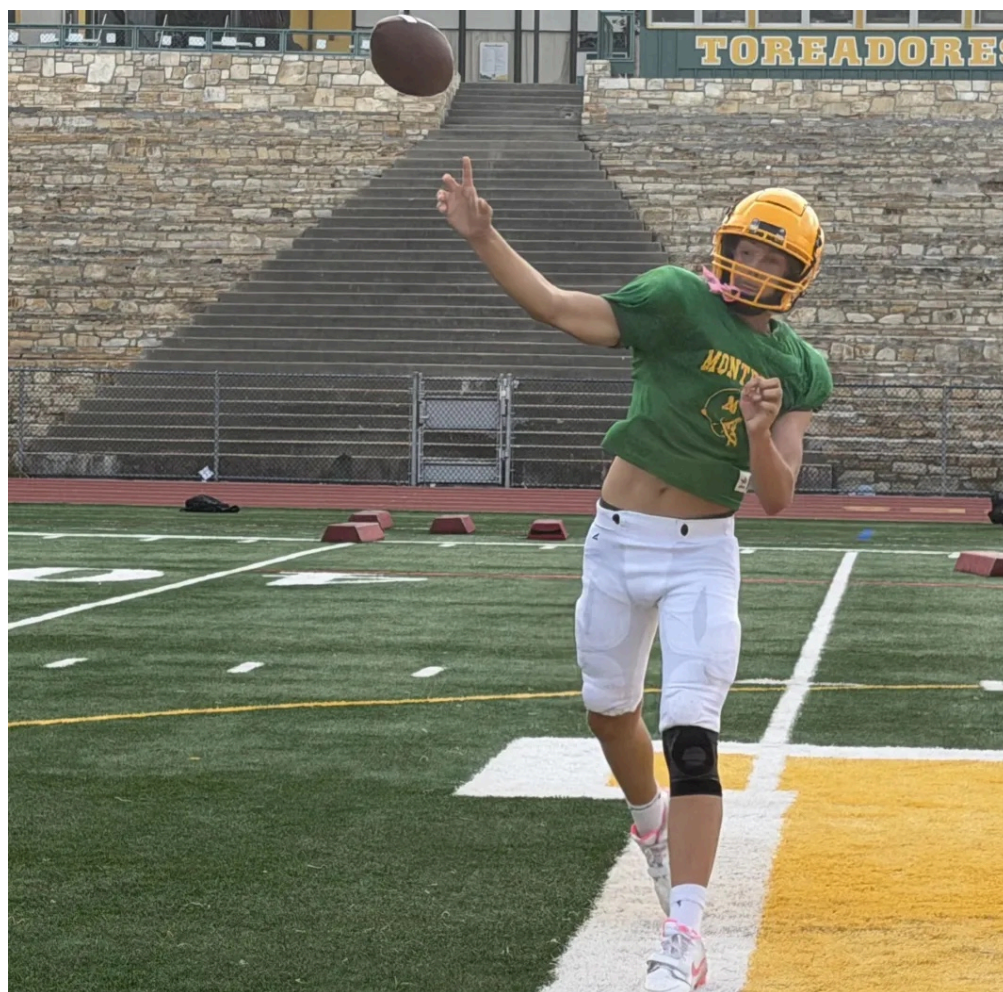


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Thursday night football: Monterey stops 2-point conversation to preserve win





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MONTEREY — The situation was eerily similar to last year's season opener on Thursday, only with the roles reversed, as well as the site.

Instead of Monterey High going for a 2-point conversion and an eventual win, it was Christopher changing its mind and going for two in the final three minutes of a one-point game.

"They brought the kicker out and then called a time out," Monterey football coach Alex Besaw said. "It felt a lot like last year. We did the same thing to them. Now we are trying to stop a 2-point conversion."

The Toreadores defense rose to the occasion, as five players converged to stop Christopher just short of the goal line, preserving a 27-26 win.





Monterey's Bronson Gulley. (John Devine -- Monterey Herald)

"We had a nice gang tackle and stopped the runner just short enough," said Besaw, who is 5-0 in season openers — including last year's 22-21 win at Christopher as the Toreros' head coach.

Injuries crippled the Toreros last year, who dropped their last four games to miss the postseason for the first time since Besaw took the program five years ago.

"We have some areas to clean up," Besaw said. "I felt we had a good game

In part, because the Toreadores offense, behind tailback Naesean Mitchell's big first half, jumped out to a 27-7 lead midway through the third quarter.

Besaw slowed the game down, looking to milk the clock and give his defense as much rest as possible.

"I think fatigue set in the second half," Besaw said. "With that, you have to be laser sharp and focused when you're tired. We had a difficult time withstanding that. We are still young."

Mitchell had a pair of explosive plays in the first half that led to his own touchdown and one from Missouri transfer Cassius Guilleroy in the second quarter.

Recovering an on-side kick just before halftime, Monterey marched downfield and built a 19-7 halftime lead on a touchdown run from Zander Morse.

"We're still figuring out our rotation," Besaw said. "Our running backs did a great job tonight. We had a nice blend. Naesean is very explosive and shifty. Cassious is just flat-out fast."

"When sophomore quarterback Logan Vanderberg-Grace connected with converted tight end Bronson Gulley on a 22-yard scoring strike, the Toreadores opened up a 20-point cushion late in the third quarter.

A former member of the Pacific Coast Athletic League's Gabilan Division, the Cougars have been to the playoffs five consecutive years as a member of the Mount Hamilton Division of the Blossom Valley Athletic League.

With a number of players forced to go both ways for Monterey — particularly in the trenches as 33 players suited up, fatigue set in over the final 12 minutes as Christopher ran off 19 unanswered points to cut the deficit to 1 with 3:15 remaining.

The Toreadores, though, put together one big stop on Christopher's 2-point attempt, with the offense grinding out the final minutes to preserve the win.

"We found a way to make it close," said Besaw, whose Toreadores will visit Seaside next Saturday in the Battle of the Bay. "Coming away with the win was huge. It was a good learning experience."

Monterey 27, Christopher 26

Rancho San Juan 22, Gilroy 21

King City 26, Greenfield 0

North Salinas 41, Live Oak 28

Independence 21, Marina 12

Monte Vista 16, Seaside 8

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Laney 27, MPC 23

FRIDAY'S GAMES

Pacific Grove at Carmel, 7 p.m.

Clovis at Salinas, 7:30 p.m.

Soledad at Hollister, 7:30 p.m.

Alisal at Alvarez, 7:30 p.m.

North County vs. Palma at Rabobank Stadium, Salinas, 7:30 p.m.

Scotts Valley at Gonzales, 7:30 p.m.

SATURDAY'S GAMES

Leland at Stevenson, 2 p.m.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Hartnell at Delta, 1 p.m.

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