



By Pastor Vince Carrig

Sports Writer

Senior Plainsmen Vinny Ross, Alex Johnston and Elliot Carlson hated watching and participating in a 23-year losing streak* to the Cambridge Trojans and avenged their pain with a 44-22 blowout win Friday night in Grant.

"It's just an amazing experience. We've all been looking forward to this ever since we were freshmen because we've never beaten [Cambridge] before. It's definitely a great experience, one of the best in high school," the 6-foot-4, 270 pound lineman Ross said after the game.

Carlson continued his dominance from the backfield, rushing for five touchdowns and 244 yards as Perkins County mounted a 44-7 third quarter lead.

Carlson bookended the blowout with two video-game touchdown runs. He opened the game's scoring by running 75 yards untouched; only Trojans safety Kaden Huxoll even got a sniff of Carlson as he whizzed by toward the left sideline.

No Cambridge defender clamped on Carlson as he ran 55 yards to roll the score to 44-7, either. The Plainsmen found that the "up-the-middle" call worked for the senior quarterback, who sliced beyond defensive back Trevor Fritz and split T.J. Gregory and Taylor Kubik with nary a scratch.

The Trojans appeared ready for a street fight after marching methodically up the field to even the score at 7-7. Fullback Zane Peterson turned upfield for 24 yards after quarterback T.J. Gregory rolled right and hit him in stride in the drive's key play. Running back Jordan Volk

leaped in front of Trojans wide receiver Jake Witte in the left corner of the end zone to grab a four-yard touchdown catch from Gregory 7:47 into the first quarter.

Excellent Plainsmen defense, highlighted by junior cornerback Garrett Toner invading the Trojans backfield to wrestle down Zack Moore for a loss, returned Perkins County's offense to the field quickly.

Perkins County's defensive backs consistently thwarted Cambridge's game plan to roll Gregory out, connect on a short pass, and allow their receivers to make defenders miss in the open field. Toner hauled down four Trojans himself, as did fellow defensive back Chase Miyamoto; Austin Thelander made three solo tackles.

Junior running back Tim Johnson began chipping away at Cambridge's defense on the Plainsmen's third possession, reversing right-to-left and turning west for a 16-yard gain. Carlson then used perfect blocking from center Vinny Ross, who locked up linebacker Petersen, and guard Blake Poppe, who handcuffed Trojans tackle Krayton Banzhaf to sneak straight up the middle of the field 49 yards for a 14-7 Perkins County lead.

Defensive backs Thelander and Toner escaped their blockers to kill receiver Huxoll's reverse play and force Cambridge to punt on the Trojans' fourth drive.

Carlson broke two tackles and fled to the left sideline to return Petersen's punt 37 yards. The senior quarterback, who now has 888 rushing yards midway through the season, ran straight up the middle for 12 yards and then shed two tacklers for a 13-yard score and a 20-7 Plainsmen advantage.

"Every time it's always the blocking—you see how hard those guys are blocking—and even before I break into the open field I know [the run] is going to be big for us. That was a big win for us, lots of momentum..." Carlson said.

Spurred by the offense's success, Toner killed a Cambridge draw play and junior defensive back Matt Sestak sacked Gregory hard to force another Trojans Punt.

Johnson did most of the heavy lifting on the Plainsmen's only field goal drive to run the score to 23-7 with 2:34 left in the half. He swung wide right for 21 rushing yards, sat down in the middle and spun left for a 41-yard reception, and booted a 22-yard kick between the uprights.

The pass rush in high gear, the Plainsmen then forced the Trojans to surrender the ball after four downs by influencing three-consecutive Gregory incompletions.

Senior Alex Johnston next showed off his second-level acceleration, sweeping left and steaming up the sideline for a 37-yard touchdown run with under a minute left in the half.

"I just saw a lot of defensive guys over-pursuing, so I had to cut it back and get upfield. It feels good to be back to speed now and recovered a little bit from my hamstring [injury], and since [defenses are] keying on Elliot now, I should have some open runs," the 6-foot, 200 pound running back said.

Halftime gave the Trojans no rest from the Plainsmen running game, which turned Friday into their nightmare. Returner Kaleb Vak took Cambridge's kickoff 36 yards, then Johnson cut by one tackler and outran another for a 40-yard chunk of field before Carlson brushed off four hits for an 11-yard touchdown run.

The three-headed backfield of Carlson, Johnson and Johnston gained 429 ground yards.

Ahead 37-7, the Plainsmen defense teed off on Cambridge's passing offense, with Sestak and Johnston blitzing Gregory and forcing early throws and harmless incompletions.

The Trojans' second failed fourth-down conversion attempt allowed Carlson to run 82 yards and a touchdown, except that a penalty ruined all of that fun. Had run yardage stood, the quarterback would have broken his own single-game rushing record of 308 yards.

The yellow hanky only stalled the inevitable: Carlson soon “settled” for the 55-yard touchdown run that spun the score to 44-7 with 17:18 left.

Gregory rolled right and floated a pass to Petersen for a six-yard touchdown and sophomore back Fritz carried 11 yards with 20 seconds left to tidy up the Cambridge side of the scoreboard.

“I figured it would be a little closer game because it’s always two teams that fight tough to play each other; I didn’t really expect us to come out [and win by] 30-7 at halftime,” Ross said.

*Perkins County and Cambridge schools have not played football against one another every year of those 23 years.

Next Action

The 4-0 Plainsmen remain home as Kimball drives southeast to provide the opposition. The 2-3 Longhorns joined the Plainsmen in overtaking Dundy County-Stratton, but common opponents Hershey and Cambridge slaughtered them on the scoreboard by a combined 79-16 score.

PC 44, Cambridge 22

	1	2	3	4	
Cambridge	7	0	0	15	—22
Perkins Co.	7	23	14	0	—44

Rushing leaders—Perkins County: 15-244 (75T) 5TD; Johnson 8-100 (40); Johnston 5-85 (37T) TD; Cambridge: Moore 13-47 (15); Fritz 2-41 (30) TD; Gregory 9-32 (18).

Passing leaders—Perkins County: Carlson 2-5-44; Cambridge: Gregory 16-33-160-2.

Receiving leaders—Perkins County: Johnson 1-41; Miyamoto 1-3; Cambridge: Witte 3-52 (41); Volk 7-43 (9) TD; Petersen 3-38 (26) TD.

Tackling leaders—Perkins County: Miyamoto 7 (4); Ross 5.5 (3); Thelander 5(3); Toner 4.5 (4) Malmkar 4 (2); Johnson 3.5 (3); Johnston 3.5 (1); Poppe 3 (2).

