

It certainly was *Mister* Ham to the Oilers.

Sharon's 6-3, 194-pound senior quarterback whose first name is actually Mister, was as advertised -- as was the Tigers' fast and furious defense -- in dismantling Oil City, 39-16, Friday in the District 10 3A semifinals at Slippery Rock.

Ham got the Tigers (9-2) off to a fast start with two long (yardage-wise) TD passes covering 50 and 49 yards and then added two second-half sneaks and another scoring pass to lead the way. He completed 15 of 25 passes for 227 yards to go with 96 yards rushing on 13 carries.

In some ways the game was closer than the score indicted. Oil City was within 24-16 as late as the early fourth quarter. And they had the ball with a chance to tie. But -- as was the case all game -- they couldn't extend the drive.

And in some ways the game was more lopsided than the score indicated: final yardage was 432 for Sharon and 185 for the Oilers.

Ethen Knox was limited to 94 yards on 25 tries. He scored both Oiler touchdowns -- one on a 1-yard run after Hayden Wilson recovered a muffed punt at the 15 -- and the other on a 56-yard pass from Cole Findlay. Findlay also hit Jon Hargenrader and Gavin Stephens for PATs.

That first TD, which came after the Oilers were stopped on downs on the Sharon 17, gave them a brief lead, 8-7, but it didn't last long.

The Tigers scored on Ham's second TD pass two plays later and never looked back. De'Andre Griffen returned the ensuing kickoff to the Sharon 45, but the Oilers stalled again.

Oil City appeared to have hope when after a forced fumble by Knox and a seven-yard TFL by Kevin Pearsall pinned the Tigers on their 7. But they made their way to the other end of the field where a 25-yard field goal gave them a 17-8 halftime cushion.

While the Oiler offense sputtered and sputtered, the Tigers were keeping drives alive all game, converting third and fourth downs. This included their first possession after the second half kickoff when they extended their lead to 24-8.

Oil City appeared to be dead in the water at that point, but Findlay and Knox connected for their TD to make it 24-16 and Hank Lockhart then recovered his own onside kick. The Oilers moved to the Sharon 23, but, again, sputter, cough, sputter.

"We had our chances when it was 24-16; unfortunately, we couldn't seal the deal," Oil City coach Dan York told Ryan Kunselman of The Derrick.

Sharon then responded with a five-minute, 10-play, 77-yard scoring drive to start the fourth quarter that made it 31-16.

So Knox finished his illustrious career with 7,870 yards in only 28 games (935 carries) to go with 92 touchdowns. He ran for 99 yards on 24 carries against Sharon.

Meanwhile, Sharon will take on Hickory for the District 10 title, but the Tigers will be without a couple of key defenders who were ejected during a wild and wooly fourth quarter.

And this is big. "I don't know that I've seen a team that's this fast on defense," York told radio's Joe Lodanosky on the pre-game show. "The speed on Sharon's defense is very, very, very impressive."

OIL SPILLS -- Knox accumulated 8,436 all-purpose yards. On defense, he finished with 199 tackles and seven interceptions...His 640 points is third all-time in District 10 history...Kevin Pearsall ended up second on the "modern day" list (last 30 years or so) in tackles. He had 264; Brayden Crocker whose career was cut short by knee problems has

the record the 281. Pearsall finished one ahead of Mario Fontanazza...The LB/FB /P also set a school mark for tackles for loss with 38...Tackle leaders against Sharon were Knox with 14, Hargenrader with 13 and Pearsall with 12 (to go with three QB hits)...Junior Tanner Kightlinger contributed 8, which is a lot for a down lineman...Kightlinger and fellow linemen Henry Milford and Tim Walentoski teamed for 81 stops this season...Oil City's 83 pass attempts this season is the most since 2017 and 11 more than the last two years combined...Findlay threw for 639 yards this season and had 743 yards total offense. The soph was also a force in the secondary with 32 tackles, seven passes defended and four INTs...Hargenrader and Gavin Stephens each caught 11 passes...Stephens defended eight enemy aerials..Senior Justen Dunkle was active along the LOS defensively with 11 TFLs and 9 hurries...All-purpose yardage, thanks mostly to returns, was up from last season: Sean Alexander 722, Hargenrader 642 and De'Vaughn Griffen 443...Hargenrader was second in tackles with 69...Pearsall averaged 36.2 yards on 21 punts...