

SPORTS

Piedmont falls to Alhambra in first round of NCS

By Jonathan Comeaux

Piedmont High’s football season came to an end on Friday, November 10, after falling to No. 4 Alhambra 49-14 in the first round of the Division 5 North Coast Section playoffs.

Despite the loss, this year marked the rebirth of the school’s storied 100-year football program at PHS. With a roster of only 17 players, the team finished with a 7-4 overall record, and won its first Western Alameda County Conference Shoreline title since 2015, and first NCS appearance since 2018.

Some predicted the team would not be able to complete its 10-game season with so few players.

“Playoffs with football is always something where experience becomes a factor, Alhambra had 18 seniors and we had one senior on the field. But we had opportunities. No one picked us to be in the playoffs, let alone win a league title. We feel [that we’re]

ahead of schedule. It’s terrible to lose, but this helps us grow, and we can be great with another year of experience,” reflected coach Jordan Seiden.

With just three seniors on the roster – Derek Schleuning, Brayden Hong, and Emmett Maxwell – Piedmont fielded a young and talented group. When Hong and Maxwell went down with season-ending injuries, the team had to dig even deeper to perform well.

On top of that, Piedmont was unable to play or practice on its field, due to the school district scheduling the returfing and replacement of the irrigation system at Witter Field during the summer and fall, and now into early 2024. Practices were held on the school’s baseball diamond.

“Not having a field was kind of a blessing in disguise. It brought us all closer together and made us a strong team,” said Schleuning. “Four years ago when we went undefeated, and we didn’t have a JV, I was pulled up to varsity and



Staff Photos

Piedmont’s football season ended with a loss to Alhambra in the first round of the North Coast Section playoffs.



Sam Shelby runs into the end zone for a touchdown reception against Alhambra.

didn’t play at all. Then the next year, I got injured for most of the season. Then as a junior, our varsity year got cut short, so this season really meant a lot to me to watch this program grow. Now that we’re winning, we’re seeing more people come out and participate, it’s great for the program.”

“No one really thought we’d be in this position and we continued to prove people wrong. We were projected to go 0-10 by some media. But we knew what we had; we pushed through and relied on each other,” said junior quarterback Markos Lagios.

The team was aided by breakthrough performances. Junior Sam Shelby emerged as a game-breaking receiver and return specialist. Fullback Tommy Ashton is a bruising running back and line-backer, junior Jordan Alemania is a talented edge and interior rusher, and there’s a quality receiving core in Shelby, Brandon Dicke, and Albert Bellingrath. Meanwhile, Shelby, Miguel Long, and Vince Arbit make a solid defensive backfield.

“Everyone in this group knew how important it was to improve. We knew what we were capable of. Most people thought we didn’t have a chance,” added Shelby.

Game Recap

Piedmont opened the game strongly, recovering a trick inside

kick at Alhambra’s 44, but wound up punting after a snap sailed over Lagios’ head. The Bulldogs went three-and-out on its first possession, enabling Piedmont to start at Alhambra’s 39-yard-line, and eventually scoring on a 35-yard fade to Shelby down the left sideline. Piedmont led 7-0 with 5:39 left in the first quarter.

But Alhambra scored on its next drive, where quarterback Beau Blau broke a couple of long runs, capping off with a five-yard TD run for a 7-7 tie. Piedmont followed with a long 16-play drive that finished with Lagios throwing a 22-yard TD pass to Bellingrath on a 4th-and-18 situation to take a 14-7 lead Piedmont with 5:47 left in the first half.

However, that was the last time PHS got on the scoreboard.

The Bulldogs scored slightly over two minutes later on a five-play drive, where Blau ran in a five-yard touchdown, 14-14. After a Piedmont punt, Alhambra went ahead 21-14 with 58.6 seconds left in the half—where they converted a 4th-and-4 with a fake punt at Piedmont’s 49, creating a 25-yard carry.

With the PHS offense struggling to create, Alhambra tacked on scores with 6:08 left in the third, then again two minutes later, once more with 11:55 left in the fourth, while the Bulldogs made it 49-14 at the 3:24 mark. Official stats were not provided by post time.



Albert Bellingrath’s scored for Piedmont in the second quarter.



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