

Bengals punch 5A playoff ticket

McArdle's TD catch secures exciting win in game's final minute

By Bruce Smith
Matchup

Brighton punched its ticket to the 5A state football tournament Monday with a late-game win over West Jordan that both teams will likely remember for a long time.

After dropping a 20-0 contest to Cottonwood in the first half of the tiebreaker game, Alec McArdle made a circus catch, which was the decisive play as the Bengals earned a dramatic 14-7 come-from-behind victory over West Jordan to win the second-half tiebreaker.

By virtue of Cottonwood's regular-season victory over Brighton, the Colts headed into the playoffs as the No. 3 seed from Region 3. Brighton got the fourth spot.

And even that almost didn't happen.

The Bengals played a sloppy first quarter against Cottonwood and, when they fell behind 20-0, coach Ryan Bullett said the coaching staff tried to remain positive.

"We wanted to get them motivated again and excited again to compete in the second game," Bullett told the *Deseret News*.

The strategy worked as Brighton scored on the opening



Isaiah Kaufusi and Nick Giles celebrate one of Brighton's touchdowns.

drive against West Jordan to take a 6-0 lead, as Osa Masina connected with Isaiah Kaufusi on a 16-yard TD pass. The Bengals missed the extra point, which nearly proved costly.

Late in the first quarter West Jordan's Landon McMorris scored on a two-yard touchdown run, with Brandon Naylor's extra point giving the Jags the 7-6 lead.

That extra point looked like it was going to be the difference, as Brighton faced a 4th-and-12 from its own 46-yard line with 1:15 remaining in the game. Incredibly, though, Brighton's Alec McArdle made a leaping catch in traffic on Drew Jensen's desperation heave downfield. McArdle quickly cut

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BRIGHTON FOOTBALL: Play-in games



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LEFT: J.J. Mahe and Chandler Gee tackle a ball carrier.

ABOVE: Isaiah Kaufusi hits a Jaguar runner as Kekoa Kane approaches.

between two tacklers and raced toward the end zone.

The excitement got the better of him, though, as he fumbled the ball forward around the 10-yard line. With Brighton's playoff hopes hanging in the balance, McArdle managed to track the ball down and pounced on it inches before it rolled out the back of the end zone.

"We missed about four deep balls today. I'm glad the kid made a play when we he needed to today," said Bullett.

Cottonwood, on the other hand, had no trouble making plays.

"Darn glad it came when it did," Cottonwood coach Greg Croshaw said of his team's performance. "We've been showing signs. We're still alive so it's all good."

Cottonwood wasted little time jumping all over Brighton in the first mini game. Cooper Bateman led the Colts on a quick three-play drive that Inoke Lotulelei capped with a 36-yard touchdown reception to put his team ahead 6-0 just 40 seconds into the game.

By the time the first quarter ended, the Colts had tacked on two more touchdowns — Bateman's 5-yard TD run and Bateman's 24-yard touchdown pass to Sione Moli.

"That was as solid a half as we've played. We executed our game plan both sides of the ball, coming out with a win like that. Even though it was just one half, it feels good," said Bateman.

Cottonwood didn't look anything like the team that was torched by Alta 48-12 last week.

"That just says a lot about the character of this team that we can bounce back from a loss like that as bad as it was. That's the worst game I've been a part of the four years I've been in the program," said Bateman.

Cottonwood did all of its damage into the wind in the first quarter, which wasn't a surprise to Croshaw.

"If you're going to Alabama, you've got to be able to throw into the wind," he joked.

SECOND GAME

Brighton	6	8	14
West Jordan	7	0	7

B – Isaiah Kaufusi 16 pass from Osa Masina (kick failed)

WJ – Landon McMorris 2 run (Brandon Naylor kick)

B – Alec McArdle 54 pass from Drew Jensen (Jensen run)

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING: Brighton – Osa Masina 7-33, Brady McCloy 3-27, Jensen 8-21, Kekoa Kane 1-4. WJ – Chinedu Ahononu 9-73, McMorris 5-30, Kaden Maddox 1-3, Colton Michaelson 1-(-3).

PASSING: Brighton – Jensen 4-7-0-77 yards, Osa Masina 1-1-0-16 yards. WJ – Michaelson 2-7-0-29 yards.

RECEIVING: Brighton – McArdle 1-56, Kaufusi 2-31, Josh Thompson 1-5, Osa Masina 1-1. WJ – Josh McMorris 1-21, Kaden Maddox 1-8.

FIRST GAME

Brighton	0	0	0
Cottonwood	20	0	20

C – Inoke Lotulelei 36 pass from Cooper Bateman (Jose Bacerra run failed)

C – Bateman 5 run (Inoke Lotulelei pass from Bateman)

C – Sione Moli 24 pass from Bateman (kick failed)

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING: Brighton – Kekoa Kane 3-13, Brady McCloy 3-12, Osa Masina 5-12, Drew Jensen 2-0. Cottonwood – John Halaeua 6-34, Bateman 5-32, Lotulelei 3-32, Malu Hosea 5-16, Dalton Daniels 4-1.

PASSING: Brighton – Jensen 3-8-1-47 yards, Osa Masina 0-1-0-0 yards. Cottonwood – Bateman 7-13-0-127 yards.

RECEIVING: Brighton – Taylor Reid 1-27, Isaiah Kaufusi 1-12, Brady McCloy 1-8. Cottonwood – Moli 3-61, Lotulelei 2-52, Siale Fakailoato 2-14.