

# Bulldogs on top in MAC Red

**By Fred Costello**

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If there were any lingering doubts regarding Romeo's place

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## High School Football

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among the best Macomb Area Conference Red division football teams, they were erased on Friday night. The Bulldogs defeated visiting Eisenhower, 14-0, and in doing so improved to 2-0 in the Red and 2-1 overall. Ike fell to 2-1 overall and 1-1 in the divi-

sion.

The game was a titanic struggle between two unyielding defenses. Neither offense dominated the other; the teams combined for just a single offensive touchdown. In fact, it was ultimately a defensive play that won the game for Romeo in the third quarter.



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# BULLDOGS: Take over top spot in MAC Red

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Eisenhower took over offensively, following a turnover on downs from the Bulldogs. Sophomore quarterback Joe Zerafa dropped back to pass on first down, throwing to his right. Romeo junior linebacker Troy Zbikowski jumped the route and picked off the ball at the Ike 30 yard line. Zbikowski scampered right to the end zone – prompting the loudest cheer of the night from an overflow crowd.

With 2:45 left in the third, the Bulldogs had a 7-0 lead and all the points it would need for a win.

Romeo coach Jason Couch was elated with the victory, especially since it followed last week's emotional win over Dakota.

"Two wins in the MAC Red is not even a bad year," Couch said. "So, this is a great start. We've got to keep things rolling. Troy's pick really brought back our enthusiasm."

Senior running back Ryan Burkard played well for the Bulldogs, rushing 29 times for 118 yards and a touchdown. He capped a long fourth-quarter drive with a four-yard sweep with 1:29 left in the game. With senior quarterback Blake Laurain limited to just five completions for 73 yards due to injury, Burkard played the role of an 'every-down' back.

On one third-quarter drive in particular, Burkard carried the ball 11 consecutive times – often lining up behind center for a direct snap. "He's a horse," Couch said of his bruising runner. "We knew all offseason that he was going to catch people by surprise."

The challenge for his team, Couch believes, is to not get caught up in believing its own hype. He has a solution for that, however.

"Hopefully our boys' heads

won't swell up too big," he said. "Some hard conditioning and sled work should remind them."

On the opposite sideline, Eisenhower coach Bob Lantzy thought his team failed to capitalize on several opportunities. Indeed, the Ike offense – led by Zerafa's 175 passing yards and 47 yards rushing – could never cash in.

"In the first two games, we were opportunists," Lantzy explained. "I don't know what happened in this game. We had passes that were right on the money, but nobody could take it to the house. I feel every time we catch a ball, it is that player's responsibility to break at least one tackle. I don't think we broke tackles – but their tailback did."

Eisenhower's defense swarmed the ball on most passing attempts – senior defensive back Alan Figlan recorded an interception in the third quarter – but had more difficulty in bringing down Burkard.

The Eagles had the ball first to start the game, and immediately went to work carving out yards. Facing a fourth-and-one from the Bulldogs 15 yard line, Zerafa scrambled for an eight-yard pick-up. The 58-yard drive ended on the next play, however, when Eisenhower fumbled the ball away.

From that point, both teams cranked up the defensive intensity. They combined for four punts and two turnovers on downs over the next quarter and a half of play.

Romeo's offense took over with 3:38 left in the second quarter, but got knocked back by penalties.

Laurain zipped a pinpoint pass to fellow senior Darryl Johnson on a second-and-19 to easily earn a first down. The play got called back, yielding yet another punt – and 0-0 score at the half.