FINAL SCORE: Hobart 23, Cortland 22

GENEVA, N.Y. – Junior running back Doug Blakowski (Elma/Iroquois) scored the game-winning touchdown on a 1-yard run with seven minutes, 37 seconds remaining as Hobart defeated Cortland, 23-22, in the opening round of the NCAA Division III tournament. The Statesmen (9-1), seeded fourth in the East region, will play at top-seeded Delaware Valley on Nov. 26 in the second round. Cortland, the New Jersey Athletic Conference co-champion making its first NCAA appearance since 1997, finishes the season with a 7-3 record.

Trailing 22-16 with 9:14 remaining, Hobart took possession at its own 24-yard line. On the first play of the game-deciding drive, junior wide receiver Nick Dyson (Barton/Tioga) caught a lateral from junior quarterback Shawn Mizro (Newark) and turned his attention down field. Dyson heaved a 46-yard completion to wide open sophomore wide receiver James Wright (Olean). After running for no gain on the next play, Mizro hit sophomore wide receiver Steve Sorhaindo (Yorktown Heights) for 29 yards to the Cortland 1-yard line, setting up Blakowski's dive.

On the ensuing possession, Hobart forced the Red Dragons to attempt a 44-yard field that fell short. The Statesmen failed to gain a first down with their next three plays and lined up in punt formation. Sophomore punter Dom Ancona (Garden City/Chaminade) took the snap, scrambled to his right and found junior linebacker Evan Hoffman (Fairfield, CT/Fairfield Prep) on a 12-yard pass play. While the Statesmen did not score on the drive, the fake punt did allow them to run almost two minutes off the clock and force Cortland to use a timeout before punting the ball back to the Red Dragons. Ancona's punt was downed at the Cortland 27 with 1:57 remaining.

Cortland sophomore quarterback Alex Smith (Niagara Falls/Niagara-Wheatfield) threw for 29 yards and rushed for 15 more on three plays to move the Red Dragons to the Hobart 29. A fumbled snap, an incompletion, and two false start penalties pushed Cortland back to the Hobart 40. On fourth and 21, Smith completed a short pass to sophomore wide receiver Shane Arce (Poughkeepsie/Arlington), who attempted to lateral. The Red Dragons recovered the loose ball, well short of the first down and Hobart took two knees to run out the clock.

The Statesmen opened the afternoon's scoring on a 27-yard field goal by freshman Kevin Olson (Mohawk) at the 4:21 mark of the first quarter. Ancona made the key play on that drive, hitting Hoffman on a 25-yard fake punt pass from the shadow of his own goal posts. Cortland grabbed the lead 16 seconds before the end of the first frame on an 11-yard run by Smith. An elusive runner, Smith stepped out of a shoestring tackle behind the line of scrimmage to save the scoring play.

Hobart went into the intermission with the lead thanks to the only score of the second quarter. Mizro, attempting a quarterback draw, was hit at the Cortland 1-yard line by junior linebacker Josh Jablonski (Buffalo/West Seneca West) and fumbled into the end zone. Sophomore lineman Phil Perkins (Andover, MA) fell on the loose ball to give Hobart a 10-7 lead. A Cortland 38-yard field goal attempt late in the half fell just short.

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The Statesmen extended their lead two plays into the second half. Hobart kicked off to the Red Dragons and freshman Matt Duliba (Forestville) put a punishing hit on the return man to force a fumble that the Statesmen recovered. On the next play, Mizro hit Wright on a quick slant for a 15-yard scoring play. Cortland linebacker Bill Hauser (Lancaster) blocked the extra point attempt to keep the Hobart lead at 16-7. Cortland blocked nine kicks this season, easily eclipsing the previous school record of six.

Cortland crept within two on a 1-yard run by junior Matt Rickert (Holbrook/Sachem) at the 8:25 mark of the third quarter, capping a 14-play, 92-yard scoring drive. Rickert, who finished with 64 rushing yards on 22 carries, scored again with 13:05 left in the fourth quarter on a 6-yard run, completing a 60-yard drive to give the Red Dragons a 22-16 lead.

Smith finished the game with a career-high 100 yards rushing and completed 19-of-40 passes for 230 yards. Junior wide receiver Anthony Morat (Rome/Rome Free Academy) was his top target, making seven catches for a career-best 100 yards. Junior Drew Lascari (Pequannock, NJ/Pequannock Township) grabbed five passes for 81 yards.

Mizro threw for 167 yards and a touchdown, finding senior wide receiver Colby Feane (Weedsport) for a team-high four catches for 72 yards. Defensively for Hobart, junior linebacker Nolan Robinson (Johnson City) recorded a game-high nine tackles.

For Cortland, junior lineman Michael Connolly (Middletown/Minisink Valley) posted a team-high seven stops, while the Red Dragons registered five sacks, including 1.5 each by Jablonski, junior linebacker Matt Montpetit (Westhampton/Westhampton Beach) and senior defensive end Eric Czachor (Middleburgh), to raise their season total to a school record 52. The Red Dragons also recorded three interceptions, one each by sophomore cornerback Jeff Beck (Middlehope/Marlboro), junior safety Chuck Eich (Cheektowaga) and sophomore linebacker Dave D’Aurelio (Rochester/Aquinas Institute). Mizro threw only four interceptions during the entire regular season.

Cortland finished with 422 yards of total offense – 230 through the air and 192 net rushing yards on 46 carries. The Red Dragon defense held Blakowski, who entered the game ranked 12th in Division III with 136.3 rushing yards per game, to only 24 yards on 17 carries. Factoring in Cortland’s five sacks, Hobart was limited to 12 net rushing yards on 27 attempts. The Statesmen did pass for 302 yards, although 135 came on two fake punts and two receiver option passes.

(The Hobart Sports Information Office contributed to this story)