

## BLUE RAIDERS TO PLAY FOR DISTRICT TITLE

BY LARRY ETTER

Following an impressive 46-7 victory over visiting Bermudian Springs on Friday, October 30 at home the Middletown Blue Raiders earned themselves a spot in the District III-AAA championship game this week. The game will be played at War Memorial Field against district nemesis Wyomissing, a team that defeated the Raiders in last year's championship contest.

The loss last November broke the string of three straight titles for the Blue Raiders and the Middletown team will be looking to reclaim the championship in the rematch. Wyomissing made it back this year with a solid win over Boiling Springs last week.

This past week's triumph over Bermudian featured offensive excitement from both teams, but, following a close first half, it was the Middletown defense that took control after halftime which led to 34 second-half points for the home team.

The Eagles from the York-Adams Conference entered the game with a 4-2 record, ranked fourth in the district. Bermudian featured a solid running game, a factor that showed up at times in the closely-played first half. That offense, led by bruising back Sauvari Shelton who finished with over 100 yards rushing, produced a couple promising drives in the game, only to be denied by the Raider defenders.

The Blue Raiders scored on the game's opening possession, marching 53 yards in 8 plays with Tymir Jackson punching into the endzone from four yards out for the score. Jackson would finish the game with 187 yards and 5 touchdowns on 23 carries in the win. Keyed by a pair of runs of 30 yards by Shelton and 25 by Ricky Pacana, the Eagles followed with a quick drive that reached the Middletown 16. But on fourth-and-14 from the 21, Raider cornerback Julian Nester intercepted an Eagle pass at the one to kill the threat.

Over the next three minutes Bermudian would intercept a pair of Middletown passes and Audric Bryant would pick off another Eagle throw to keep things interesting. Later in the first quarter the Raiders got the ball back following an Eagle punt. Six plays into the second period Jackson scored again on a short run that gave the home team a 12-0 lead.

Again, the Eagles marched down the field behind Shelton but the drive died at the Middletown 10 as the Raider defense held its ground. The first half ended with the Raiders holding onto its slim, 12-0 lead. Everything changed, however, in the third quarter as the home team scored twice to build its lead to 26-0.

The momentum started with a fumble recovery by T.J. Daniels that shut the door on another promising Bermudian drive at the Middletown 24. Two plays later Jackson ripped through the Eagles' defense for a 55-yard touchdown run and Tyson Leach added the extra point to lift the Blue Raiders to a 19-0 advantage. On the Eagles ensuing possession Tajae Broadie sacked Eagle quarterback Jaylen Martinez on first down keying a defensive stand that forced a Bermudian punt. Derek Wall's return set the Middletown offense up at the 32.

Behind solid blocking up front by Chase Vandegrift, Jeremy Wells, Amir Potter, Marquis Beasley and Brock Welsh, Jackson carried the ball 7 straight times, the last from two yards out producing another Raider touchdown and a 26-0 lead. Linebackers Jayson Stoner and Dylon Zettlemoyer and their defensive mates forced another three-and-out for the Eagles with time winding down in the third quarter.

Brandyn Davis, stepping in in relief of Jackson, ripped off a 33-yard run to start the Raiders' possession, but, on the first play of the fourth, Jackson sealed another drive with a 3-yard scoring dive that put the game pretty much out of reach at 33-0. With 10:09 left in the game the Middletown offense was back on the field right at the midfield stripe. Davis carried three times and Bryant added a 16-yard sprint as the Raiders forged ahead. Davis, who finished the night with an even 100 yards, capped it with a 6-yard dash up the middle that set the "mercy clock" in motion.

Bermudian finally broke into the scoring column via a 49-yard drive against the Raider reserves with 3:44 left. An onside kickoff attempt by the Eagles was recovered by Middletown's Jay Smith near midfield and Middletown's second offense got into the scoring act when Tito Spears raced 35 yards for a touchdown with 1:11 left.