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To the State Finals!

By Michael Sakoda



The Campolindo Cougars (15-0) are one win away from a Division III State Championship as they'll continue their incredible season Saturday at the Stubhub Center in Carson, Calif.

Campolindo took the NCS crown on Dec. 6, edging Marin Catholic, 27-21, on the strength of a late fumble recovery by senior linebacker Jack Shurtz.

The Cougars faced the bigger, well-rested, also unbeaten Sutter High School in the CIF Northern Regional Division III Championship on Dec. 13.

Sutter (13-1) had not played since Nov. 29, and their fresh legs showed in the first half. The Huskies came out hot, going on a nine-play, 65-yard touchdown drive to start the game.

Sutter's size showed early, too, as the Cougars' offense was stymied through much of the

first quarter. Campo was forced to punt on their first two possessions, and on their third, Jack Stephens threw an interception that set up Sutter's next touchdown.

"Jack got off to a rough start and he just kept fighting," said Campo head coach Kevin Macy. "We had to do a lot of switching what we were doing on offense to get him a little more comfortable."

Trailing 14-0, Campo dug in its heels and went to the air. Max Flower caught two passes for 69 yards on a seven play drive capped by an Adam Remotto touchdown reception.

On their next possession, Campo's offense was the beneficiary of a 9-yard punt, and the Cougars capitalized. Facing a third-and-nine from the 18-yard line, Stephens threaded the needle, finding Remotto between two Sutter defenders for his second score of the night.

Minutes later, Campo forced another punt and took over from their own 28-yard line. On first down, Stephens threw a bomb to Caleb Whalen who took it 72 yards for a touchdown, and a Matt Blair extra point gave them a 21-14 lead.

Sutter threatened late in the first half, moving the ball 45 yards downfield, but on second down from Campo's 20-yard line, Huskies quarterback Randy Post threw for the endzone only to find Campolindo defensive back Tiger Garcia for one of his two interceptions.

The Cougars took the opening kick of the second half, scored on a 4-yard scamper from Nick Fadelli, took a 28-14 lead, and never looked back, beating Sutter 35-14.

Once again, it was Campo's defense putting on a show. They blanked Sutter in the final 36 minutes of play, their front seven putting all kinds of pressure on Post, drawing penalties and allowing their secondary to make plays.

"Whatever we were earlier in the year, an offensive team, I think our personality has changed," said Macy. "It was a big night for our defense. We're so worn down and beat-up; it's just playing with determination and grit at this point."

Notable among Campo's injuries are those to Max Flower (shoulder) and Connor McNally (groin), which didn't seem to be issues on Saturday as Flower caught for 140 yards, and McNally rushed for 31 yards and a touchdown. Stephens threw for 283 yards, three touchdowns and an interception, while Fadelli managed 50 yards and a touchdown on 16 carries.

Campolindo heads to the Division III Championship in Carson this Saturday to take on El

Capitan of Lakeside, the No. 16 team in California, whose size and athleticism the Cougars will look to overcome with one last touch of the magic that's carried them all year. Kickoff is at noon on Dec. 20.

"Our kids battle. They buy us time to figure our way back into a game," said Macy. "Our team definition changes week to week. Who knows what we'll be [this] week."



Jack Shurtz had a key fumble recovery in the NCS championship game. Photos Gint Federas



Jack Stephens and Chase Abbott

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