**Cowboys complete 16-point comeback over Durant**

By Kyle Lojacono

The Gaither football team found itself trailing 23-7 at halftime against Durant in the Class 7A regional quarterfinals on Nov. 18 but fought back to win the program’s first playoff game since 2007. The Cowboys (8-5) scored 31 second-half points off three touchdowns passes by quarterback Alexander McGough, a 19-yard run by Shug Oyegunle and a 27-yard field goal by Dalton Gibson to win 38-30.

"At halftime we told them listen ‘you’re champions, but you’re not just playing like it’," said first-year Gaither coach Jason Stokes. "Throw everything else out the window. You just have to execute. We told them ‘you do want to go home and turn your gear in, or do want to keep playing?’"

-- The Cowboys were a different squad coming out of the locker room, picking up 305 yards of total offense after halftime.

Gaither’s defense sacked Cougars (7-4) quarterback Nick Fabbriro four times and picked off three of his passes. Safety Eddie Pastrana took the first interception 35 yards for his squad’s first points, while the final two found the hands of cornerback Tyler McCollum.

McCollum said he wasn’t expecting to pick off two passes against Durant’s run-heavy read-option offense, but was happy there were a few attempts to his side of the field. "If they were going to throw my way I was going to do everything I could to pick them off and make them pay," McCollum said.

McCollum’s first interception came on the Cougars drive after the Cowboys had taken a 31-30 lead, giving them the ball with 3:49 remaining in the game. Durant had one timeout left and Gaither would have been able to run out the clock with one first down. But Oyegunle decided a one-point victory was too close.

"When I saw Tyler get that pick, I knew I had to go in and get the stop," Oyegunle said. "I told Alex get me the ball and I’d get in the end zone.

McCollum did find him on the fifth play of the drive, connecting on a screen pass that Oyegunle took 62 yards for the game’s final points.

"When I got the ball in my hands I was just thinking touchdown touchdown touchdown," Oyegunle said.

"We were totally out of whack," Stokes said.

The Cowboys started the game slowly. Stokes said the start was partially due to injuring a Durant defender to score on a two-point conversion on Nov. 18.

**Sunlake escapes with 22-21 win**

By Eugenio Torrens

Seven seconds. That’s how much time was left when Ocala Vanguard missed a game-winning 44-yard field goal. Vanguard’s postseason ride into the second round of the Class 6A playoffs came to a 22-21 win.

"The only thing I was saying was please God make him miss. Please God don’t let him do it. When the rubber meets the road, big-time players make big-time plays in big-time games." Oyegunle decided a one-point victory was too close. Vanguard kept pounding the Sunlake defense in the second half, scoring on a Demarcus Sexil and Carlo Perello, respectively.

Oyegunle filled in for McGough, going 5-of-9 for 72 yards. He also added 107 yards on four carries. 24 yards on four carries and another 27 on a kick return.

"It was a total effort," Stokes said. "We got some good runbacks on special teams, got some key picks and we’ve got some big-time players on offense. When it comes down to it, when the rubber meets the road, big-time players make big-time plays in big-time games."

The Cowboys travel to district rival Tampa Bay Tech on Friday, Nov. 25 at 7:30 p.m. for the regional semifinals. The Titans defeated Gaither 17-14 on Nov. 4 on a last-minute field goal.

---

**Cowboys senior wide receiver Carlo Pereolo leaps over a Durant defender to score on a two-point conversion on Nov. 18.**

**Seniors Nate McCooe, No. 77, and Nick Morrison celebrate after Sunlake’s 22-21 playoff victory at Ocala Vanguard on Nov. 18.**

Then Stoltz found a matchup he knew could exploit — a linebacker on Rashaud Daniels. The result: a 44-yard pass down the sideline. One play later, Stoltz snuck it in himself.

"My mindset was coach Browning, you’re a crazy old man," Burgess said. "You crazy, but I love coach Browning so much, and I trust coach Browning."

The conversion put Sunlake up, but it didn’t win the game right there. Vanguard got the ball back two more times, including one last stab at winning with 17 seconds left.

The Knights were near midfield, when quarterback Cody Miller found Williams who streaked to the Sunlake 27, setting up a field goal with 7 seconds left that sailed wide left.

"I’m going to enjoy this for the rest of my life," Daniels said.

The Sunlake travel to Gainesville on Friday, Nov. 25 at 7:30 p.m.