

Eyes on a repeat

Barons top Cedar Cliff
42-20 to advance to
District finals

**By
Bruce Morgan**

Manheim Central coach Dave Hahn included two words on his play script for last Saturday's game.

They were simply, "Be aggressive."

"I believe in (our players)," the Barons' boss said, "and I want them to believe in themselves."

That aggressive mindset contributed to Manheim Central scoring two touchdowns in just 20 seconds in the final minute of the first half, giving them a 21-7 edge over Cedar Cliff going to the locker room.

Behind Bobby Whalen, a Division-One baseball

recruit to Louisville University, the Colts climbed back to 21-20 in the third quarter, but the Barons never relinquished the lead and went on to earn a 42-20 victory in the District Three 5A playoff semi-finals at Manheim's Elden Rettew Field.

"One of the things that I really enjoy about this team is their maturity,"

Hahn said. "So when it got tight tonight, we knew we could still do things. We just had to find our way and we'd be alright. I'm proud of them."

This Friday night, top-seeded Manheim Central (12-0) will find its way to Manheim Township High School, where they will battle long-time rival, No. 2-seeded Cocalico (10-2) for the District crown.

It will be an opportunity for the Barons to go back-to-back, as they look for their 18th District championship in program history.

“It’s a feeling like no other,” said senior tight end/defensive back Evan Hosler, who helped seal Saturday’s win with a fourth-quarter interception. “It feels great, awesome.”

“It’s Cocalico week,” said junior QB Evan Simon, who passed for three TDs and ran for two scores against Cedar Cliff. “We’re going to get after it. It starts at practice. Execute all week.”

Manheim Central had no problems executing after receiving the opening kickoff, as Colby Wagner took a jet sweep 15 yards around the left end, and then Will Rivers added runs of 15 and 21 yards down the right side.

“That was huge,” Simon said. “I thought that really worked, attacking the perimeter.”

Eventually, on fourth-and-short, the Barons’ QB called his own number and scored on a one-yard sneak, capping a 10-play, 72-yard drive. The PAT kick was blocked, but Manheim Central led 6-0.

It then turned into a defensive battle, as the Colts went three-and-out on three of their first four series, with picks by MC’s Isaac Perron and Wagner, while the Barons were held without a first down on their next five possessions.

The Colts did a solid job of bottling up Baron senior running back Tyler Flick, who was limited to 28 rushing yards on 12 carries in the game.

“They came out in a 5-3 tonight,” Hahn said, “so until we made some adjustments and got the blocking down ... Tyler’s awesome, I wouldn’t trade him for the world. But when you’ve got eight guys in the box, if you’re going to try to be stubborn and run on that, you’re going to have a tough time. And those are tough sonof-a-guns over there.”

Lineman Justin Resto and D-back Mason Heiple added first-half INTs for the Colts (10-3), and following Resto’s pick, Cedar Cliff running back Jaheim Morris (21-98 rushing) barreled for an 18-yard TD run. Jack Quesenberry’s PAT gave Cliff a 7-6 lead with 4:41 left in the half.

The Colts then turned the ball over on downs on their next series, and Simon’s 37-yard TD strike to Rivers down the left sideline put MC

back up. Moments later, Simon hit Landan Moyer for the two-point conversion, making it 14-7 with just 42 seconds remaining before the break.

“That’s the thing about (Evan) — some days, (INTs) are going to happen, some days you’re going to go 16-for-19 and throw four touchdowns,” Hahn said. “He just lets it roll off his back. He gets (upset), but he lets it roll off his back and does what a good quarterback has got to do. You’ve got to come out swinging.”

Manheim Central certainly came back swinging, as Hunter Hess’ onside kick was recovered by Wagner, putting the Barons in business again at the Colts’ 49-yard line. On the next play, Wagner executed a hitch-and-go and outdueled a Cedar Cliff defensive back for

the ball, scoring on a 49-yard TD to make it 21-7.

“We practiced it all week and we knew we wanted to do it,” Hahn remarked. “I don’t know if it was the smartest call, I think I rolled the dice and won on that one.”

“That was a momentum builder, from our stands, to our sideline, to us on the field,” said Simon, who was 7-of-19, 239 yards. “I mean, that was huge.”

Coming out after the half, though, the Colts were able to regain the momentum behind Whalen (22-139 rushing; 4-121, 30 yards passing), who took over under center when senior Chris Dare went down with a first-half injury.

Using an impressive 16-play, 79-yard drive which ate more than

seven minutes off the clock, Cedar Cliff cut the Barons’ lead to 21-14 when Whalen eventually scored on a three-yard TD run.

Following a three-and-out by the Barons, the Colts went back to work again. Whalen scampered 30 yards, and then two plays later, the senior playmaker darted 13 yards to paydirt with 1:08 to go in the third quarter. The extra-point missed, but Cliff was back within 21-20.

“Hey listen, (Whalen)’s special,” Hahn said. “The last time we played a Division-One baseball player/athlete like that, it was 2003 in the State championship (against Pine Richland) and (Neil) Walker’s still in the Major Leagues.”

As Cedar Cliff was rallying, the Barons’ offense was sputtering, managing only seven

yards from scrimmage in the third quarter.

But then early in the fourth, on 2nd-and-long Simon connected with Wagner for 28 yards down the left sideline to give MC a shot in the arm.

“I think that really boosted our passing game and got everyone more confident,” Wagner said.

“(Colby)’s one of the most athletic players on the team, for sure, 100 percent,” Simon said. “He plays offense, defense — he had a pick tonight and he had two touchdowns, so that’s one heck of a night. I mean, he really showed out. He’s a nice target to throw to, he and his brother (Ben).”

Three plays later, Simon and Colby Wagner (3-113 receiving) again hooked up, this time for a 36-

yard TD which put MC up 28-20 with 6:43 left. It was the 52nd career TD pass for Simon, tying him with Jeff Smoker for the most in program history. Cedar Cliff answered by driving to the Barons’ 32, but on 4th-and-2, Hosler picked off a pass by Whalen intended for senior wide receiver Dre Dorsey to end the threat.

“I knew the situation was fourth-and-short and we were in man,” Hosler recalled. “I started off a little deep, and I was like, ‘Alright, they’re going to do something quick,’ so I rolled up, jammed (Dorsey), he did a quick out and I was just there for the play.”

Another back-breaker quickly followed for the Colts when Simon hit tight end Moyer, who sprinted 61 yards for a first down to the Cedar Cliff 10.

“That was huge,” Hahn said. “I thought Moyer was going to score, I couldn’t believe it.”

Simon actually took care of that, darting 10 yards to paydirt with just 2:37 left for the dagger. The extra-point by Niko Gavala made it 35-20.

A 29-yard TD run by Manheim Central’s Chris Shaw with 1:10 left completed the scoring.

“We pretty much hold our composure, we don’t get too rattled,” Hahn said. “Warwick is a special team. Wilson is a great team. Cocalico is a great team — we’re going to play them again. We were down against all of those guys and we were able to keep our composure and come back. I’m proud of them.”