

Airline downs East St. John

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“All wins are good wins.”

Airline coach Bo Meeks said that on more than one occasion following the Vikings' 30-20 victory over the No. 27 seed East St. John Wildcats in the first round of the Class 5A state football playoffs Friday night at Airline Stadium.

The No. 6 seed Vikings (9-2) play No. 11 Jesuit in the second round Friday. Jesuit defeated West Jefferson 31-21 in the first round. East St. John finished the season 5-5.

One reason Meeks assured his team that “all wins are good wins” is that the Vikings played a somewhat sloppy fourth quarter.

Airline grabbed a 30-6 lead late in the third quarter when Demontre Evans recovered a high Wildcats punt snap in the end zone.

The game was never really in any doubt after that, but East St. John scored two touchdowns in the fourth quarter to make the score respectable.

“That’s one of those things as a program that we’ve got to do, continue improving on finishing,” Meeks said. “We’ve got to put them away. We can’t relax when it’s 30-6 especially against a team like East St. John that’s extremely talented.

“(East St. John quarterback) Leonard Davis is a heckuva player. When we get the opportunity we’ve got to finish.”

Airline did plenty right in the first three quarters.

“I thought the effort was outstanding all night,” Meeks said. “There are just some things we need to clean up because whoever we are going to play next week is going to be a good football team.”

Hayden Hildebrand completed 15 of 24 passes for 210 yards and three touchdowns. Michael Nunnery rushed for 91 yards on 21 carries.

In the first half, Hildebrand threw TD passes of 11 yards to Logan Williams and 52 to Laterious Pouncy.

Matt Hanisee also kicked a 29-yard field goal and the Vikings led 17-6 at the half.

“I thought Hayden played outstanding in the first half,” Meeks said. “The receivers made some great plays.”

The defense set up Airline’s third touchdown, stopping the Wildcats just short on a fourth-and-2 gamble from their 28.

Hildebrand found Pouncy in the end zone for 12 yards and the TD. Hanisee’s PAT put the Vikings up 24-6 midway through the third quarter.

East St. John’s Davis completed 19 of 40 passes for 212 yards and three touchdowns, including two in the fourth quarter. The Wildcats had 314 total yards.

The Vikings were buoyed by the return of defensive lineman OJ Smith, who sat out the second half of last week’s loss to Byrd with an undisclosed injury.

“Defensively, I thought we played great all night,” Meeks said. “We had a busted coverage for the first touchdown. We were just on the field too much in the second half. But we made plays when we had to.”