

General McLane has been playing “pretty” all year – nearly 2,500 yards passing, 30 TD passes, 43 points per game. And for the first minute of its District 10 4A championship game against Oil City Saturday night at Edinboro, it looked like the Lancers’ prettiness would live on.

Two plays after the opening kickoff Matt Caro tossed his 31st scoring pass of the season, a 36-yarder to Navy recruit Jared Corwin. But the Oilers, a 28-7 loser to McLane earlier this season, said Not. So. Fast.

Withstanding more assaults by the polished Lancer offense, they clawed, clawed and clawed some more, and when the smoke had cleared they had themselves a gutsy 16-14 victory for their first district championship since the three-peat of 2018-2020, and their fifth overall.

As it turned out, not only could McLane put up the pretty numbers passing the ball, they could also do some ugly things otherwise on the football field –like turning the ball over – seemingly at will.

On their next possession following that opening TD, Bad Football reared its ugly head when Caleb Sparks made an interception that could have passed for a fumble at the nine. Although the Oilers couldn’t take advantage then, they did get on the scoreboard after McLane took over at the 6: an intentional grounding call from the end zone for a safety that made it 7-2.

It stayed that way until early in the second quarter – and keep in mind McLane’s offense was still no ball of fire since that opening touchdown. It was at this point that a backup quarterback fumbled after an excruciating hit by Abdul Stanton and Brayden Buzard pounced – picking it up and racing 43 yards for a touchdown that put the Oilers up, as it turns out to stay, 8-7.

General McLane did have an answer to that – but not a complete answer. The Lancers reached the Oil City on a 36-yard pass to Kyle McConnell, a thorn in the Oilers side the first time the two teams met during Week 3. The Lancers then went on to get to the 4, but, oops, fumbled on the next play and Cole Findlay recovered for the Oilers.

That’s when they extended their lead to 16-7. Steven Heise did most of the running during the 68-yard drive, but the march also included a 20-yard pass to Logan Heath and two other catches worth 13 and seven yards to Landon Baker. A 14-yard third down run to the 1 by Heise set the stage for a quarterback sneak by Findlay. Heise added the two-point conversion.

Before halftime arrived, McLane got the ball to midfield with a 12-yard catch by its other formidable tight end, junior Caiden Holler. They were about to pick up 13 more yards, but an offensive pass interference call – one of two called on the Lancers during the course of the game – nullified that and sent them to the locker room with points to ponder.

After the Oilers went three-and-out to start the second half, a 48-yard pass to McConnell had McLane in business. (That would have been a three-yard gain had it not been for a missed

tackle). The Lancers eventually were well into the red zone and faced fourth down, but Heise made an interception – his fifth of the season, and that was that.

Heise did account for the Oilers' only turnover of the game when he fumbled after an exchange of possessions. Two plays later, the Lancers were in the end zone – zip, zip – on 27- and 15-yard completions by Caro, the second of which went to McConnell for the TD. The extra point made it 16-14, with 1:19 remaining in the third.

Early in the fourth, after a 55-yard completion by Caro in which Spence Singleton saved the touchdown, the Lancers settled for a 32-yard field goal attempt that was partially blocked by Buzard.

It was around this time that Findlay really began to assert himself as a runner – 22 carries for 134 yards. But, as had been pretty much the case the entire game, the Oilers would get within striking distance only to be stopped cold.

The Lancers had just stopped them on the 13, giving McLane one more chance with just over two minutes to play. But Buzard hit Caro on the arm as he was attempting a pass and then another pass was batted down by Findlay, forcing a punt.

A 15-yard chop block penalty sent the Oilers back, however, and they were soon looking at third-and-way long, needing to get to the GML 38. And they were on their own 37 with 1:23 on the clock.

Enter: the Play of the Game. Findlay scrambled for 26 yards and the first down.

Findlay later told reporter Joe Sager that he was just looking to get a couple of yards for a decent punt. But those plans changed when he saw what was ahead. "I found a lane and kept running. I got a good block from my receiver on the outside and was just able to keep getting more yards....," Findlay said.

"Once I realized I got the first down, I knew we'd win the game, for sure."

Oiler coach Dan York couldn't believe it. "How about that? It was third and 25 and he runs for a first down. Are you kidding me?"

Findlay ran the ball two more times for another first down, and the game was over after two victory formations.

OIL SLICKS – Not only did the Lancers turn the ball over four times, they were flagged nine other times for 87 yards (compared to 2/23 for the Oilers)...So, the Oilers have lived to play on. Their next game will be Nov. 14 or 15 against either Punxsutawney or Clearfield...Oil City has never played Clearfield, a perennial D-9 power, but is 3-1 vs. Punxsy with wins from 1999-01. The loss was in 1983...While the stats were close (302-297) in the game the Oilers lost to

McLane on Sept. 5, they were more lopsided in the game they won: 360 for the Lancers, 270 for Oil City...Most of that was passing yardage. Caro completed 19-40 for 286 yards...That gave him 2,755 yards this season (174/253) for 32 TDs and four INTs – all by the Ollers...Findlay now has the program record for most yards rushing in a season by a quarterback with 679...He broke Holden Stahl's record, but Stahl still has the career mark with 1,286. Findlay has 1,039... Blake Stevens had 12 tackles, giving him 100 for the season. Stevens was also credited with the safety...My'Saun Mills also had 12 stops and Singleton added 10...Not only did Buzard return a fumble for a TD, but he had three tackles for loss...And not only did Heise have an interception, but he defended four other passes...Spence Singleton had a couple of nice runbacks and Logan Heath kept his punting average at 35.1 after six boots against the Lancers...