

Spirited Defense Plays a Great Game In Narrow Loss

By Bruce Smith
MatchupUT.com

Liam Smith and the Hillcrest defense had their best games of the season. Playing in front of their fans on homecoming night, the Huskies game everyone a surprise and it almost resulted in another victory.

But Kearns QB J.R. Finai threw a pair of touchdowns, and the Cougars defense did a job on Hillcrest, too, claiming a 14-7 win in a non-region contest.

“Our defense really stepped up,” said Hillcrest coach **Kirk Merhish**. “We hit them hard time after time and came up with four turnovers.”

Smith had a season-high 16 tackles, including nine unassisted. He also came up with two sacks and forced a pair of fumbles. Defensive end **Dylan Ford** also had a good night.

“Ford kept batting down balls,” Merhish said.

Ford and **John Delaney** also forced a fumble each. And, since the Hillcrest offense was having trouble moving the ball against the Cougars, it helped keep the Huskies in the game.

The fun actually started before the opening kickoff. The Huskies entered the stadium for pregame warm-ups in their traditional green uniforms. Later, they returned to the locker room and re-entered the facility wearing black.

Coach Merhish did that in the team’s



Connor Phelps (left) joins a Hillcrest trainer in helping Kory Maw off the field during Hillcrest’s homecoming game against Kearns.

SCORING SUMMARY

Kearns	7	0	7	0	-	14
Hillcrest	7	0	0	0	-	7

H - Trae Kranz 12 run (Jeff Brown kick)

K - Sammy Sweat 26 pass from J.R. Finai (Devin Hickenlooper kick)

K - Austin Brower 25 pass from Finai (Hickenlooper kick)

2008 game against West Jordan, and it resulted in an inspired effort. This year, it had the same result.

Hillcrest scored first when **Trae Kranz** reached the end zone on a 12-yard run. The lead did not last long, however, as Kearns came back and put up the tying touchdown on a 26-yard pass from Finai to Sammy Sweat.

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HILLCREST FOOTBALL: Kearns 14, Huskies 7

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It stayed that way until the third period, when Finai connected with Austin Brower on a 25-yard scoring pass.

Hillcrest QB **Tanner Kemp** completed 6 of 18 passes for 65 yards. His longest was a 25-yard throw to **Matt Pecht**. **Tanner Dastrup** relieved briefly and was 1-3 for 15 yards.

The Huskies offense mounted just 114 yards, and part of that was because it had just 36 plays. Kranz was the leading rusher, supplying one-third of the offense with 38 yards on 12 carries.

By comparison, Kearns ran 52 plays, and the majority of them were rushing, which kept the clock running. Finai completed 10 of 19 passes for 134 yards. He was under heavy pressure most of the night, though, and ended up running the ball 17 times.

Finai might have had more luck, however, except for the play of **Kaleb Kirmer** and **Adrin Vigil**, who deflected several passes that could have led to long gains.

Connor Phelps had a busy night, with seven punts for a 39.3 yard average.



Danny Thompson, Dylan Ford, Matt Pecht and Bridger Dallimore walk on to the field as captains prior to Hillcrest's game against Kearns.



Austin Schugk (No. 79) leads the team off the field during a change of possession in the second half.