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Controversial calls break Wolves' hearts

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The New Trier Trevians were already a formidable opponent for the Niles West Wolves in their pursuit of Maine South for a conference championship and possibly a state playoff game at home. The Wolves didn't anticipate that they would also be battling the officials and at times, themselves.

Several controversial pass interference calls against West, along with legitimate penalties they could have done without, eventually led to their demise in a heartbreaking 22-21 loss at New Trier last Friday.

The 22 points given up by the Wolves were not indicative of the way the team played defensively. The Trevians picked up more than 200 yards on the ground against top defensive team, Maine South. On this night, they would be relegated to less than 100 rushing yards by a sound Wolves defensive effort.

Niles West's offense was eventually able to take advantage of the opportunities bestowed upon them by the defense when they finally broke through against the New Trier defense in the first half.

The scoring began on a 50+ yard touchdown run by senior running back Blerim Delisi, which would later be followed by an exciting 17-yard touchdown run on a reverse play by senior running back Walter Mendenhall on fourth and goal. It appeared that the score would remain at 14-0 in favor of the Wolves going into halftime when senior quarterback Mike Pantazis' last-minute interception gave New Trier possession.

One of many questionable pass interference calls quickly put the Trevians into field goal range. The homestanding Trevians got on the board for three points as the half ended and the Wolves held a 14-3 lead.

The second half began inauspiciously for Niles West when New Trier quarterback Casey Napoleon uncorked a 60-yard touchdown pass to cut the score to 14-9 after failing on a two-point conversion attempt.

After possession changed hands a couple of times, the West defense landed a couple of key sacks and forced the Trevians to punt out of their own end zone. The Wolves offense capitalized on the strong field possession to

increase the lead to 21-9 on a spectacular leaping touchdown catch by Walter Mendenhall.

It appeared West would ride the 12-point lead for the remaining 7:43 to a major road victory when disaster struck.

Another controversial pass interference call set up a 16-yard Trevian touchdown pass to

A profoundly disappointed coach Mark Egofske declined to comment after the game, but said Tuesday that he felt it was a shame to lose a game in which the Wolves had played so well.

"We played an outstanding defensive game, while being able to get 370 yards on the ground. We missed opportunities to



close the lead to 21-16 with an awfully long-looking six minutes left on the game clock.

Undaunted, the Wolves mounted an extended drive and had a chance to run out the clock on a fourth down and two at the New Trier 36 yard line. The attempt failed for a loss of two, and the Trevians took over at their own 38 yard line with no timeouts and only 1:00 left to work with.

A couple of big plays for New Trier set them up at the West 18 with 30 seconds left in the game. The Trevians came through on an 18 yard touchdown pass to take a 22-21 lead with :18 left.

The stunned West offense couldn't score the miracle touchdown it was looking for, and the team fell to 5-3, 2-2 in the conference.

score points" said Egofske.

Egofske downplayed the impact of the disputed penalties, saying, "There were a lot of questionable calls out there, but you can't control it. You just have to move forward," Egofske said.

Athletic director Steve Heuerman was less forgiving, calling the officiating, "The worst in [my] 21 years [in high school athletics]."

Despite the loss the Wolves' five wins assure them a spot in the Class 8A IHSA State Playoffs.

They play their season finale at Glenbrook South this Friday night, hoping to secure a first-round home game Halloween weekend.