

Sports



OV FORWARD RYLEIGH LaPorte and teammates press the attack at the Middlebury Tiger's goal in the first half of Thursday's game at MUHS. LaPorte, a junior, scored twice, while Tiger goalie Cassie Bettis made 21 saves during the Otters' 5-0 win. Reporter photo/Steve James

OV field hockey starts fast, blanks host Tigers, 5-0

BY ANDY KIRKALDY
MIDDLEBURY — When the Middlebury and Otter Valley union high school field hockey teams met in the 2020 Division II playoffs the Otters prevailed in double overtime. That was the last time the programs had squared off before the Otters' visit to MUHS on Thursday. Unfortunately for the Tigers, this more recent game lacked that kind of suspense. The Otters scored twice in the first quarter and added another goal in the first minute of the second quarter, junior forward Ryleigh LaPorte's second of the game, on the way to their 5-0 victory. That fast start set the tone for the afternoon. "It's very important in any game," said OV Coach Jodie Keith, whose team stood at

7-2-1 after losing a tough battle at undefeated Bellows Falls on Saturday. "We always like to score a couple goals and get ourselves settled and then keep pressuring." The Otters also acquitted themselves well in the 5-2 setback at Bellows Falls according to Keith. The Terriers are the defending D-I champs. "Everyone on the team played very well," Keith said. Brittney Jackson and Mackenzie McKay got the goals, and goalie Lily Morgan made nine saves for OV on Saturday. On Thursday the Tigers had difficulty matching the quickness of OV forwards LaPorte, McKay, Riley Keith and Jackson, and midfielders Alice Keith and Madison Colburn. "We have a very quick front line," Coach Keith said. "They're very speedy, and our

midfielders are the same way." MUHS Coach Brandi Whittemore agreed the Otters' start put the 0-10 Tigers on their heels. "I think that's fair to say. We were taken off guard a little bit, and then we just didn't have the momentum behind us to rally back," Whittemore said. She also agreed the Otters

are fast, but was not sure speed was the decisive factor as much as the Tigers just not displaying the grit they had shown recently when playing D-I Metro teams. "We can be quick when we want to be quick. They've

shown that they can," said Whittemore, whose team was without ailing middle Kenene (See OV Hockey p, Page 9)



ABOVE, RYLEIGH LAPORTE gets behind the Tiger goalie on one of her attempts at goal, though Tiger defender Hannah Cameron makes a last-second goal-line stop. At left, OV's Madison Colburn, a senior, rades to get the ball back into scoring range. Reporter photos/Steve James

OV field hockey

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Otis, a key cog. “We were letting the team get those 50-50s.”

The trouble started on the Otters’ first shot. LaPorte, a thorn in the Tigers’ side all game, carried down the left side and crossed into the box. The ball deflected to Jackson, near the penalty stripe, and she rapped it inside the right post.

A fruitless Tiger penalty corner interrupted a series of OV chances, a half-dozen of which Tiger goalie Cassie Bettis stopped, including several from point blank. She finished with 21 stops, and defender Hannah Cameron made a defensive save.

“Cassie has been a leader, not only as a captain but as a goalkeeper,” Whittemore said. “She really takes charge.”

But Bettis had no chance on OV’s second goal, which came on a corner with 43 seconds left in the period. A ball served from the right side bounced through and off a knot of players to LaPorte, who banged it home from about six feet out.

Two minutes into the third period LaPorte raced past the Tiger defense and in alone on Bettis and found the lower right corner to make it 3-0.

The Tigers showed some signs of life in the period, with strong runs from middies Hana Doria, Scarlet Carrara, Erin Mulcahy and Viviana Hammond. But nothing translated into true threats on Morgan in

the OV goal; she finished with three routine saves.

The Otters reasserted themselves in the third period, earning seven penalty corners in the first eight minutes and scoring on two of them. The first goal came at 8:08, when a ball rolled from across the goal mouth until Alice Keith tapped it in at the right post.

At 6:50 Riley Keith found the cage on an angled shot from the left side after taking a pass from Alice Keith, who relayed the insertion.

The Tigers countered with two corners late in the period, but could not convert. They also had two chances early in the fourth quarter. Carrara slipped a pass through the defense to Talia Cotroneo, but her one-timer rolled wide left. Morgan also kicked away a strong cross from McKenna Raymond. Later in the period the OV defense blocked another Cotroneo bid.

Coach Keith attributes her team’s success to conditioning, vital with just four subs, and a constant focus on mastering the sport’s fundamentals.

“We try to focus on the basics, like stick skills, how to stop the ball properly without getting called for a hack, good passes in front of our teammates leading them to the ball, those kinds of things,” Keith said. “It’s just drilling the basics, good stick skills into them. We work on that a lot.”



OV BACK BRADY Diaz cuts right to avoid onrushing Eagle tacklers on Saturday. The Eagle defense limited the OV rushing attack to 78 yards in the Mount Abe-VUHS team’s home win on Saturday. The Eagles won 44-20.
Reporter photos/Angelo Lynn

Eagles pull away to topple OV in high scoring battle, 44-20

By **ANDY KIRKALDY**
BRISTOL — The Mount Abraham-Vergennes cooperative football team converted seven Otter Valley turnovers into 30 points on Saturday as the Division II Eagles won for the time this season, 44-20, at the visiting Otters’ expense.

The 1-4 Eagles, who lost leads in their previous two games, didn’t blink when the D-III Otters

pulled to within 27-20 midway through the third quarter.

Instead, they marched 66 yards to set up Adam Mansfield’s third field goal of the game with six seconds left in the period, and the Eagles led by 10. Thirty-five yards of that drive came on the ground, with Mansfield, the quarterback, and running back Beau Carpenter lugging the ball.

On that march the Eagles also faced third and 17 from their own 35. In possibly the key play of the game, Mansfield scrambled right and threw a bullet down the sideline to Carmelo Miceli for 20 yards and another first down.

In the fourth quarter Mansfield then bolted for two scores both

set up by Eagle interceptions. The first was a two-yard burst up the middle that capped a 40-yard drive after Eagle safety Ian Funko picked off Richard Lafontaine at midfield.

The second came after hard-rushing Eagle lineman Jamison Couture batted a Lafontaine pass into the air and made a diving catch on the OV 6-yard line. Mansfield burst up the middle again to create the final score.

That late outburst followed a back-and-forth game. On its first possession OV moved well behind starting quarterback Caleb Whitney, who took snaps for three quarters, but a Miceli fourth-down

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OV boys’ soccer play hard, come up short

BRANDON — The Otter Valley boys’ soccer team dropped two road games late last week. The 2-7-2 Otters were looking to bounce back at home on Tuesday, when they were set to host Stratton.

On Oct. 7, host Green Mountain Union improved to 10-1 with a 5-0 victory over OV. Everett Mosher scored three times for the Chieftains.

On Saturday, two second-half goals from Body Wood were the difference as host Woodstock topped the Otters, 2-0.

OV coach Dick Williams said the Otters were on the front foot in the first half, with Kieran Williams and Luca Cifone creating chances, but the Wasps controlled much of the second half. Hayden Bernhardt made seven saves for OV.

Hartford OV girls show solidarity

HARTFORD — On Saturday, host Hartford defeated the Otter Valley girls’ soccer team, 3-1.

Three Hurricanes scored, while Elena Politano converted an Ella Brytowski cross for the Otters. Linnea Faulkner also returned from injury to the OV goal.

Before the game OV and

Hartford players all linked hands in a show of anti-sexist solidarity. Hartford had left the field late in its previous game, at Fair Haven, because members of the crowd were directing derogatory and sexist remarks at Hurricane players.

OV (0-10) was looking to break through for a win at Mill River on Tuesday.

OV girls’ place golf fifth in Div. II

DORSET — The Otter Valley Union High School tandem of Elena Politano and Anna Lee finished fifth in the Division II championship girls’ golf tournament, held on Oct. 7 on the Dorset Field Club course.

The Otters carded a 269, trailing winner Northfield (213), U-32 (215), Rice (227) and Fair Haven (237).

Politano’s score of 109 was fifth-best among the 10 competitors on the challenging course. U-32’s Paige Oakes fired a 97 to become the individual D-II medalist. She was only one of two golfers to break 100.



OV’S CALEB WHITNEY runs wide right to score this touchdown against the Mount Abe-VUHS cooperative team on Saturday. The Otters got to within 27-20 in the third period, but turnovers, as they had all game, killed their momentum.

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sack halted the march on the Eagle 43.

The Eagles then marched 57 yards to take a 7-0 lead. The score came on a 15-yard pass from Mansfield to Miceli. Mansfield kicked the first of his four points-after.

The turnover bug bit the Otters in the second period, although to be fair the Eagles' defense deserves credit, too. On the Otters' first possession of the quarter, Miceli ripped the ball loose from Whitney on a blitz and recovered on the OV 23.

On the next play, Mansfield dumped the ball to Miceli in the left flat, and he weaved his way through the defense to make it 14-0.

OV came right back. Whitney found a wide-open Dylan Stevens-Clark downfield, and he raced 62 yards to the Eagle 3. Two plays later, Keevon Parks punched

it in from the 4, and Brady Diaz ran in the conversion to make it 14-8 at 8:54.

The Otters forced a three-and-out, but a big Collin Dupoise hit on punt returner Isaac Whitney jarred the ball loose, and Miceli recovered on the OV 47. The Eagles took advantage with a 31-yard Mansfield field goal at 5:06, and it was 17-8.

Again the Otters fumbled, and this time Spencer White recovered for the Eagles on the OV 33. Soon after Mansfield booted a 30-yard field goal at 2:15.

Next Funke picked off Whitney and returned 10 yards to the OV 12, and the Eagles were back in business. On the next play Mansfield hit Tristan Parker in the left side of the end zone to make it 27-8.

The Otters fought back. Whitney hooked up with Brady Diaz for 45 yards to the Eagle 25, from



THE OTTERS OCCASIONALLY broke through the offensive line to apply good pressure on Eagle QB Adam Mansfield as they did breaking up this pass just as it left Mansfield's hand.

Reporter photo/Angelo Lynn

there tossed a TD pass to Tucker Babcock, and at halftime it was 27-14.

After the Otters stopped the Eagles' opening drive at the OV 41 on fourth down, they struck again. Whitney converted a fourth-and-one by hitting Stevens-Clark for

eight yards to the Eagle 41, and on the next play he bolted 41 yards down the right sideline to make it 27-20 at 6:34 of the third.

It was anybody's game at that point. But the Eagles made their long march to a field goal, and then turned the two fourth-quarter

interceptions into points to clinch their first win of 2021.

The Eagles outgained the Otters, 307-217, as Mansfield completed 11 of 20 passes for 150 yards, including seven to Miceli for 91 yards. Carpenter finished with 115 yards on 15 carries, and Mansfield added 58 yards on the ground. Defensively, Miceli (two), Ryan Stoddard (two), Noah Gargano and Lucas Grover picked up sacks that totaled 50 yards of losses.

Whitney connected on nine of 16 attempts for 189 yards and rushed six times for another 46 yards, but the Otters managed just 78 yards rushing on 18 attempts.

OV Coach Kipp Denis credited Mount Abe for running the ball "right down our throats" on the pivotal third-quarter drive, but said his team's turnovers were the big issue.

"I don't care what team you are, you turn the ball over that many times you're not going to be on the winning side of anything," Denis said.

Miscues also plagued the Otters in their loss to Windsor the week before, Denis said, but he is hopeful the 4-2 Otters, in fourth place in D-III, can bounce back when they host third-place Woodstock (5-1) at 1 p.m. on Saturday.

"We've got to get ready for Woodstock," he said. "Physically, we can match up no problem with them. Their speed is what we've got to worry about."

Regardless, Denis said, he pledged that the team "will be ready for the playoffs."

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