

FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS

Eskomos advance with flying colors

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The Esko football team is loaded with speed, talent, and power. All three of those elements were on display Saturday as the Eskomos blasted their way to a 43-14 win over Rock Ridge in Esko in the Section 7AAA semifinals.

"We did what we needed to do," said Esko coach Scott Arntson. "We also worked on what we needed to work on and continue to try and improve each week."

The first quarter had one explosive play when quarterback Ty Christensen hit Mason Perich for a 40-yard touchdown pass, giving Esko a 6-0 lead after the missed extra point.

Esko tacked on two more touchdowns in the second quarter as they pulled away to a 21-0 halftime lead. The first score was a Braden Lowe 3-yard touchdown run and the second was a 37-yard touchdown dash by Mason Perich. The Eskomos also added a two-point conversion run on Lowe's score and a Wyatt Stankiewicz extra point kick on the touchdown by Perich.

"We also got inside the 5-yard line two other times

in the first half and didn't score," recalled Arntson. "In the second half we focused on trying to clean up some of our offensive mistakes."

Cole Engen ignited the crowd when he intercepted a pass and returned it 10 yards for another score, making it 28-0 after the extra point kick by Stankiewicz.

Rock Ridge answered quickly, scoring on a 55-yard run, but Esko struck equally fast before the third quarter ended when Nolan Witt raced 46 yards to pay dirt. The Eskomos went back up 36-6 after a two-point conversion run.

Early in the fourth quarter, Rock Ridge notched its second score of the game on a 1-yard touchdown run, but Esko responded in kind when Joey Antonutti slipped in from a yard out and Stankiewicz booted the extra point, pushing the lead to 43-14.

"We had six different people score for us," said Arntson. "The main thing we worked on was running our base offense better and continuing to improve."

The win put the Eskomos into the Section 7AAA championship game Thursday against Aitkin, a team that Esko slipped by 14-12



Esko's Makoi Perich leaps over Rock Ridge defender Jake Burress as the Eskomos walloped the Wolverines Saturday in Esko, 43-14. Esko advanced to the section championship. Dan Saletel/Pine Knot Sports

on Oct. 14.

"It will be a good test for us," said Arntson. "They are strong and they are very physical at the point of attack. They brought it

to us in the first game. They come right at you, and they don't trick you, they basically smash you and we need to be ready for that."

A big key for Esko is

their speed and athleticism. They had to take advantage of that against the Gobblers at UMD's Malosky Stadium.

"It is going to be a tough

game with two evenly matched teams," Arntson said. "We will need to get our athletes in space and let them use their ability and just go out and play."

VOLLEYBALL PLAYOFFS

It's crunch time on court

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The Section 7 girls volleyball playoffs kicked off in earnest last week. Opening games in tournament action were played on Wednesday with second-round games played on Friday.

Section 7A

Barnum entered the tournament as the No. 1 seed in Subsection 1 in Section 7A and they have not dropped a set in two matches. Last Wednesday the Bombers opened tournament play by playing neighboring Wrenshall. The Wrens had entered the tournament seeded No. 8 and on Monday opened play by beating No. 9 Silver Bay. But on Wednesday, the Bombers easily handled the Wrens to the tune of 3-0 and continued that dominance Friday by beating No. 5 Cromwell-Wright 3-0. Cromwell-Wright had knocked off No. 4 seeded Cook County 3-2 to advance to the game vs. Barnum.

The other two local teams in Section 7A were South Ridge and Carlton.

The Panthers came into the tournament as the No. 3 seed and the Bulldogs were the No. 6 seed. The two teams met Wednesday in Culver with the Panthers winning 3-0 as the Bulldogs. The Panthers moved on to second round action Friday and disposed of No. 2 Floodwood in Floodwood 3-2.

The four remaining teams in the tournament battled in the semifinals in Hibbing Wednesday. Barnum lost 3-1 to Northeast Range and South Ridge defeated Ely 3-2. The Section 7A championship game is set for 4 p.m. Saturday in Hibbing as the South Ridge takes on Northeast Range.

Section 7AA

Opening round play last Wednesday in 7AA saw Subsection 1 top seed Proctor down No. 8 Two Harbors 3-0. No. 2 Rush City eliminated No. 7 Moose Lake/Willow River. Esko, the No. 3 seed, beat No. 6 Hinckley-Finlayson 3-0 in Esko.

Esko, the lone local 7AA team left in the tournament, bowed out on Friday when they were beaten by Rush City 3-2. Rush City

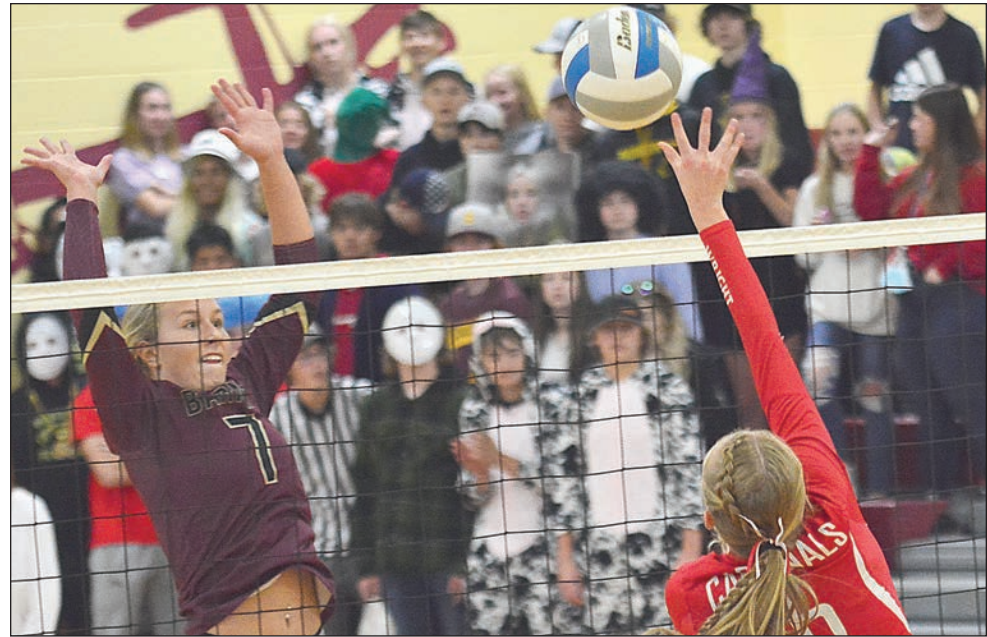
was the No. 2 Subsection 2 seed.

Section 7AAA

The Cloquet Lumberjacks are the lone Pine Knot area team playing in Section 7AAA. The Lumberjacks are experiencing one of the best seasons in school history with a record of 21-6. Cloquet, the No. 2 seed, opened play at home Friday against No. 7 Duluth Denfeld with the Lumberjacks winning handily 3-0. The win over Denfeld put the Lumberjacks in the semifinals against No. 3 Hermantown Wednesday. The 'Jacks pounded out a 3-1 win. Hermantown made the semifinal with a 3-0 victory over No. 6 seed Hibbing.

Cloquet defeated Hermantown just two weeks ago in the last game of the regular season, which allowed Cloquet to capture the Lake Superior Conference title.

Cloquet will face No. 1 Grand Rapids or No. 4 seed North Branch. The 7AAA championship game is set for 1 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 6, at Cloquet Middle School.



Cromwell-Wright's Andrea Pocerlich tries to tip a ball past Barnum's Reese Miletich as the Cardinals and Bombers faced off in the section 7A playoffs Friday night. Barnum got a sweep and advanced to the next round. Dan Saletel / Pine Knot Sports

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