

Cunningham ignites Jewell triumph

By Bill Richardson
sports writer

With 9 minutes, 50 seconds remaining in the third quarter, David Cunningham came in to play fullback for the William Jewell Cardinals.

Things were never the same the rest of the afternoon. Cunningham, who was a doubtful participant because of a 3-week-old ankle injury, caught two touchdown passes as the Cardinals overcame a 13-10 deficit and posted a 20-17 playoff victory over Baker before a crowd of 5,000 Saturday in Liberty.

The triumph sends William Jewell, 11-0-1, into the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics Division II semifinals Dec. 6 in Liberty against Wilmington of Ohio. Wilmington outlasted Hanover (Ind.) 56-49 in an overtime game.

In the other Division II semifinals, Valley City State (N.D.) defeated McMurry (Texas) 16-7 and Pacific Lutheran (Wash.) defeated Linfield (Ore.) 35-20. Valley City will play Dec. 6 at Pacific Lutheran. The Division II championship game will be played Dec. 13 at a site to be selected.

The loss ended Baker's season at 9-1-1. Baker and Jewell played to a 10-10 tie in a regular-season showdown for the Heart of America Conference championship Nov. 8.

Cunningham, Jewell's 6-foot-2, 200-pound senior rushing star from Louisiana, Mo., missed the earlier meeting with Baker because of the ankle injury he suffered in the Missouri Valley game Nov. 1. Coach Stan McGarvey said he decided to use Cunningham Saturday morning, but only in the second half and if Cunningham were not bothered by pain.

Cunningham caught a 20-yard touchdown pass from Kelly Groom with 3:44 left in the third quarter, giving Jewell a 13-10 lead. Groom passed to Cunningham for a 5-yard touchdown early in the fourth quarter, offsetting Baker's 80-yard touchdown pass from Chuck Ervin to Bobby Bates with 6:17 to play.

"David (Cunningham) gave us a lift," Groom said. "The crowd on our side went wild when he came in the game. It was a psychological advantage for us."

McGarvey went a step farther on the impact of Cunningham, who has drawn inquiries from pro teams.

"Not only was it a psychological lift, but he gave us a lift for our game plan," McGarvey said. "We could do more things. In the first half we probed inside with Steve Hodges at fullback and it was successful. We knew we could run there and we came back to it with Cunningham."

Cunningham, voted the outstanding offensive player of the game, rushed for 68 yards in 16 carries. Of his two touchdown receptions, he said: "I wasn't the primary receiver on either one. On the first touchdown pass, I was supposed to detain a linebacker to help clear out an area. Things just opened up when nobody stayed with me."

Cunningham wore what he termed was an air splint over his left leg and ankle for support. He said he was shaky when he first went in, but felt fine after his first play.

"Cunningham didn't hurt us rushing, but he did coming out of the backfield to catch those passes," said Baker Coach Charlie Richard, who suffered his first loss as a head coach. "We flat out didn't cover him. Turnovers and the inability to get the ball into the end zone when we were down close beat us. But you have to give Jewell credit. They stopped us when it counted."

Baker had two opportunities to take the lead or force the game into overtime after closing the gap to 20-17. Both times fumbles by fullback Taylor Gill on short snaps from a shotgun formation stopped drives.

Jewell scored on its opening possession, freshman Jerry Burch kicking a 33-yard field goal. Baker retaliated with a 64-yard drive, Ervin passing to tight end Joe Ledford for the final 26 yards.

Burch, whose late field goal gave Jewell a 10-10 tie in the first Baker game, kicked a 31-yarder early in the second quarter, cutting the Wildcats' lead to 7-6. Barefooted soccer-stylist Tony Butts increased Baker's lead to 10-6 at halftime on a 22-yard field goal.

Four fumbles and an interception stalled Baker drives in the



Baker's Steve Mai recovers a fumble in the backfield as Jewell's defense closes in during their game Saturday in

Liberty. Jewell won 20-17. (staff photo by Erik Hill)

second half. The Jewell defense, led by linebacker Gary Ainsworth, slowed the NAIA's most prolific offensive team until Cunningham came in and ignited the Cards' offense.

Ainsworth, a 205-pound junior, was voted the outstanding defensive player. He made or assisted on 16 tackles, recovered a fumble

and made an interception on a tipped pass.

Bates, who turned a 15-yard pass from Ervin into the 80-yard touchdown, said the Wildcats were confident entering the game.

"I didn't think there was anyway we were going to lose," said Bates, a junior wide receiver.

"But they played a heck of a game and took advantage of our mistakes. Our defense held them so many times, but we didn't capitalize on the opportunities."

Hodges, a freshman who saw no action for Jewell until mid-season, was the leading rusher with 93 yards. He gained 42 yards on a draw late in the game while the

Cards were protecting their lead. Groom, a sophomore quarterback, rushed for 69 yards, including a 46-yard run.

Tailback Anthony Flanders led Baker with 63 yards rushing. Gill added 53 yards and Ervin 51. The Wildcats led in total yardage, 392-334. But they also led in turnovers, 6-1.