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By Andrew Cato, ShowMe Times Sports Editor

The Sikeston Bulldogs proved to be too much for the 'Cats to handle on Friday night at Charles Bland Stadium.

Sikeston's speed and outstanding ground game took a toll on the Bearcat defense, and the Bulldogs handed Dexter the first loss of the season with a 57-30 final score. Head coach Aaron Pixley noted that tackling and penalties again proved to be big problems for the Bearcats in the contest.

"We talked about it all week long, about how we had to tackle these guys. Whenever you get in space there with them, you've gotta make sure you wrap up real well, and I think we were over-pursuing quite a bit on defense," Pixley said. "Turnovers, big penalties got us again tonight."

The Bearcats' defense struggled with over-pursuing the speedy Sikeston running backs, which led to big plays for the Bulldogs.

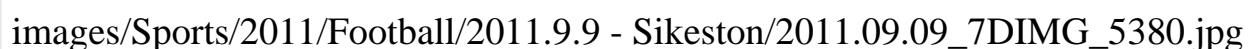
"I told them after the game, any time you have a defense that over-pursues a lot, that's aggressive kids, but you have to correct a few things along the way to correct the over-pursuit," Pixley continued. "That's what we have to do. We have to tackle better. They hit way too many big plays on us. If you don't tackle these guys, they build momentum."

Watson proved to be the biggest challenge for the Bearcat defense. Watson's incredible speed, coupled with the Bulldogs' misdirection-oriented offensive schemes, helped the running back to 332 rushing yards and two touchdowns in the contest. "[Watson] is good...he's not an overly big kid; he's very fast. The style of offense they run is really conducive to a super-fast kid like that," Pixley said. "Their other backs are good, but the Watson kid, they got us on the gives up the middle as well as some runs off-tackle. Part of the reason for that was their misdirection prior to the handoff. They're a very good football team."

Despite the final score, the 'Cats were in the game until midway through the third quarter, and the Dexter offense moved the ball well for most of the game.

Senior Zach Watson picked up a fumble to setup a short field and touchdown for the 'Cats early in the third quarter, but an onside kick that Sikeston recovered was the 'nail in the coffin' for the Bearcats. "30 points will win you a lot of football games. We come right out, get a fumble, take it down and score to tie it 22-22, and it's anybody's game," Pixley said. "They come back, score, get the onside kick, and score again, and that turned the momentum in their favor and we had a hard time coming back after that. We missed two possessions right there that our offense probably could have done something with."

Quarterback Cody Stevens (9-22 for 148 yards, one touchdown, and two INT's passing, 101 rushing yards on 16 attempts and one touchdown) had a great game for the Bearcats. Despite the low completion percentage and two early picks, the senior showed some great leadership late in the game.



With
just

over four minutes left in the contest, the senior QB scrambled for 26 yards to set up a 28 yard touchdown pass to Tyler Miller on the next play. The touchdown drive was too little, too late for the Bearcats, but it gave the squad a much-needed burst of positive energy.

"They were up big there, and we were doing a good job moving the football, and I felt like we could continue to move it," Pixley said of the drive. "Our kids responded and had a great attitude. In the fourth quarter, our kids were great about saying 'hey, this is okay, lets just keep playing hard and get something positive out of this', and I think they're going to recover from it and be better for it."

Both teams move to 2-1 on the season after the contest.

The Bearcats will be on the field next Friday, when they hit the road to face the Scott City Rams. Kickoff is scheduled for 7:00 p.m.

For a full breakdown of the game's stats, click here.

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