

Stars align for Blue Devils

by Tripp Miller

Marietta Daily Journal Sports Writer

KENNESAW - Marietta is going to the playoffs.

The Blue Devils got all the help they needed from other region teams Friday night. They also remembered to take care of their own business and beat Kennesaw Mountain, 35-20, at Cobb Energy/Mustang Stadium.

"Our kids came to work (at practice) Monday, because they knew we had a chance," Marietta coach James "Friday" Richards said. "Our kids played hard when they needed to, and I'm proud of them."

It will be tough for the Blue Devils (5-5, 4-5) to stretch their magic in the first round, however. They have the unenviable task of traveling to top-ranked Grayson, a Class AAAAA state semifinalist last year, which has also risen into the rankings of some national publications.

It all came down to another big night for running back Greg Franklin and, perhaps, an even bigger night for defensive lineman Tripp Dodd.

Franklin did his usual thing, rushing for 208 yards and three touchdowns on 21 carries.

Dodd did something a little more out of the ordinary.

With the final seconds ticking away in the first half, Kennesaw Mountain (1-9, 1-8) took the field to punch in a chip-shot field goal from 22 yards out. Mustangs kicker Devon Stookey had just drilled one from 42 yards to cut the Blue Devils' lead to 14-5, but this one was blocked right into the hands of Dodd, who ran it back 94 yards for a score.

The 10-point swing all but sealed the game before halftime.

"I told him to throw it back to somebody that could run," Richards said of the 6-foot-2, 233-pound Dodd, "but the other guys realized he needed a whole lot of blocking, so they got in front of him," Richards said.

Marietta took the field in the second half, intercepted a pass from Kennesaw Mountain quarterback Will Campbell and later scored on a 24-yard strike from quarterback Adam Patrick to wideout Charles

Francois. The Blue Devils commanded a 28-5 lead with more than 8 minutes remaining in the third quarter.

Marietta got on the board first on a 40-yard touchdown run by Franklin early in the first quarter.

After Kennesaw Mountain went three-and-out on its first possession, punter Alex Sims pinned the Blue Devils on their own 12-yard line. A chop block penalty pushed Marietta back to the 3 before Kennesaw linebacker Kenny McCarter sacked Patrick in the end zone for a safety.

The Blue Devils extended their lead to 14-2 early in the second quarter on a 19-yard touchdown run by Franklin. But the Mustangs closed the gap to 14-5 with Stookey's 42-yard field goal.

Kennesaw Mountain recovered the ensuing kickoff, which went untouched by Marietta, at the Blue Devils' 30-yard line. Marietta committed pass-interference and a roughing-the-passer penalties to move the Mustangs up to the 6-yard line for a field goal attempt before the half.

That resulted in Dodd's long ramble and the 21-5 halftime advantage.

After Francois' touchdown reception early in the third, the Mustangs struck back with a 5-yard touchdown run by Diamond Stewart. They then cut the lead to 28-20 when Campbell hit Rashaud Moore for a 3-yard touchdown and 2-point conversion in the fourth

Franklin, however, iced the contest for Marietta with a 35-yard run with less than 3 minutes to play.

"I think that Greg Franklin is pretty tough, and I think we've got a long way to go," Richards said. "But I'm proud of my kids, and we're in the playoffs, and we're going to do the best we can."