

2021 STATE FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT



Jonah Gruenes was the Minneota recipient of the Most Valuable Teammate award after the game.

Football Continued from Page 1

Minneota (13-1) jumped out to a quick 7-0 advantage on the Crusaders with relative ease, as it so often did throughout the season.

On their second possession of the game, the Vikings marched 75 yards in 11 plays, capping off the drive with a three-yard scoring run by Anthony Rybinski with 3:12 left in the opening quarter. Peyton Gillund added the extra point.

On its next possession, Minneota was forced to punt and Gillund pinned the Crusaders back on their own seven. But it took Mayer Lutheran only seven plays to cover those 93 yards, including a 41-yard TD pass from Ty Hoese to Dennis Samuel. Jonah Gruenes blocked the extra point and kept the Vikings in the lead at 7-6.

"Sports are a game of momentum and in that case, I thought early in the game we were doing some good things, moving the ball," Johnston said. "Unfortunately, we got some turnovers at crucial times, including one that gave them the go-ahead touchdown."

Mayer grabbed the lead at 13-7 following a fumble recovery on the Minneota 29. Dylan Nelson scampered 16 yards on the first play and Cole Neitzel scored from 13 yards out on the next play.

It looked like the Vikings would trail at halftime after being forced to punt with only 54 seconds left. Instead of letting the ball die, Mayer Lutheran tried to pick it up and run. Hudson Scholten hit the return man and forced him to fumble and Jack Lacek recovered at the Crusaders' 22.

Isaac Pohlen then floated a pass out to Gruenes, who caught it at the 14 and turned upfield. By the time he reached the 12-yard line, the Crusader defenders converged on him. Gruenes kept his legs driving and dragged three defenders the final 10 yards into the end zone, giving the Vikings a 14-13 lead at intermission.

"I caught the ball and turned and ran. I wasn't thinking about scoring," Gruenes said. "I just didn't want to go down. I give credit to Coach Engler's buddy carries. I definitely would not have scored if my center, Cole Myhre, hadn't

come and pushed the pile. Three of those points should really go to him."

The only score in the second half for either team ended up costing the Vikings the game. It came on the Crusaders' first possession of the second half.

"During the game we would be getting close to scoring and either have something so wrong with either fumbling or missing a block and getting sacked," Esping said. "I believe our team did not play up to our potential in the championship. We did not do many things well during the game as a team."

Cole Neitzel worked his way into the end zone from six yards out to cap an 11-play, 80-yard drive that included eight running plays, three pass plays and a roughing-the-passer penalty.

"At halftime we talked about not being able to make mistakes against a good team like Mayer Lutheran," Johnston said. "A couple of penalties hurt us a little, too."

Minneota was unable to sustain a drive of more than seven plays the rest of the way.

"I do feel we didn't play up to our full potential and I'll take blame myself that I didn't recognize the blocking schemes Mayer had leaving them to run right past me multiple times," said Gamrak. "We missed crucial blocks, tackles and catches. We figured ourselves out eventually on defense but couldn't pick ourselves back on offense. I'm not taking anything away from Mayer, what they did was impressive."

Conner Sik was able to gain 67 yards on the ground for the Vikings. Gruenes, who was named the Most Valuable Teammate of the game, played a strong game on both sides of the ball with a touchdown, a blocked extra point and six tackles.

"I am extremely proud of my team and all that we accomplished," said Gruenes. "Going into the season I did not imagine that we would be in the position to play for the state championship. It was definitely an experience that I will remember for the rest of my life."

Tucker Thoof amassed a team-high 13 tackles for the Vikings. Scholten and Esping each had two tackles for losses.

"We had great coaches leading the way, as well

as seniors and younger guys stepping up to help lead," said Gamrak. "This will be a team that goes down in the history book. I trust that they'll be back next year tearing it up at the Bank again."

Mayer Lutheran 20, Minneota 14

Mayer Lutheran	0	13	7	0	-20
Minneota	7	7	0	0	-14

Scoring Plays

- Min** - Anthony Rybinski 3 run (Peyton Gillund kick)
- ML** - Samuel Dennis 41 pass from Ty Hoese (kick blocked)
- ML** - Cole Neitzel 13 run (Conner Olsen kick)
- Min** - Jonah Gruenes 22 pass from Isaac Pohlen (Gillund kick)
- ML** - Neitzel 6 run (Olsen kick)

Team Totals

Total Plays: Minneota 56, Mayer Lutheran 67. **Total Yards:** Minneota 177, Mayer Lutheran 308. **Passing Yards:** Minneota 93, Mayer Lutheran 146. **Rushing Yards:** Minneota 84, Mayer Lutheran 162. **First Downs:** Minneota 10, Mayer Lutheran 17. **Turnovers:** Minneota 2, Mayer Lutheran 1. **Penalties:** Minneota 5-11, Mayer Lutheran 8-30.

Minneota Statistics

RUSHING (att-yds): Conner Silk 17-67, Anthony Rybinski 3-23, Jonah Gruenes 5-20, AJ Josephson 3-1, Isaac Pohlen 2(-21).

PASSING (com-att-yds-td-int): Pohlen 8-2-93-1-0

RECEIVING (rec-yds): Rybinski 4-66, Gruenes 2-28, Sik 2(-1)

TACKLES (solo-assisted): Gruenes 4-2, Tucker Thoof 4-9, Zack Fier 4-3, Hudson Scholten 3-3, Peyton Gillund 3-2, Sik 2-1, Rybinski 2-4, Jackson Esping 2-2, Alex DePestel 2-1, Ryan Dalager 2-0, Cale Sorensen 1-1, Jack Lacek 1-0, Landon DeSmet 1-0, Josephson 0-2, Jayden Gamrak 0-2, Andrew Lipinski 0-1, Ryan Meagher 0-1.

SACKS: DePestel 2, Esping 1.

TACKLES FOR LOSS: Scholten 2, Esping 2, DePestel 1.

INTERCEPTIONS: None

PUNTING (no-avg.): Gillund 5-38.0

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Minnesota coach Chad Johnston chats with officials before the game as the Vikings warm up behind him.



Minnesota players huddle up before a play in the state final at U.S. Bank Stadium.



Vikings quarterback Isaac Pohlen (12) looks over the Mayer Lutheran defense before getting the snap from center Cole Myhre.

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