

2021 STATE FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT

Vikings head into final



Top Rushford-Peterson, 28-8; Mayer Lutheran next

Minneota players line up for the playing of the National Anthem before Saturday's game at U.S. Bank Stadium. Mascot photo by Brian Jeremiason



Jonah Gruenes hurdles a Rushford-Peterson tackler during a 15-yard pass completion in the second quarter. Mascot photo by Brian Jeremiason

By Scott Thoma
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The end zones at U.S. Bank Stadium read Vikings in large purple lettering, so it must feel like home for Minneota. They sure played like it.

Conner Sik ran for three touchdowns and the Minneota defense again flexed its muscle as the Vikings dominated Rushford-Peterson 28-8 in the Class A state semifinals Saturday at U.S. Bank Stadium.

The Vikings (13-0) will take on Mayer Lutheran in the Prep Bowl championship at 10 a.m. Friday at U.S. Bank Stadium. Mayer Lutheran routed New York Mills 41-6 in its semifinal game.

Minneota, which has allowed only six points total in the first three quarters this season, allowed Rushford-Peterson to score on a pass with 1:28 left in the game, preventing the Vikings from posting their 10th shutout of the season.

"(Rushford-Peterson) has weapons," said Minneota coach Chad Johnston. "They have kids who they can throw the ball to. We told our kids they were going to get challenged this week and they had to step up. I thought they did a great job today."

Still, it was another dominating defensive performance for the Vikings, who limited the previously unbeaten Trojans to 128 total yards, including minus-6 yards on the ground.

Meanwhile, Minneota amassed 359 total yards, including 238 on the ground and 121 through the air.

"I think that even though we may run the ball at a higher percentage than pass, our ability to include a number of running backs that all give us something different, allows us to make adjustments as the game progresses," said Matt Myrvik, assistant coach/offensive coordinator. "Although everyone wants the football, I

truly believe this group is very unselfish when it comes to that and they understand that if it is not their night, they can help in other ways such as blocking and even in the pass game."

With the game scoreless after both teams were forced to punt on their opening possessions, Rushford-Peterson had moved to its own 42 when Max Rost came up with a stellar interception, outdueling the Trojans' receiver for the ball at the Vikings' own 22. Rost also added an interception later for his team-leading sixth of the season for the sophomore defensive back.

"The team just stepped up and made plays," said Gillund. "It is hard for them to beat us when they throw three interceptions."

After a Rushford-Penalty penalty moved the ball to the 27, Sik busted loose over the right side and scampered 73 yards for a touchdown with 6:08 left in the opening quarter.

"The play was designed for me to get to the outside with some lead blockers," Sik explained. "I saw a small hole inside, but a large hole outside. Anthony Rybinski and Jonah Gruenes made great blocks and stayed on them until I was past them."

On the Trojans' next series, Thompson was picked off by AJ Josephson after unloading the ball amidst heavy pressure from Sik, giving the Vikings the ball at the Rushford-Peterson 16.

After five short runs put the ball at the three, Sik motored into the end zone for his second score for a 14-0 lead with 2:07 remaining in the first quarter.

Conner has put together some very good, physical games in the section and state tourna-

ments," said Myrvik. "Right now, he is seeing things very well at the line of scrimmage and is reading his blocks to get some of that extra yardage."

Rushford-Peterson had not allowed more than 15 points in a game this season. Minneota nearly matched that after one quarter.

"(Minneota) isn't fancy and they aren't tricky," said Rushford-Peterson coach Davin Thompson. "They are just really good at what they do."

After a Rushford-Peterson punt, Minneota went 79 yards in 10 plays, capped by an 18-yard TD pass from Isaac Pohlen to Peyton Gillund, who broke free in the left corner of the end zone for a 21-0 halftime lead. In that drive, Pohlen also connected with Jonah Gruenes on a 17-yard pass and a 12-yard pass to Cale Sorensen, while Sik accounted for 23 yards on the ground.

The Vikings capped the scoring with 49 seconds left in the third quarter with Sik scoring from six yards out. The Vikings began the drive at midfield following a punt. On first down, Pohlen and Sorensen teamed up for a 38-yard pass to put the ball at the Trojans' 11. Sik gained five yards to the six before scoring on the ensuing play.

Pohlen passed for 121 yards and a touchdown. Josephson ran for 41 yards in 10 carries, while Gruenes added 20 rushing yards. Sorensen finished with three receptions for 59 yards.

"Our (offensive) line has done an outstanding job of attacking head-on when some teams may have more speed or are not giving us the edge," said Myrvik. "Our two young tight ends (sophomore Sawyer DeSmet and freshman Ryan Meagher) have done everything we have asked of them and keep improving each time out."

Defensively, senior linebacker Tucker Thooft had nine total tackles. Zack Fier led with five solo stops among his six tackles. Gruenes had seven total tackles. Sik and Jackson Esping recorded a sack apiece. Hudson Scholten each batted down two passes at the line of scrimmage. Sik blocked one and disrupted another which led to an interception.

"Hudson made two great plays where he got his hands up and blocked the pass," Sik noted. "The quarterback had a tendency of not really scrambling but staying in the pocket. This allowed us to collapse the pocket, putting pressure on him. He never really paid attention to the pressure and focused on his receivers. It allowed us to basically sneak up on him."

Rushford-Peterson's only score of the game came on a 31-yard touchdown pass from Malachi Bunke to Alex Ronnenberg in the right corner of the end zone with 1:25 left in the game. The Trojans also completed a pass for the two-point conversion.

Bunke completed 15 of 32 passes for 134 yards, but had was picked off three times. Carson Thompson had both fumble recoveries for the Trojans.

Class 9-Man SEMIFINALS NOV. 20
Leroy-Ostrander 49, Kittson County Central 0
Fertile-Beltrami 30, Hill-Bever Creek 22
FINAL NOV. 27
Leroy-Ostrander vs. Fertile-Beltrami, 10 a.m.

Class A SEMIFINALS NOV. 20
Minneota 28, Rushford-Peterson 8
Mayer Lutheran 41, New York Mills 6
FINAL NOV. 26
Minneota vs. Mayer Lutheran, 10 a.m.

Class AA SEMIFINALS NOV. 20
Chatfield 22, Barnesville 18
West Central Area/Ashby 8, Maple River 7
FINAL NOV. 26
Chatfield vs. WC Area/Ashby, 1 p.m.

Class AAA SEMIFINALS NOV. 20
Plainview-Elgin-Millville 28, Annandale 6
Dassel-Cokato 21, Esko 14
FINAL NOV. 27
Plainview-EM vs. Dassel-Cokato, 1 p.m.

Class AAAA SEMIFINALS NOV. 20
Kasson-Mantorville 24, Becker 20
Hutchinson 36, Orono 6
FINAL NOV. 26
Kasson-Mantorville vs. Hutchinson, 4 p.m.

Class AAAAA SEMIFINALS NOV. 20
Mahtomedi 34, Robbinsdale Cooper 7
Mankato West 42, Rogers 6
FINAL NOV. 27
Mahtomedi vs. Mankato West, 4 p.m.

Class AAAAAA SEMIFINALS NOV. 20
Maple Grove 35, Eden Prairie 3
Lakeville South 40, St. Michael-Albertville 14
FINAL NOV. 26
Maple Grove vs. Lakeville South, 7 p.m.

Minneota 28, Rushford-Peterson 8
Rushford-Peterson..... 0 0 0 8 - 8
Minneota..... 14 7 7 0 - 28

Scoring Plays

Min - Conner Sik 73 run (Peyton Gillund kick)
Min - Conner Sik 3 run (Gillund kick)
Min - Peyton Gillund 18 pass from Isaac Pohlen (Gillund kick)
Min - Sik 6 run (Gillund kick)
RP - Alex Ronnenberg 31 pass from Malachi Bunke (Justin Ruberg pass from Grady Hengel)

Team Totals

Total Plays: Minneota 67, Rushford-Peterson 52.
Total Yards: Minneota 359, Rushford-Peterson 128.
Passing Yards: Minneota 121, Rushford-Peterson 124.
Rushing Yards: Minneota 238, Rushford-Peterson (-6).
First Downs: Minneota 18, Rushford-Peterson 6.
Turnovers: Minneota 2, Rushford-Peterson 3.
Penalties: Minneota 5-29, Rushford-Peterson 2-33.

Minneota Statistics

RUSHING (att-yds): Conner Sik 19-171, AJ Josephson 10-41, Jonah Gruenes 9-20, Anthony Rybinski 3-8, Isaac Pohlen 3(-1).

PASSING (com-att-yds-td-int): Pohlen 6-16-121-1-0

RECEIVING (rec-yds): Cale Sorensen 3-59, Gruenes 2-44, Gillund 1-18

TACKLES (solo-assisted): Zack Fier 5-1, Tucker Thooft 4-5, Sil 1-2, Gruenes 1-6, Sorensen 1-1, Gillund 1-0, Max Rost 1-3, Jackson Esping 1-2, Alex DePestel 1-2, Jayden Ganmrak 1-1, Jack Lacey 1-1, Ryan Meagher 1-0, Josephson 0-2, Andrew Lipinski 0-1, Hudson Scholten 0-1, Lucas Rybinski 0-1.

TACKLES FOR LOSS: Sik 1, Esping 1, Gamrak 1, Scholten 1

INTERCEPTIONS: Rost 2, Josephson 1

PUNTING: (no-avg.): Gillund 2-33.0

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City Hall Bar and Grill

Pet OF THE WEEK

Cooper

Owners: Arlene & Dan Markell
Age: 7 Years
Breed: Purebred Golden Retriever

About Cooper:
Loves to entertain, most gentle dog ever, like to jump into cars & trucks when people bring furniture to be repaired!

Tri-County Veterinary Clinic
201 1st Street W. • Taunton 507-872-6113

Athlete of the Week

Max Rost
Sophomore

Rost intercepted two passes in the state football semifinal game on Saturday, giving him a team-high six this season. He also made four tackles.

Congratulations, Max!

301 E. 1st St. Minneota (507) 223-7241

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