# 'Cats Climb Into Region Title Game

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# 'Dosta Defense Does Job Again

The Valdosta Daily Times
SPORTS

By MIKE CHASON

They came with flashlights a-flickering, banners a-fluttering and unbounded optimism. They left with dead batteries, shredded paper signs and a feeling the inevitable had happened.

Before an almost capacity crowd of 11,400 at Cleveland Field here Friday night, Valdosta's Wildcats sputtered, backfired and at times almost choked down before nailing shut their 11th straight win in a 21-7 decision over cross-county rival Lowndes.

| YARDSTICK | Valdosta | Lowndes |
|---|---|---|
| First Downs | 16 | 4 |
| Yards Rushing | 205 | 28 |
| Yards Passing | 62 | 100 |
| Passes | 5-11 | 11-20 |
| Passes Incl. By | 4 - | 1 |
| Fumbles Lost | 4 | 1 |
| Punting | 3-40.0 | 7-37.2 |
| Penalties | 6-51 | 3-45 |

The victory in the first round of the Region 1-AAAA prep football playoffs vaulted the still unbeaten Wildcats into the region title game next Friday.

Valdosta meets Thomasville, a 28-16 winner over Tift County (Tifton) in the other first round game Friday night.

The site of the championship game was to be decided at 10 a.m. today when Valdosta end Thomasville school officials met in Quitman to flip a coin.

It is the second straight year the two teams have met for the 12-team league's winners' flag. Last season, Valdosta secured a 39-20 victory and rolled on to second place in the state playoffs.

But the region championship berth would never have been possible without Friday's 11th win in 12 tries in an intra-county rivalry growing more intense each season.

Earlier in the year when the two teams met, Valdosta took a 22-0 triumph. The game was played in semi-darkness when the lights on the home side of the field went out.

Some Lowndes' fans responded to Viking Coach Joe Wilson's jovial plea earlier in the week that they bring flashlights to the game in case of an instant replay.

This time the lights stayed on but the bottom line was the same.

Valdosta went to its double dynamite package of junior speedsters, Irvin Roe and Ernest King, early, late and often. King bolted into the end zone standing up on a 2-yard run with 7:51 to play in the first half enroute to ta 78-yard rushing performance.

Roe duplicated that feat with 22 seconds left in the half on a 16-yard run. He also wasn't knocked down as he crossed the goal line and he also had a big night running the ball with 87 yards in 13 trips.

Senior fullback William Gaskin scored the other Valdosta touchdown on a 3-yard run in the third quarter.

Lowndes' lone tally came with 31 seconds left in the game on a 6-yard run by its own senior fullback, Steve Thomas.

Roe added to his performance by catching two passes for 31 yards, and ran one kickoff back 23 yards.

"The line was blocking good tonight," the lightning-quick 148-pounder with the number 22 on his back said.

"I didn't want them to beat us. If they had beaten us, we would have had the whole summer of hearing this and that from them. I didn't want to go 10-0 and then lose the 11th one to them."

"I'd rather lose to anybody else than them."

Roe had no explanation for Valdosta's six turnovers, including four lost fumbles. He lost one and King lost two, including one which King fumbled into the end zone in the third quarter to take away a sure six.

Valdosta offensive coordinator and play-caller Butch Brooks tried to put his finger on the problem.

"We were just flat," Brooks said. "Everybody was flat. We've been flat all week...the fans, the pep rallies, everything. Everybody tried everything they knew how to do to get up but nothing worked."

"I think it was the worst game we've played all year."

The Vikings might not necessarily agree with Brooks' assessment. As in the previous contest, they had problems moving the ball against a swarming, aggressive Valdosta defense which stopped them with minus 28 yards rushing.

Lowndes could never find any field position until midway the second quarter because of the standout play of such VHS individuals as end James Harris, who had six tackles and linebacker John Branan, who had four.

Also, a Rodney Gordon punt died 40 yards from his foot on the LHS one-foot line on the Vikings' first possession.

Lowndes' first hint at signs of offensive life came when quarterback Chuck DeVane uncorked a 46-yard pass down the middle of the field to tight end Chuck Jones in the second quarter.

But Valdosta's secondary, which picked off four of DeVane's passes, two of them by Gordon, stiffened and Jeff Stokes punted into the end zone.

Roe fumbled on the following play for the 'Cats, and Allen Culpepper leaped on the prize, 16 yards from the goal.

Two incompletions and one 5-yard pass to Brent Edwards later, DeVane rolled out of a fake field goal formation and overthrew Jones in the end zone.

"Our defense can't hold them and score for us too," DeVane said afterwards. "They've just got an awesome team. They'll win the state hands down."

—Times Staff Photo By Robert Wieber III.

*Lowndes Fullback Steve Thomas Finds A Rare Open Hole Through The Middle Of Valdosta's Defense*

DeVane was sacked six times for minus 57 yards. The gutsy little junior threw for 100 yards on 11 of 29 tosses. Two of the interceptions he threw were on tipped passes.

"We thought we could beat them," he said. "Maybe next year, we'll get them in the pasture (Martin Stadium)."

An interception by Branan set up Valdosta's first touchdown 32 yards from paydirt. The Wildcats had been in scoring position almost the entire first quarter but couldn't find the goal line against the Ronnie Adkins-Adam Reese-led LHS defense.

Adkins, a senior playing his final game of a standout career, was credited with 12 tackles. Reese, a junior noseguard, had 11. Tackle Joey Pedrick had one of his finest games ever with eight individual tackles.

One of Gordon's interceptions keyed the second VHS touchdown drive which began on Valdosta's own 34-yard line. Quarterback John Lastinger went to the air on the drive and completed his first pass of the game to Robert Smith with a minute left before intermission. Catches by Roe and Frederick Blair set up Roe's score.

After the turnover-plagued first half, the third quarter seemed almost calm until King fumbled into the end zone and then Valdosta got the ball back on a Nathaniel Caesar interception on the 38-yard line.

Valdosta applied the game-breaking score when Gaskin followed the wall of Darrell Swindle, Harvey Carter and Tony Blasetti into the end zone.

David Reaves kicked all three Valdosta extra points but missed on a 32-yard field goal attempt in the first half.

The Valdosta defense seemed to sense the kill and started teeing off on DeVane. Harris said his team wanted the game badly.

"I wanted this one because it was Lowndes," he said. "Plus, I want to go 15-0. I think we've got a pretty good shot at it.

"We figure that if we play to the best of our ability, we can do it."

After Culpepper recovered a Bobby Johnson fumble in the closing two minutes, DeVane moved his team in for the score from the 32-yard line. He hit Jones with an 8-yard pass, ran for nine yards himself, got four more yards from Steve Thomas and was helped along by a penalty.

Thomas refused to go down on his 6-yard TD run to the end of his high school football career.

Lowndes has never scored more than seven points against Valdosta. For the 11th time in 12 meetings, seven points were not enough.

| | Score by Quarters | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valdosta | 0 | 14 | 7 | 0 | —21 |
| Lowndes | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | —7 |

Scoring
Val. — Kg 2 run (Reaves kick)
Val. — Roe 16 run (Reaves kick)
Val.—Gaskin 3 run (Reaves kick)
Low. — S. Thomas 6 run (Stokes kick)

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS
Rushing: Valdosta — Lastinger 4-7-51, Roe 13-87, Gaskin 6-10, Johnson 4-23, King 12-78, Bond 3-0, Reaves — 3, Thomas 4-28, McElroy 1-1, Weaver 1 minus 9.
Passing: Valdosta — Lastinger 4-11-1-62, Bond 1-4-1-31. Roe 0-1-0-0; Lowndes — DeVane 11-29-100; E. Thomas 0-1-0-0.
Pass Receiving: Valdosta — Blair 1-12, Smith 1-14, F. Roe 2-31, Harkins 1-5; Lowndes — Nick Jones 3-60, Player 4-25, Edwards 2-13, Thomas 2-2.
Punt Returns: Valdosta — Thomas 3-44; Lowndes — Adric Jones 2-17.
Kickoff Returns: Valdosta — J. Roe 1-23, Lowndes — Adric Jones 1-21, McElroy 1-2, S. Thomas 1-3.
Defense (Number of Tackles): Valdosta — Harris 6, Branan 4, Thomas 2, Roberts 1, Evans 2, Chord Johnson 2, Gordon 2, G. Roe 2, Carr 2, Smith 2; Lowndes — Adkins 12, Reese 11, Pedrick 8, Crawford 7, Cribbs 5, Schreffler 5, Casper 5, A. Culpepper 2, Mashburn 2, Wright 2, Hitchcock 2.
Interception Returns: Valdosta — Gordon 2-0, Branan minus 6, Caesar 1-4; Lowndes — Schreffler 0, Mashburn 1-5.

## As Key Factor In Game

—Times Staff Photo By Mike Dowse

*Lastinger Hands Off To Ernest King For One Of His 22 Carries*

# Hyder Points To Second TD

By Times Staff Writer

Before Friday's high school football game, Valdosta Head Coach Nick Hyder said he was a little nervous. His fears proved correct in the early going as the Lowndes Vikings gave his number one ranked Wildcats all they wanted.

The 'Cats finally emerged a 21-7 victor in the first round of the Region 1-AAAA playoffs and advanced to play Thomasville for the region championship. Hyder said the coin flip to determine the site of the championship game would be held in Quitman today.

"We've got to rest tomorrow, make plans Sunday and go over the scouting report Sunday. Then we go back to work Monday. Thomasville is a vastly improved team. Coach Jim Hughs and his staff do a fine job in putting together a balanced attack," said Hyder.

"Our coaching staff did an excellent job tonight. They made the necessary adjustments on the sideline," said Hyder.

"It was a real hard-hitting game on both team's parts. Lowndes did a real fine job throwing the football."

Hyder said his team's second score just before the half was an important factor in the game. "It lifted all of our thinking to a different thing. Before that, they could score and get right back in the game."

The Wildcat's third touchdown did not cause Hyder to feel he had the game wrapped up. He said, "we were trying to make it 28."

Excelling for the 'Cats was the breakaway backfield of Irvin Roe and Ernest King. King carried the ball 22 times for 78 yards, while Roe gained 87 yards in 13 carries in his usual explosive syle.

Speaking of the move of King to fullback, Hyder said, "he has played fullback the last few games and played it a lot last year."

Of Roe, Hyder said, "he is a fine athlete. He could be our quarterback if we needed him. I've had him in class and he is an excellent student."

The Lowndes pass rush gave the Wildcats a much tougher time than in the two team's previous meeting this season. Hyder said, "it was according to what kind of pass was called. They were using the safety blitz. The pros haven't figured the safety blitz out yet. There were one or two plays where there might have been some confussion in the backfield.

"I think it was the fumbles that hurt us. Good hitting has a lot to do with that."

Hyder said that Lowndes' employment of the shotgun formation did not cause the 'Cats too much trouble. "They could have snapped to the fullback," he said. "When we shifted to our Oklahoma defense, we held them pretty much in check."

Hyder paid tribute to former NHS Coach Wright Bazemore by saying "our offenses (Lowndes' and Valdosta's) are very similar. We have a built in scouting report. After all, they came from the same man."

—Times Staff Photo

*Lowndes' Chuck DeVane Is Sacked For One Of Six Times In Game*

# Wilson Looks To Future

By MIKE HAGOOD

The 1978 campaign of the Lowndes High School football team came to a close Friday night, but Coach Joe Wilson remains undaunted.

"We're gonna' have our day. Our kids have nothing to be ashamed of. We ran up against a very formidable foe," he said.

That foe was Valdosta, which walked away from Cleveland Field with a 21-7 victory over Wilson's Vikings.

"We had to work like hell to make the prediction right," said Wilson jokingly about Times Sports Editor Mike Chason's accurate prediction of the final score.

"And we scored seven on their first defense. They ran their first defense all the way.

"It was the touchdown they scored with a minute and a half left in the first half that broke our backs. If it was 7-0, it might have been different."

Defensive penetration played a big part in the game's final outcome. Speaking of the Viking rush on Valdosta quarterback John Lastinger, Wilson said, "as long as we put the pressure on him and made him throw quickly, we did well. When he had time, he was deadly."

The Wildcat rush on Lowndes quarterback Chuck DeVane evoked a response from Wilson. He said, "we had to keep them off of him. No one knows but Chuck's right thumb was jammed. He threw real well considering."

Before the game Wilson said that "it was a keep on or hang it up, a do or die situation."

After his team's loss, his teams' effort seemed a source of pride for Wilson.

"They did a good job. They never quit. We proved that we put our pants on the same way they do. We are gonna' get this program where we want it. We lose some mighty fine players, but we've got a lot of players back.

"The secret to this game, as I've said all along, was their offensive line. They are big and physical."

Wilson was complimentary of Valdosta, expressing a view that many agree on. He said, "they well deserve the number one ranking. They are a fine football team."

# Nike Paying Off Coaches

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Nike shoe company is pay 17 major-college basketball coaches up to $10,000 each to endorse its shoes, The Washington Post reported in Saturday's editions.

The endorsement campaign is part of "an aggressive attack" on the basketball shoe market, The Post quoted a Nike official as saying.

The newspaper said that, for example, University of Maryland Coach Lefty Driesell has a contract that pays him $8,000 a year for supporting and assisting the company. It said the university switched to Nike shoes this year and was given unlimited free shoes throughout the season.