

Stalnaker adds value on both sides of ball

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Special to Newark Advocate
USA TODAY NETWORK

HANOVER — Licking Valley junior linebacker Ayden Stalnaker experienced a defensive player's dream just three plays into last Friday's win over Northridge.

Northridge misfired on an option pitch and the ball was rolling around in the Vikings' backfield. Stalnaker came out of nowhere, snatched up the pigskin and was headed 25 yards to the end zone for a touchdown. He had scored previously on offense, but never before on the defensive side.

That was the Panthers' first score in what became a 55-7 blowout of the visiting Vikings.

"I really think our defense set the tone early on with that score," Stalnaker said. "Then our offense kept on running the ball down their throat. We just kept the pressure on them."

Stalnaker was credited with five tackles on defense and also had two catches for 27 yards from his wide receiver position on offense. He hardly came off the field on what was a hot and humid night.

"It's hard work, but I appreciate the coaches for putting me out there and knowing I have the capability of playing on both sides," Stalnaker said.

Valley coach Randy Baughman said Stalnaker holds himself to high standards with his work on both offense and defense.

"The thing about Ayden is he is just such a conscientious kid," Baughman



Licking Valley's Ayden Stalnaker (11) and Drew Hampton (3) tackle Northridge's Nic Minder. STEVE HELWAGEN/THE ADVOCATE

said. "He just wants to be good on both sides of the ball. It really bothers him if he hasn't played his best. He is a great example of a kid who is working hard and trying to play every play 100 percent."

Valley quarterback Hayden Rodgers, who ran for a touchdown and also threw for one in the win, said Stalnaker is emerging as a key piece for the Panthers.

"He's makes a lot of impact," Rodgers said. "Last year, he got some reps with the varsity. I think he is really ready to

help us a lot. He's going to have a bright future."

The win over Northridge evened Licking Valley's record at 2-2. The Panthers hosts Zanesville (2-2) to open Licking County League-Buckeye Division play on Friday. The Blue Devils flexed their muscles with a 48-7 rout of Heath in an LCL crossover game last Friday.

Stalnaker said the Panthers want to have a strong second half of the season and contend once again for the LCL-Buckeye title.

Schedule, results

Aug. 20: Sheridan 35, **Valley 30**

Aug. 27: **Valley 20**, London 14

Sept. 3: @Jackson ccd.

Sept. 10: Watterson 27, **Valley 6**

Sept. 17: **Valley 55**, Northridge 7

Sept. 24: Zanesville

Oct. 1: @Watkins Memorial

Oct. 8: Lima Central Catholic

Oct. 15: @Granville

Oct. 22: Licking Heights

"We've had a few setback games with (losses to) Sheridan and Bishop Watterson," he said. "But our mental aspect of the game changed from the Watterson game to the Northridge game. We wanted to go out there and score and get on them early. We know what it felt like (to lose). We were able to soar above it."

The Panthers have won three of the last four Buckeye titles. Baughman, however, said knows each division game will be difficult the rest of the way.

"I said at the beginning of the year I thought this was the toughest the Buckeye Division has been from top to bottom," Baughman said. "We go into a meat grinder now with division play. It's going to be a slugfest every week."

Rodgers added, "I think we are the underdog. We go week by week. If we have a good week of practice, we will be ready to go."

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