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TCHS running back rushes for 263 yards, scores 4 TDs

By Aaron Suttles Sports Writer

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TUSCALOOSA | With his team uncharacteristically trailing at the end of the first half, Damian Minor went up to his coach and pleaded for the ball.

Tuscaloosa County High School's senior running back said he could make things happen and get things turned around for the Wildcats.

Coach Lee Gibson gave in to Minor's wish and watched his 5-foot-10 scatback go wild in the second half as the Wildcats turned a two-point deficit at the half into a 35-16 win Friday night in a Class 6A, Region 5 game at Northridge Stadium.

Minor scored the first time he touched the ball in the second half, racing 80 yards untouched for a touchdown that put TCHS on top. He added fourth-quarter touchdown runs of 4 and 65 yards to put the game out of reach.

"Damian just came to me and said, 'Coach, just put it on my shoulders. I can get it done for you,'" Gibson said. "So that's what we did.

"Damian just begged me to give him the ball, and we fed the beast."

Minor had 263 yards rushing on 21 carries and five catches for 51 yards, totaling four of the Wildcats' five scores.

"They wanted me to put the team on my shoulders and get them moving," Minor said. "Once we got to moving I said, 'Now, nobody can stop us.' Great blocks, great runs, great catching, good defensive stops. ... We need to keep this up."

With his play alone, Minor overshadowed a gutsy effort by Northridge, which played with the entire right side of its offensive line out with the flu.

Northridge led 16-14 at the half and was within striking distance of the Wildcats until well within the fourth quarter.

"I'm happy with our effort." Jaguars coach Mike Smith said. "We'll take this and get



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Tuscaloosa County running back Damian Minor (2) is dragged down by Northridge defensive back Nick McMullen (18) during the second half of Friday night's game at Northridge High School.

better from it. We know we have a good team.”

Jaguars wide receiver Malcolm Johnson showed why he is one of the state’s best wide receivers, catching five passes for 89 yards despite being blanketed for most of the game.

“Not many teams have many players like (Johnson),” Gibson said. “He’s a handful.”

Northridge struck first, taking advantage of a Tuscaloosa County onside kick that rolled harmlessly out of bounds. The Jaguars traveled 51 yards and got a Griffin Rudolph 25-yard field goal for a 3-0 lead.

Northridge came right back of its next possession with a seven-play, 44-yard drive, highlighted by a Justin Pruitt 12-yard score giving the Jaguars a 9-0 lead.

A 26-yard connection between TCHS quarterback Matt Sandlin and Minor got the Wildcats their first points. TCHS drove 76 yards in eight plays to pull within 9-7.

Sandlin was 15 of 20 for 142 yards and two touchdowns and one interception. Northridge sophomore quarterback Brooks Burns was 15 of 26 for 189 yards.

The teams swapped scores before the half, with Northridge’s Joey Hamilton intercepting a Sandlin pass and returning it 55 yards for the score. Tuscaloosa County scored with less than a minute remaining in the half when Sandlin found Danny Gaines in the back left corner of the end zone for a 4-yard score, leaving the Wildcats down by two at the half.

Tuscaloosa County (2-0, 1-0) hosts Jackson-Olin next Friday. Northridge (1-1, 0-1) travels to Minor.

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