

11-0 GRIDDEERS OWN BEST YEAR IN AC HISTORY, RANK FOURTH

STAFF SPECIAL

Football seasons do not come any greater than the 1972 campaign recently completed by Coach Fred Martinelli's Ashland College Eagles.

It just is not an everyday occurrence that a team sets a perfect 11-0 record, setting 45 school records, leading the nation in defense and finishing fourth and seventh in the national College-Division grid polls.

All those impressive things came the Eagles' way this season as Ashland College soared to its greatest heights ever on the gridiron.

Looking back on the year, Coach Martinelli had to admit that he was "a little surprised with the outcome." The Eagle mentor stated, "I knew we would have a great team but I never dreamed we would do everything that we did this season."

The coach and Eagle fans had their doubts early in the season. Ashland opened with a lackluster performance against host Franklin College en route to a 14-7 win. An 81-yard punt return for a touchdown by Dave Burke was the decisive score. The defense came up with the play of the game when a Phil Powell pass was batted down in the end zone by Bud Boughton on the last play of the game. The quarterback ended up with 22 completions for 256 yards, however. Franklin went on to win nine straight and earn a spot in the NAIA playoffs.

Then came another squeaker when Ashland rolled up 17 points in the second half for a 17-7 victory over Capital University. All of AC's scoring came in a nine-minute span of time when quarterback Ron Slater hit split end Bob Rosati on two TD passes and Jeff Groza connected on a 22-yard field goal.

The Eagles finally "arrived" in the 51-7 explosion over host Edinboro State College, which carried a regular-season undefeated streak of 22 games into the contest. Ashland bolted for 427 yards in total offense, including 264 on the ground. Bob Mahl rushed for 133 yards as the starters played little more than half the game. Fullback Jon Viar bulldozed over for three TD's.

One of the most thrilling Ashland wins ever came in the 33-3 demolition of Wittenberg University. Ashland scored on its first three possessions, ate up 450 yards in total offense and Rosati caught eight passes en route to handing the Tigers their worst loss in 12 years.

Ashland smeared Muskingum College in total offense, 409 yards to 170, but had a little more trouble on the scoreboard in a 23-10 win. The passing combo of Slater and Rosati shattered school marks on pass completions and receptions, respectively. Mahl gained 166 yards in 31 carries, including 106 yards in the first half.

The Eagles finally stepped into the national ratings and showed off their stuff against Central State University, jumping to a 27-3 halftime lead and then laying off a bit in the 27-9 triumph. Ashland scored the first four times it had the ball. The game did prove very costly, however, as tailback Mahl suffered a knee injury which was to keep him out of the next four games.

The injury-bug really struck hard when six Eagles left the game due to injuries in the 27-10 win over Ohio Northern University. Linebacker Dick Miller returned an interception for a TD and had 15 tackles, sharing heroics with another sharp passing game. The Polar Bears' lone score came on a 76-yard punt return.

Ashland gained sweet revenge for its previous two losses against Hillsdale (Mich.) College with a smashing 20-6 victory before 5600 Homecoming fans. Ashland gained 221 yards on the ground against the defense which was ranked number one in the NAIA. The top Eagle was Mike Collins who was the seventh tailback used since Mahl's injury. Collins ran for 154 yards in 22 carries, including a 64-yard scamper.

The Eagles got off to a slow start but a 27-point second half destroyed Waynesburg (Pa.) College 41-0. Collins' 94 yards rushing led a 464-yard total offensive output. The Eagle defense prided itself on allowing only four yards rushing.

Things never looked better for Ashland in the 55-0 romp past Northwood (Mich.) Institute. Ashland chewed up a 34-0 half-time lead and Jamie Martin came off the bench for 119 yards in 14 carries. The defense against the run was once again brilliant, permitting only 52 yards.

That eleventh straight win looked easy when the Eagles pounded Fairmont State (W. Va.) College, 46-3. Records fell fast as the Eagles totaled 507 yards, including 332 through the air on 21 completions in 30 attempts. Slater fired 16 completions in 24 attempts for 285 yards, including two TD tosses to Rosati. Collins piled up 151 yards in 18 attempts, scoring twice.

Ashland ended up with its highest national ratings ever in football. The team was selected fourth in the Associated Press poll, only two votes out of third place. United Press International and Football News named the Eagles seventh.

Looking over the season, Martinelli commented, "It is just unbelievable the way this team played. We got off to a slow start and then, all of a sudden, caught fire. We played our finest football late in the season. This club got better almost every week of the season. In fact, we outscored our opponents 142-3 over our last three games."

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