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Trojans Ride Staunch Defensive Effort to 20-10 Victory Over Divine Child ^[1]

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By:

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Above: East Lansing senior quarterback Joe Benbraham calls a play during Thursday night's game against Divine Child in Dearborn. The Trojans won 20-10 to improve their record to 2-0.

There's something about the sudden crackle of a pad-popping tackle that naturally elevates the spirits of those delivering the crunch.

Times two and they can have a huge impact on a close game.

Toss in a timely interception and you wind up with a defensive performance early in the season that makes the difference between winning and losing.

East Lansing had all of that and more Thursday in its 20-10 victory over Divine Child. Outside the visitors' locker room, East Lansing senior linebacker Justin Brown, de facto leader of the Crunch

Bunch, could not suppress his enthusiasm for what had just taken place.

"Our defense, we just play together," said Brown, who forced a key turnover in the second quarter with one of the aforementioned hits on Divine Child quarterback Cameron Urbanick. "We have a lot of chemistry on defense, we've been playing together since seventh grade. And we're a pretty athletic bunch."

With the score tied at 3 and five minutes to play in the first half, Brown blitzed Urbanick and forced a fumble. Senior linebacker Noah Iosefa scooped up the loose ball and carried it to the Divine Child 15 yard line. Two plays later, senior running back Kobe Hayward scored from 12 yards out to put the Trojans ahead to stay.

Brown said he was on his own when he blitzed around left end.

"I looked at my defensive coach (Gianni Feraco) and he gave me the go signal," Brown said. "We have a good connection. We were thinking the same thing."

On the very next series, Hayward from his defensive back position drove the ball out of the hands of Divine Child's 235-pound tailback Tyler Whiteside and recovered the fumble at the DC 22. Though the Trojans failed to capitalize on the turnover, the game's tempo had turned quickly in favor of East Lansing.

"Midway through the third quarter, he (Whiteside) started to feel the shock of the collisions that he had absorbed earlier in the game," East Lansing coach Bill Feraco said. "Every Wednesday we practice ripping and recovering the ball, and we do a great job preparing for it. So it doesn't surprise me that we make those kind of plays."

Brown had plenty of help on the defense. Senior defensive back Kaleb Elam intercepted two Divine Child passes while junior linebackers Jayth Joseph and Jamar Mills combined for 19 tackles many of which slowed down Whiteside or kept Falcon quarterbacks Urbanick and Joshua DePaulis in check.

Offensively, Hayward carried 22 times for 119 yards and scored both of the Trojan touchdowns. His second touchdown, a 3-yard run midway through the third quarter, capped an eight-play, 60-yard drive in which Hayward carried the ball five times for 48 yards.

Senior quarterback Joe Benbraham, who missed last week's game vs. St. Johns, completed a pair of passes to Jack Morse on that drive and showed the type of leadership that Feraco said is critical for the team's success.

"In reality, Joe had the upper hand in camp but there was an internal matter that had to be taken care of (last week)," Feraco said. "We evaluated this week in practice and both Joe and (junior quarterback) Sam Busch competed well. We thought for this game Joe had a better command of things. We'll build from there."

And take a much-needed holiday break. The Trojans have had a day and a half off from practice or games since the official beginning of the season Aug. 6.

"It's extremely satisfying to be in this situation," Feraco said. "We're going to take a few days

off and refresh.?

And get ready for Grand Ledge, whom the Trojans will host at 7 p.m. Friday, Sept. 7, in the CAAC Blue opener for both teams.



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