on his first eight carries of the game.

Late in the second, Algonquin's Hayden Kea (10 of 19, 171 yards passing, 2 TDs, INT) scored a QB sneak from a yard away. The conversion pass failed, giving FHS a 20-12 lead.

Figueroa then added TD No. 4 of the night on a 13-yard run right up the middle.

He had 209 yards on 14 carries in the first half. Nine of his carries were 10 yards or more.

The Tomahawks scored first in the third, as Kea connected with Brett Casellini for a 27-yard scoring strike to cap off a six-play, 56-yard drive. The PAT was good, and Fitchburg held a 26-19 advantage.

Figueroa took the toss on the second play after the TD, and he flew 59 yards to score his fifth TD of the game, this one from 59 yards away.

Key found Casellini for a 25-yard scoring strike on the ensuing drive, but Figueroa scored No. 6 three plays later, this time from 14 yards away.

"They made some big plays," DiGeronimo said. "We have some things to fix."

Figueroa scored his seventh and final touchdown midway through the fourth from 19 yards away.

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