CORTLAND, N.Y. – Sophomore tailback James Perkins (Troy) rushed 32 times for 123 yards and two touchdowns as Buffalo State rallied from a 13-0 deficit to defeat Cortland, 27-20, in a non-league contest. The Bengals (1-2) ran off 27 straight points to post their first victory of the season. The Red Dragons (3-1) lost their home opener after winning their first three games on the road.

Buffalo State rushed for 162 yards on 57 carries against a Cortland defense ranked third nationally in Division III against the run at less than 30 yards per game. Senior quarterback Mike Mikolaichik (Hilton) completed 15-of-30 passes for 181 yards and two touchdowns. The Bengals finished with 343 total offensive yards to 229 for Cortland.

Two Cortland first-quarter drives stalled inside the Buffalo State 15-yard line, leading to a pair of field goals by sophomore Derek Ziders (Lancaster) for a 6-0 lead. On Buffalo State's next possession, sophomore cornerback Greg Steward (Elmont/Sewanhaka) recorded his second interception of the game and returned the ball 58 yards down the left sideline for a touchdown to give the Red Dragons a 13-0 lead.

The Bengals responded with a 17-play, 82-yard touchdown drive that took more than seven minutes. Mikolaichik capped the drive with a 10-yard screen pass to freshman wide receiver Greg Meyer (Lancaster) to pull the guests within 13-7.

Buffalo State capitalized on two Cortland fumbles in the third quarter, turning both possessions into touchdowns and a 21-13 lead. Cortland quarterback Alex Smith's (Niagara Falls/Niagara-Wheatfield) errant option pitch was recovered by Justin Bodnar (Huntington) at the Buffalo State 44-yard line, leading to a 12-play, 56-yard scoring drive. Mikolaichik completed a 15-yard pass to senior Jeff Shostak (East Smethport, PA/Smethport Area) on 4th-and-8 at the Cortland 17-yard line, and Perkins ran in from a yard out two plays later. On Cortland's next possession, Smith backedpedaled near midfield and lost the ball as Buffalo State's defense was nearing. Bodnar grabbed the ball at the Cortland 40-yard line and raced 30 yards before being caught from behind at the 10-yard line. Perkins' 7-yard touchdown run two plays later gave the Bengals a 21-13 lead with 1:50 left in the third quarter.

Cortland moved into Buffalo State territory on its next possession but had to punt. The Bengals were pinned on their own 9-yard line, but a 49-yard pass from Mikolaichik to junior Jonathan Allen (Fayetteville/Fayetteville-Manlius) quickly move the ball to the Cortland 42-yard line. Sophomore Bob Vesona (Depew) ran 28 yards later in the drive to move the ball to the Cortland 3-yard line, and on third-and-goal Mikolaichik found Allen wide open on the far right side of the end zone for a 3-yard touchdown pass. The extra point was blocked by Josh Jablonski (Buffalo/West Seneca West), leaving Buffalo State’s lead at 27-13 with 10:09 remaining.

The Bengals ate up nearly six minutes on their next possession, giving Cortland the ball back on downs at its own 30-yard line with 2:30 left. Smith hit junior Drew Lascari (Pequannock, NJ/Pequannock Township) on a 28-yard pass, with a 15-yard personal foul penalty tacked on to move the ball to Buffalo State 27-yard line. The two-play touchdown drive culminated in a 32-yard pass from Smith to junior Anthony Morat (Rome/Rome Free Academy) with 2:13 left to pull the Red Dragons within 27-20. Cortland attempted an onside kick and almost recovered, but the Bengals were able to gain possession. Vesona’s 3-yard run on third-and-three with under two minutes left, after Cortland had used its last two timeouts, sealed the victory.
For Buffalo State, Allen caught four passes for 75 yards, while Justin Draper (Cheektowaga/Cleveland Hill) and Bill Kirsch (East Aurora/Attica Central) each made six tackles and Michael Haynes (Cheektowaga/Cleveland Hill) recorded his team-high fourth interception.

Cortland was led by sophomore linebacker Bill Hauser (Lancaster) and junior linebacker Matt Montpetit (Westhampton/Westhampton Beach), who each recorded career-highs of 17 tackles. Junior defensive end Rich Coyne (Wantagh) finished with three sacks and a forced fumble and junior safety Chuck Eich (Cheektowaga) made eight stops. Cortland registered five sacks in the game and has 21 in its first four games. Sophomore tailback Dustin Bowser (Jamestown/Southwestern), starting in place of injured Matt Rickert (Holbrook/Sachem), rushed 18 times for 76 yards. Morat caught four passes for 78 yards and Smith completed 9-of-17 passes for 145 yards.

Cortland will host Montclair State in a New Jersey Athletic Conference game next Saturday at 1 p.m. The Red Dragons are 2-0 in NJAC play. Buffalo State returns to Atlantic Central Football Conference play next Saturday at Frostburg State (Md.) at 1 p.m.

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