

Grand Island blanks Macks

By [Keith McShea](#) | News Sports Reporter

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Grand Island coach Dean Santorio gave his team a “word of the day” prior to its Class A quarterfinal against McKinley.

The word was “relentless.”

And the Vikings were certainly that, right from their very first drive.

Grand Island marched down the field on its first possession, scoring a touchdown, and for the rest of the night its defense and special teams shined as the Vikings knocked off higher-seeded and higher-ranked McKinley, 23-0.

“That’s just how you play a playoff game – that was the most fun I’ve had all year,” said senior defensive end Tommy Doctor. “Coach said the word of the day was relentless, and I feel that’s exactly how we played. We never gave up on anything – McKinley’s a great team, they’re so athletic, but we stayed relentless.”

The 6-foot-4, 235-pound Doctor had two sacks in helping Grand Island to its first shutout of the season, while 5-9, 160-pound sophomore running back Jarod Brandon ran 31 times for 168 yards and two touchdowns – including one on GI’s opening drive.

The Vikings ran for a total of 220 yards while they blocked a punt, deflected another, recorded a safety and recovered three fumbles.

“I can’t say enough about how our kids prepared, and then executing,” said Santorio. “That’s always the difference. Every player works hard, every coach works hard, in every program. It comes down to game night, and how much do you execute, how well do you put it together. And I’ve got to say, we put it together about as well as we could have ever expected, so I’m very proud of the kids for that.”

In one of 19 Section VI playoff games this weekend, Grand Island traveled to Riverside High’s Charles Dingboom Field for a battle of top 10 large schools – but the Vikings showed everyone that the polls had it wrong.

McKinley (6-2), the third-seeded Class A team as champions of A Central, came into the game as the co-No. 8 large school. No. 10 Grand Island (7-1), which finished second in Class A North and was seeded sixth, was ranked 10th.

Grand Island wasn’t the only team knocking off a higher-seeded Buffalo Public School on its side of the bracket, and the result is that it will host next week’s semifinal. GI will play seventh-seeded Williamsville North (5-3), which beat second-seeded and No. 6 large school South Park, 21-0.

The Vikings had the upper hand the entire evening, starting with a tremendous opening drive which included several strong runs – through some very nice holes – by Brandon.

“Our coaches told us we were going to run the ball right down the middle the first drive of the game, and that’s exactly what we did,” said Brandon, who began the season on the JV team.

Brandon finished the drive with a 5-yard run for a 7-0 GI lead halfway through the first quarter.

The Vikings would hold their 7-0 lead until they claimed control of the game with a 16-point third quarter. Grand Island recovered a fumble in McKinley territory leading to an 11-yard run by Brandon with 8:42 left in the third.

On the Vikings’ next drive, senior Quinn Corrao delivered a nifty pass – one of just three passing attempts in the game – to Sukmanowski on the right side for an 11-yard score with 3:40 left in the third.

“All week we trained for this,” said senior running back Paul Sukmanowski. “We knew they were faster than us, but we had to be more physical.”