

# Rome Wolves Win Corky Kell Classic Game Against Marietta Blue Devils

Grit, determination and the will power of Rome High Football was on full display last night during the two-game Cork Kell Classic season opener. With the slow pace, fans of high football were glad they stayed at Barron Stadium until after midnight to see the Pack claw their way to their first victory of the 2018 season.

The hype surrounding Thursday night's Corky Kell Classic lived up to expectations as the two-time Class 5A state champion Rome Wolves took on the Class 7A Marietta Blue Devils.

The Calhoun Yellow Jackets secured the first win of the Corky Kell Classic against Ridgeland High with a score of 45-21.

Even though Rome High School's game against the Marietta Blue Devils was not to start until 8:30 p.m., there was already a sea of red in the home stands around 4:30 p.m.

Before the start of the big game, RHS football fans were surprised with the reveal of a new banner draped across Barron Stadium's press box celebrating the 2017 5A State Championship.

As the teams warmed up, so did the smack-talk. Mayor Jamie Doss and Marietta Mayor Steve Tumlin enjoyed a little pregame banter on the sidelines.

"We have enjoyed welcoming the mayor of Marietta to Rome and this is a wonderful way to celebrate two great cities playing in the Corky Kell Classic," said Mayor Doss. "However, if Rome wins this game, he will have to give us his biggest and loudest Rome Wolf Howl."

"I can't wait to see Mayor Doss wear our Big Chicken and do the Big Chicken Dance," laughed Mayor Tumlin.

"I'm pretty sure that at the end of this game, that no eyes will see the Chicken Dance," Mayor Doss laughed with his new-found rival.

Both leaders remained strong in the support of their teams, much like the economic impact the Cory Kell Classic had on Rome, according to City Manager, Sammy Rich.

"Corky Kell has been around since 1992, and has historically has been played in the Georgia Dome," Rich said. "That is a very large venue so for the organizers to choose Rome is huge for our community. Our goal is to continue to put a lot of focus on sports tourism and the energy and turnout has been amazing. The reports I'm getting from Broad Street are that restaurants are full and I suspect this is at least a half-million dollar impact for us. We have a great reputation of hosting big events because our volunteers show up and we offer the best of who we are to visitors."

Rich went on to mention the SPLOST dollars gained by hosting Corky Kell and he hopes Rome remains a premier destination for sports and entertainment.



Rhonda Wallace, Floyd County Commissioner, echoed Rich's thoughts. "Not only is the Rome High community pumped about tonight, but I think all the other schools are as well," she said. "We are so excited to be here and we have met people from all over our state enjoying the game at Barron tonight. We have also heard there are families who invited people from even further south than Georgia. This is truly phenomenal and I hope we will get the opportunity to host this event again. Everyone has bragged and bragged about how loving and inviting Rome and Floyd County has been to them. We have really made them feel at home and that is what we like to hear from our visitors."

Eric Tutt, a former Wolf himself, said that he wouldn't miss a chance to watch his home team take on a top ranked school like Marietta. And he said, if things shake out like last year, the Wolves are set to surprise a few folks again.

"This really is big time. It is big for our city. We've gone back-to-back, so our boys deserve to be put on a stage like this," Tutt said. "We should be okay, I think, even though we lost a little on the defensive side of the ball and our offense looks great. I expect us to look really strong on offense so I can't wait to see how the game pans out."

The momentum for the Wolves started slow as the Blue Devils struck first with 61-yard touchdown on the opening drive. This didn't stop the Wolves, however, as they fought hard, back and forth, until they broke their dry spell on third down with a 1:07 left on the clock. Knox Kadum completed pass to wideout Xavier Roberts-Donaldson for and 11 yard score, squaring things up at 7-7.

With 14 seconds left in the first quarter, Jamar Roberts intercepted a pass which gave Rome the ball starting the second quarter.

"Like always, I am honeymoon-happy and peacock-proud of our school and our community today," said Dr. Eric Holland, Rome High School Principal. "Anytime we get an opportunity to host an event of this magnitude, put heads in beds and increase our SPLOSTS dollars, and visitors eat at our local restaurants, it is great for our kids. This is a magical moment."

Holland also had a special message for the Rome fans who piled in the stands at Barron. "One Rome, no one of us is as great as all of us. We are a family and we always bring the sea of red and we support our kids."

Perhaps one of the most exciting moments of the first half was the huge quarterback sack by Rome's Derricus Smith with 10:22 to go in the second quarter. This built the momentum needed for the Wolves' defense to slow the Blue Devils down. Rome High went into halftime with the Blue Devil's trailing 37-21.

During halftime, Rome High School's Sound of the Seven Hills Marching Band blew everyone away with the debut of their new routine, which continued the enthusiasm among Rome High fans as the clock became 30 minutes shy of reaching midnight.

Going in to the third quarter, the Wolves continued to battle with the Blue Devils fighting multiple penalty flags. Rome scored their sixth touchdown with 5:03 to go in the third quarter, which was a 47-yard pass to from Knox Kadum to Xavier Roberts bringing the score to 44-27, Rome. The last touchdown was scored from a three-yard run by Jamious Griffin with 8:32 left in the fourth quarter.

In true Rome Wolves fashion, the unrelenting defense held the Blue Devils until the end of the game with a winning score of 51-41 Rome Wolves. A bone-crushing team-tackle caused a fumble as Marietta was about to score and close out the game, the big hit giving the 2018 Wolves their first taste of victory.

The stir around the stadium was comparatively different as the Corky Kell was not a usual Rome High School football game. There were local sponsors who hosted hospitality tents set up all around the stands, as well as multiple scouts with their eyes peeled as the Corky Kell served as a major scouting opportunity.

John Reid, Head Coach and Athletic Director for RCS, revealed how tough this game was for his players, as this was perhaps one of the hardest games the Wolves will play all season.

“One of our goals is to win,” said Coach John Reid, “and playing a team like Marietta is like playing a state championship game out of the gate. They are as good as any top team in the state. We have some new guys on the field and that leads to a few mistakes, but we still have a tradition of playing hard football. We bend but we don’t break.”

Reid went on to say that he anticipated the grinding nature and hard fought yards of this game.

“I figured we would have to play really hard for this one and our kids are use to winning by 28 points. That was a fear of mine because that is what is ingrained in their heads. I had a few of our players look at me like they were cramping a little bit and I had to tell them that this is what it is like to be in a game like this. We always live by the old adage that you can only get in shape by playing yourself into shape and that is what they found out tonight,” Reid said.

He attributed their ability to secure the win to strong play of the defensive backs, who gave up roughly six inches in height to the Blue Devil receivers. Also, the execution on offense was key. However, he did say they will work to improve on the 185 yards in penalties Rome accrued over the course of the game.

“Our fans are unbelievable and I know it is late. Too bad it is not Friday,” Reid laughed, “but they filled the seats and they are a tremendous support for our team. They brought the Corky Kell all the way up here to Northwest Georgia and that is pretty incredible. Everyone involved has done a great job.”