

Woodlands avenges title-game loss with rout of Dobbs

By Eugene Rapay

2015 seemed even more distant for Dobbs Ferry.

On Sept. 10, the Eagles opened their regular season on the road against Woodlands, a rematch of last season's Section I/Class C final. Last year, Dobbs Ferry beat the Falcons in lopsided fashion, taking home the sectional trophy to move on to the state playoffs.

Dobbs Ferry Football

But that was then.

Dobbs Ferry couldn't begin the 2016 regular season with the same celebratory fanfare experienced when hoisting the championship plaque at Pace University. The Falcons handed the Eagles their first shutout loss since 2010, avenging the bitter defeat in a 33-0 blowout victory.

"The sour taste we had is gone," said Woodlands head coach Mike Meade, in a post-game huddle with his team.

The Falcons looked to erase the bitterness as soon as possible, imposing their will early in the game. Their defensive efforts forced a fumble on the Eagles' second play

of the game. Woodlands recovered and took over at Dobbs Ferry's own 33-yard line. From there, the Falcons punished the Eagles for their costly mistake. Quarterback Amari Bilal called his own number on second-and-goal to punch it in for the first score of the game. Bilal, who was ineffective in the previous meeting, tormented the Eagles all game long.

The dual-threat quarterback completed 7 of 11 pass attempts for 73 yards and a passing touchdown. He also ran for 53 yards and three touchdowns off of nine carries.

According to his coaches, Bilal has received Division I FCS interest, with Fordham coming to visit the 6-foot-1, 185-pound senior twice over the last month. They expect more schools to come knocking on his door by the time the season is over.

"He's everything; he lives up to the hype," Eagles head coach Jim Moran said of the Woodlands star. "He's a great runner; he's got a strong arm. He definitely got the better of us today. He might be the best player in our class."

Bilal also assisted in leading a stellar defensive effort that kept the Eagles' offense

contained, tallying a team-high 12 tackles for the game. Dobbs Ferry struggled to move the ball on Woodlands during the first half, as the Falcons' front seven often found themselves racking up tackles in the backfield. As a result, the Eagles were held to just 1 yard of offensive production by halftime.

"They were more physical than us," said Jordan Loran, a senior two-way lineman for the Eagles. "Up front, we got it handed to us."

The dominance in the trenches on both sides of the ball allowed Woodlands to take over. Bilal played a role in the first three touchdowns of the game, rushing for two and sending a touchdown pass to Aaron Robertson in double coverage. Robertson would strike again to add one more score before halftime, taking the ball 32 yards to the end zone immediately after a Dobbs Ferry turnover. The Falcons built a 27-0 lead at half, and could hardly look back.

"Some people were just throwing it in the tank, and that's not what we need," said Dobbs Ferry's Tion Holness, a senior fullback and linebacker. "We need everyone, no matter what happens, to keep their heads up, be positive, and move on."

The message came across to the

Eagles, who came out in the second half with more emotion and urgency. Dobbs Ferry was finally able to find success moving the ball, with Najee Smith getting the ground game going. He accounted for 45 yards of the Eagles' 81 rushing yards in the second half, but his and the Eagles' efforts weren't enough. Woodlands eventually placed the breaks on the Dobbs Ferry offense, stopping the Eagles in their own territory several times.

However, an improved Dobbs Ferry defensive effort halted the beating. The Eagles only gave up one touchdown in the second half, with Bilal carrying the ball 31 yards to the end zone for the final score of the game.

Overall, the one-sided loss was far from what the Eagles expected.

"We looked fundamentally unsound," Moran said. "We've been working for a long time, and I thought we had a lot of things ironed out and we didn't. So, it's back to the drawing board."

Moran was looking to get his team back on track for tomorrow's (Sept. 17) 1 p.m. game against Rye Neck at Gould Park. Rye Neck would also be seeking their first win, after losing the season opener to Fieldston.