

Five takeaways from the area round high school football playoffs

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1 After impressing with its first season in Class 5A, the Cooper Pirates had a premature exit.

“We were hoping obviously to get past that one,” Cooper coach Max Kattwinkel said of his team’s 32-14 loss to El Paso Eastlake in the area round. “But I’m proud of those kids. They did a good job for their first year in 5A.

“It’s hard because of how far we went last year. Those kids felt a lot of pressure to get there again. When you look at the big picture in us moving up in the classification, I’m really happy with that they did.”

Cooper (8-4) opened this season with a 2-2 stretch in which it beat Idalou and then-top ranked Class 4A Stephenville and lost to Randall and Frenship.

“I definitely think from day one, their expectations were pretty high,” Kattwinkel said. “But I do think they feel it was (premature). I don’t want them to walk away from that without realizing what they’ve done for the program. They set the bar pretty high. We have to follow up on it.”

Eastlake scored four unanswered touchdowns, including 21 points in the fourth quarter to seal the win.

It was also able to stymie a Pirates offense that scored at least 34 points in all but one of its wins this season.

“(Eastlake’s size) was a little bit more than what we anticipated and their speed,” Kattwinkel said. “They are very athletic and speedy. The film didn’t do them justice. They caught us a little off guard.”

2 Levelland lost in the manner it did because it was unable to protect its quarterback Nick Gerber, the area passing leader, was sacked seven times by Abilene Wylie.

The Lobos offense still managed 21 points and whenever Gerber was given time, coach Jared Sanderson’s team was able to string plays together.

The game, which eventually turned into a 75-21 loss for Levelland, started to unravel when Gerber was chased around the field and often found himself with his shoulders toward the sidelines instead of upfield.

3 As indicated by three undefeated teams in Class 2A in the regular season, lower classification teams are the strongest squads in the area Crosbyton, Abernathy, Seagraves – all 11-0 – and Shallowater (11-1) are the only teams remaining after an area round in which 11 area teams lost.

“I didn’t want to play Friday,” Seagraves coach Steve Heryford said. “You want the hidden benefit. After going 10-0 and having an off week (with a bi-district bye), you start getting practice habits instead of game habits. We haven’t had to play four quarters of football in a while and I wasn’t sure if we were ready mentally.”

Heryford told his team about the four Top-10 ranked Class 2A teams that lost the night before the Eagles faced Gruver, including Quanah’s stunning win over Booker.

“I brought that up,” Heryford said. “Regular season records (don’t matter).”

4 Estacado was on the receiving end of an outstanding individual effort As expected, the Matadors moved the ball against Stephenville just as they had done all year, rushing for 311 yards and passing for 355 yards.It's 69-60 loss in the area round to Stephenville was due to Jarrett Stidham's return.

He threw for six scores, ran for three and combined for more than 500 yards alone. The Texas Tech-bound senior wasn't due back for another two weeks because of a broken bone in his hand, but after getting cleared Monday, he returned and singlehandedly spoiled Estacado's season.

5 Monterey progressed despite a 50-14 loss a year ago at this time, Monterey's season had already been concluded for a week after a lopsided loss to Amarillo High.

This year, the Plainsmen clinched a playoff spot in the bi-district round and beat El Paso Americas at home before facing San Angelo Central in the area round.

The Bobcats opened the game with an interception of Baylor Mitchell deep in Monterey's territory and continued to add to their lead. There was a 2:13 span in the contest when Monterey had everyone's attention in Grande Communication Stadium: the Plainsmen scored two touchdowns on Vincent Johnson touchdown runs that sandwiched an onside kick recovery.

That 14-point swing temporarily brought Monterey to within two scores of San Angelo Central.

After the game, first year coach Wayne Hutchinson said he wanted to win the game, but also explained the value in bringing his junior varsity along to experience a playoff atmosphere.

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