

Highland Speed, Teamwork Overcomes United Power

Written by
Monday, 18 April 2011 04:20



Chuck Dunford photo

Highland U19s defeated United Saturday 37-5 to secure the top spot in Utah's U19 competition.

On a pleasant, breezy day at Burgess Park in Alpine, Utah, Highland ran out to a commanding lead in the first half and cruised from there.

"In our first match with United two weeks ago, I thought we came out a little tentative," said Highland Head Coach Larry Gelwix, who is in his last season coaching the team. "We were a bit flat footed on defense and waited for United to come to us rather than stepping up and meeting them. As a result United set the pace of the first match and scored the first try. We worked very hard since then to come out strong, come out hard, and try to take control of the game."

Four minutes into the game Highland camped out on the United goal line. The Highland forwards tried to work the ball over the line, but ran right into a wall of massive United forwards.

On the fourth attempt, No. 8 Douglas Ferris sneaked through an opening for the try and a 5-0 lead.

United had hoped to subdue Highland with size and power, bringing in BYU football players Manu Mulitalo and Travis Tuiloma, both over 300 lbs, to shore up their front row. They joined a group of players including Sean Vuiyasawa and Sea Tautu - Tautu switched from the back row to wing on Saturday.

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It didn't quite come off. Highland were quick to the breakdown and forced a turnover in midfield ten minutes in. Highland kicked downfield and when Tautu fielded the ball, pushed the wing into touch to get a Highland lineout near the line. United stopped the maul but Highland spun the ball quckle and flyhalf Kobi Harris linked with center Antonio Lavemai, who attracted all sorts of attention as he bulled ahead. Lavemai was able to offload to Harris who scored to make it, with the conversion, 12-0.

United faught back with a try. Highland knocked on with a try beckoning, and United countered from the resulting scrum, sending it weak where Tautu raced into the corner to make it 12-5.

The try woke up the home crowd and United seemed poised to score more. They put Highland on the back foot and almost scored a second try, except a knock-on just short of the line allowed Highland scrumhalf Kepu Lauti to kick the ball away.

Dodging that bullet, Highland struck just before halftime to put the game away. A big, bruising run from Lavemai, who routinely attracting two defenders and handled them anyway, set up a Highland attack inside the United 22. Highland fullback Jayce Hansen burst through the line and sidestepped three defenders on his way to a try.

Then with time expired in the first half, Highland scored once more to make it 22-5.

"We came out very strong, very fast, and very determined. This really pleased me as we had been a bit soft starting out the last few games," said Gelwix. "We simply were more physical and out-hustled and out-hit United. We fanned out and covered the field much better than we did the last time we played United."

Gelwix added he was very pleased with his team's set piece work.

Four minutes into the second half, Highland put aside any thoughts of a United comeback as fullback Hansen scored his second after a nice series of phases by the Highland team. A

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penalty for killing the ball gave Highland another three points, and then with six minutes to go the Highland forwards ran some pick-and-goes before Lauti spun the ball to an open Lavemai, who beat several defenders to score and make it 37-5.

Highland appears to be the top team in the Pacific Coast once again, and while they have routinely matched up against bigger teams, they are faster, fitter, and play as a team well enough to win comfortably. Next up for Highland is a tour of Colorado that will include matches against East HS, Colorado Springs, and Red Mountain of Arizona.