

Indians wrap region crown

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POWDER SPRINGS - McEachern clinched its first region championship in 10 years, and moved one step closer to an undefeated regular season, with a 42-14 victory over Kennesaw Mountain on Friday at Walter Cantrell Stadium.

The win secured a Region 5AAAAA title and a top seed in the playoffs for seventh-ranked McEachern (9-0, 8-0).

"I told the kids that there are only eight region champions in the state (in each classification) and, by winning a region championship, you're one of the best teams in the state," Indians coach Kyle Hockman said. "This was a total team effort and everyone did their part. I am very, very proud of the kids and what they accomplished."

The win didn't come easily for McEachern, which trailed Kennesaw Mountain (1-8, 1-7), 14-7, in the second quarter and was tied, 14-all, at halftime before outscoring the Mustangs, 28-0, in the second half.

Propelling the McEachern attack was Rajaan Bennett, who rushed for 256 yards on 23 carries and scored a career-high five touchdowns. Bennett scored on runs of 21, 61, 4, 32 and 47 yards.

"I really thank my offensive line," Bennett said. "They make me a better running back, so all the credit goes to them. Everybody did a great job."

Bennett got McEachern on the scoreboard first when he slipped through a number of Kennesaw Mountain defenders and rumbled 21 yards into the end zone with 33 seconds left in the first quarter. Troy Postell added the extra point to give the Indians a 7-0 lead.

Kennesaw Mountain then ran the ball to the McEachern 37 on the ensuing kickoff and took only four plays to score, with Will Campbell entering the end zone on a 2-yard quarterback-keeper with 10:24 remaining in the first half. Devon Stookey kicked the extra point to tie the game 7-all.

Kennesaw Mountain got a big break when it recovered a McEachern fumble on the kickoff at the Indians' 28 with 10:18 left in the first half.

The Mustangs scored two plays later, with Rashaud Moore

scampering 25 yards into the end zone with 9:33 left. Stookey's extra point gave Kennesaw Mountain a 14-7 lead.

The Mustangs' lead didn't last into halftime, however, as Bennett ran up the middle of the field 61 yards for the touchdown. Postell then made the extra point to even the score at 14-all with 39 seconds left.

"Kennesaw Mountain played a very aggressive game in the first half," Hockman said. "They took it right at us. We gave them a short field a few times, and they took advantage of it. I told the kids at halftime not to panic - just keep playing hard."

McEachern scored on its second offensive series of the second half as it went on a 10-play, 78-yard drive that culminated with a 4-yard touchdown run by Bennett with 4:12 remaining in the third quarter. Postell added the extra point to give the Indians a 21-14 lead.

Kennesaw Mountain was forced to punt on the next offensive series and McEachern took possession on the Mustangs' 35. On the second play of the drive, Bennett ran 32 yards for his fourth touchdown of the game at the 1:52 mark of the third quarter. Postell converted the extra point, for a 28-14 Indian advantage.

McEachern scored twice more as Dondre Purnell threw a 32-yard touchdown pass to Chris Okpala with 7:18 remaining and Bennett burst up the middle for a 47-yard touchdown run with 5:59 left to give the Indians their final margin of victory.