

Austin Green
MCO 502
Story 2
Prof. Hill
9/25/21

CHANDLER—Peoria Liberty did everything right on the play. The Lions' defensive front had flushed Chandler quarterback Blaine Hipa (CQ) out of the pocket and towards the sideline on 4th and 14. One more stop and Liberty would go into halftime with the lead.

But then Hipa sidestepped a defender, rolled to his left and heaved a perfectly placed Hail Mary pass to tight end Nason Coleman (CQ), who rose above a crowd of Liberty defenders and Chandler wideouts to pull down a 30-yard touchdown reception with 22 seconds remaining in the first half of Friday's 41-21 Wolves victory.

Hipa and Coleman's heroics tied the game at 21 and allowed Chandler to seize the momentum heading into halftime. They never gave it up, outscoring Liberty 20-0 in the second half.

"That was huge," Hipa said. "Nason Coleman, best tight end in the nation... He's just a playmaker and it helped us out, going into the half with some momentum."

It marks Chandler's 40th straight win. Liberty (3-1) had nearly ended the Wolves' streak the last time the teams met in the 2020 state playoffs but lost 35-34 in overtime.

Early on, it appeared the Lions would have a shot at revenge, as the Wolves (4-0) got off to a shaky start before settling in and pulling away. Four different Chandler players found the end zone, including two touchdowns each from Coleman and running back Ca'lil Valentine (CQ).

"We're Chandler, and we keep on pounding, and we keep on elevating as the game moves along," coach Rick Garretson (CQ) said. "You gotta play all 48 minutes against us."

Hipa led the way with a masterful performance, going 26-for-40 with 364 yards and three touchdowns. The senior transfer from Hawaii routinely scrambled away from a collapsing pocket and kept plays alive, only getting sacked twice despite constant pressure.

"It's important when things break down to just make plays and keep the drives going," Hipa said. "We can't have things just come to a halting stop... We had a slow start but the main thing is we made plays and got down the field."

Chandler opened the second half by building a two-touchdown lead in just six plays from scrimmage. First, Valentine found a gaping hole in the middle of the field and streaked 61 yards to the end zone. After the Wolves' defense forced a three-and-out, pass game coordinator Chad Carpenter (CQ) saw that Liberty's safeties were not playing deep and called a post route off of a run fake for speedy receiver Quaron Adams (CQ). In one motion, the wide-open Adams juggled a beautifully thrown pass from Hipa, secured the ball, and somersaulted into the end zone for a 50-yard score.

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On defense, the Wolves struggled mightily at first to keep Liberty coach Colin Thomas's (CQ) option-based offense at bay. The Lions routinely exploited Chandler's man-to-man defense for big chunk plays, starting with a 21-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Dom Ochoa (CQ) to cap off his team's first drive of the game.

After Chandler took a 14-7 lead on back-to-back scoring drives, Ochoa made another perfectly placed pass to the end zone--this one a 26-yard strike--on 4th down to tie it at 14 in the second quarter. Liberty struck again when Ochoa found receiver Jaqua Anderson (CQ) behind the Wolves' secondary on a play-action. Anderson caught the short pass and sprinted for a 57-yard score, giving Liberty a 21-14 lead.

"We came out of the gate strong," Thomas said. "On third downs, I guess man coverage, Dom's legs just kind of extended plays and we just made some plays down the field... We had some momentum going and had them on the ropes a little bit."

Once again, however, Chandler's defense clamped down after halftime. The Wolves have still not allowed a single second-half point this season. Liberty's offense also caught a bad break early in the third quarter when Ochoa took a hard hit on a designed run play, knocking him out of the game and pressing backup Navi Bruzon (CQ) into action.

Bruzon finished 9-for-15 with 127 yards and an interception. Ochoa went 8-for-15 with 151 yards and three touchdowns before his injury.good

Chandler will head north to play Phoenix Pinnacle (1-2) on Oct. 1.