

Highland rallies to knock off Pine View

Big plays in the fourth quarter help Rams to exciting quarterfinal win

By Tom Backman
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When Highland High football coach **Brody Benson** told his players at halftime they would remember this moment 15 years from now, he had no way of knowing just how many moments that would be.

It turned out to be several.

Not the least of which was a breathtaking game-winning catch by Highland's **Nate Fakahafua**, on a 37-yard toss by **Anthony Smithson**, with barely over one minute remaining in the game.

The reception completed a stunning fourth-quarter comeback, as the Rams captured the 4A quarterfinal playoff game against Pine View 48-44 at Panther Stadium Saturday afternoon in St. George.

"Belief, heart and passion," said a near-speechless Benson after the win. "I told the boys that the memories of this game will help them through tough times they might experience in years ahead."

If the fourth-quarter was any indication, how sweet those memories will be.

Trailing 37-22 late in the third-quarter, the Rams almost appeared down and out as Pine View was driving and threatening to expand its commanding lead. But in the blink of an eye, the game turned around. In fact, if you had blinked, you'd have missed it.

Highland's **Colby Earl** intercepted Panther Alec Mecham's pass in the end zone, returning the ball to the Ram 22-yard line. Six plays later, Smithson connected on an 18-yard touchdown pass to Fakahafua, who finished the game with four receptions, for 161 yards, including three touchdowns. **Hayes Hicken's** important point-after kick was blocked by Pine View's Wil Bangerter, but Highland immediately got the ball back on a



Sione Houma rushed for 288 yards, breaking the school record for most yards in a game.

successful inside kick.

On the next play, Smithson was on the money again with a 39-yard completion to Fakahafua, then carried for 1 yard and another score. Hicken's extra point pulled the Rams within two, at 37-35.

After an interception by **Adam Webber**, Highland scored its third touchdown in five minutes as **Sione Houma** ran 11 of his 288 rushing yards on the day. The two-point conversion attempt failed, but the Rams were finally in the lead 41-37.

Pine View regained the advantage on a 4-yard scoring reception to Mike Hansen, to give the Panthers a 44-41 lead with 5:28 left in the game.

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HIGHLAND FOOTBALL: Rams 48, Pine View 44



GAME SUMMARY

Highland 13 9 0 26 - 48
 Pine View 7 23 7 7 - 44

H – Hayes Hicken 15 pass from Anthony Smithson (Hicken kick)
 H – Nate Fakahafua 61 pass from Smithson (kick failed)
 PV – Conner Murdock 50 pass from Alec Mecham (Dallin Tampa kick)
 PV – Murdock 11 pass from Mecham (Tampa kick)
 H – FG Hayes Hicken 33
 PV – Mike Hansen 32 pass from Mecham (Tampa kick)
 H – Sione Houma 80 run (run failed)
 PV – Murdock 4 pass from Mecham (kick failed)
 PV – FG Tampa 32
 PV – Cole Wilstead 11 pass from Mecham (kick failed)
 H – Fakahafua 18 pass from Smithson (kick failed)
 H – Smithson 1 run (Hicken kick)
 H – Houma 11 run (run failed)
 PV – Mike Hansen 4 pass from Mecham (Tampa kick)
 H – Fakahafua 37 pass from Smithson (Hicken kick)

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING: Highland – Houma 25-288, Smithson 15-87, Thomas Barlow 2-20, Justin Weaver 3-19, Toi Taufa 2-2. Pine View – Prentiss Miller 16-53, Alec Mecham 5-32.

PASSING: Highland – Smithson 6-8-0-198 yards. Pine View – Mecham 31-50-3-489 yards.

RECEIVING: Highland – Fakahafua 4-161, Hicken 2-37. Pine View – Murdock 13-202, Wilstead 13-200, Hansen 4-66, Joey Muscolino 1-21.

TOP: Nate Fakahafua hauls in a fourth-quarter touchdown pass.

LOWER LEFT: Sione Houma heads downfield for another big gain.

LOWER RIGHT: Hayes Hicken kicks an extra point as Anthony Smithson holds.

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Highland then sustained what proved to be the game-winning drive of 10 plays, including converting a first down on 4th-and-2 from its own 30, while devouring 4:30 off the game clock, ending in Fakahafua's 37-yard score.

Highland had jumped ahead early in the game with scoring passes from Smithson of 15 yards to Hicken and a 61-yard bomb to Fakahafua. A 33-yard field goal by Hicken and an 80-yard run by Houma kept the Rams in the game.

But the Panthers exploded for their own offensive spurts, most of the damage coming from Conner Murdock, who had scoring receptions from 33 and 11 and 4-yards, and Mike Hansen, who was

on the receiving end of a 32-yard score, and Cole Wilstead, who had an 11-yard scoring reception among his impressive offensive effort. Murdock and Wilstead each had 13 receptions for 200 yards each. Mecham finished with 31 of 50, for 439 yards.

The teams combined for 515 yards rushing and 624 yards passing, thrilling spectators on both sides of the field, who had to constantly check the scoreboard to keep track of who was ahead.

"Pine View is a great team," said Benson. "We all deserve to be here in the postseason. Come Monday morning, we will prepare for Springville."