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No stopping the Airdrie Storm defence

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STORM TAKES CONTROL

Taking over near mid field, Airdrie's offence picked a perfect time to break out. Long cut loose for an eight yard run, then handed off to Bayda for a 15 yard gain. Scrimmaging at the Cougars' 39 yard line, Long's first pass attempt went incomplete to Robert Horne, but Bayda managed to run the ball nine yards, setting up a crucial third down.

Instead of trying to pick up the last yard on the run, Long gambled with a 20 yard pass to Horne - a gamble that paid off huge.

"We use the pass when we need to, but we can do it at any time. At third and one, we knew they were coming. It was just a matter of making the blocks and getting the ball out there," said Rohl.

"Horne is one of the best receivers in the league, he only dropped one ball all year. He's been bringing in balls that are uncatchable for anyone else. You put the right people in the right places at the right times, and good things will happen. That was the big play on a big drive - it shocked them."

Now sitting first-and-goal on the seven yard line, Long handed to Bayda for a gain of two, before calling his

own number. Thanks to a huge block by David Cromartie, Long just gained the end zone, giving Airdrie a 6-0 lead.

The lead would grow quickly. On the ensuing kickoff, French recovered a fumble, giving the Storm possession near midfield.

After an incomplete pass to Jordan Brown, Long handed off to Bayda. The greasy wheeler broke loose up the middle, beat Sherwood Park's safety to the outside, and hit the after burners for a 47 yard touchdown run. French hit the convert, giving the Storm a 14-0 lead.

CRUNCH TIME

The final minutes of the half literally became the dying moments, as the Dalton Davis show began. The speedy runningback- turned-linebacker put on a tackling clinic, absolutely torpedoing Sherwood Park's Tripodi and Tanner Pais, as well as sacking Leigh.

Together with Mugford and Cory Robinson, the Storm's seek-and-destroy defence sent a message - you can't beat us inside, you can't beat us outside, and if you try it's going to hurt.

"We didn't do any hitting in practice through the week. We left them hungry to go out and hit. It worked. They were hitting harder than they did

all year," said Rohl.

Looking to bust the game open on the first play of the second half backfired for Long, who was intercepted at mid field by Sherwood Park's Spearin Murray.

But Airdrie's defence continued its stellar outing, allowing just three first downs against it in the second half. The Cougars' first drive was stalled thanks to big tackles by Mugford, Davis and Robinson, turning the ball over on downs.

Mugford would stop another Cougar drive before the end of the third quarter, wrapping up Tripodi on a screen pass attempt.

Sherwood Park's most successful drive of the second half came at the start of the fourth quarter. Leigh orchestrated a seven play drive to the Storm's eight yard line before Robinson came up with a huge stuff on Tripodi, turning the ball over on downs.

"They put all the beef from defence onto offence for that drive, to try and punch that ball in, and we still held 'em," said Rohl.

With its back against the wall, Airdrie's offence escaped its own red zone, thanks to a pair of runs by Bayda, setting up the biggest play of the game.

With 4:10 remaining on the clock, Long handed off to Bayda, who took it up the gut. He made a strong cut to elude a tackler, got a pair of blocks, and wormed his way to the outside, before taking off for a 91-yard touchdown. The icing on the cake gave the Storm a 20-0 lead.

"That was huge... He busted it into the middle, and everybody choked in, then he busted it outside. They had a lot of big guys, but after a while they got tired of running... It sealed the deal," said Rohl.

Airdrie's final defensive stand went exactly as planned.

Kevin Lowe contained Leigh for a one yard gain, while Holmes and Robinson teamed up to bring down Tripodi after a gain of five. On third down French and Kaitsas ran down Leigh and drove him out of bounds short of the first down, essentially ending the game.

The Storm offence would pick up two first downs in the final minutes, killing off the rest of the clock.

"Everything came together. We told the kids to take it as a practice - go hard, work hard, play disciplined football... They did, and showed that they understood what being part of a team is all about. They showed it with all of their heart," said Rohl.