

BY RANDY SKUBEK
Bulletin Sports Editor

Days later — and we're talking more than a few, here — Greater Latrobe head coach Pat Murray still wasn't over his team's last-minute loss to Fox Chapel last Friday.

As for the Wildcats...well, it probably took a lot less time for them.

"I think the kids are more resilient than I am. They've probably already put it in the back of their minds," Murray suggested.

"It" was the debacle that was yet another loss — the fourth straight — to a Fox Chapel team that, despite its own struggles, has given Greater Latrobe nothing but fits. The latest came last week when the Wildcats gave up two fourth-quarter touchdowns, the second with under a minute left after Fox Chapel went 82 yards in just 1:18, and wound up on the wrong end of a 28-24 score.

"It was probably the most difficult, disappointing loss I've been involved in in 22 years of coaching high school football," Murray expressed.

"Again, it was just one play on either side of the ball. We just needed one more first down or one stop on defense, and we just couldn't get it."

First, GL quarterback Eric Shaffer for no gain on third down and two from the Fox Chapel 44. Then, Shaffer and wide receiver Tony Lonigro weren't able to hook up on a third and five from the 49.

"Offensively, it just comes down to execution," Murray simplified.

"On the third and five play toward the end of the game, we knew they were going to put a lot of people in the box," Murray continued. "We felt we had a great opportunity to put the ball in the hands of our two best offensive players, and we got the exact defense we felt that they would run with press coverage, and we thought we had the perfect pass play called where we just throw the ball down the field, and we couldn't convert it."

Still, Greater Latrobe — after a punt — had Fox Chapel pinned back at its 18 with only 2:07 and no timeouts left.

Didn't matter.

"What's disappointing about that is, we played such great pass defense in seven-on-seven drills this summer. With two minutes left and no timeouts, you knew a team's going to throw the ball, and we were unable to stop them," Murray lamented.

"It was really frustrating. All I've been doing over the last several days is wondering how we could've done things differently."

Well, it's over with now. And the Wildcats have to get it out of their heads — and quickly.

"With the team we're playing this week," Murray responded, "we don't have a choice."

For sure, Gateway isn't just any team. When the Gators (2-0) come to Memorial Stadium on Friday (7:30 p.m.) to face Greater Latrobe (1-1) to kick off the WPIAL Quad-A South Conference slate, they will bring No. 3 national and No. 1 state rankings with them.

"You try and find a weakness somewhere, and, really, they don't have any," Murray said matter of factly. "They're very big up front and fast at all of the skill positions."

With such a talent-laden team, Murray — like just about anyone else — doesn't really know where to begin. After giving it some thought, Murray decided on Dorian Bell...and not because he is one of any number of players who are capable of putting up big numbers in a Gateway offense that has scored — get this — 101 points

in two games.

Indeed, Murray talked more about Bell's defensive exploits. Called the best football player to come out of Gateway by coach Terry Smith, Bell (6-1, 225, Sr.) has already made a verbal commitment to Ohio State.

"He might be the best defensive player I've seen as a head coach in the WPIAL," Murray offered. "He's an outstanding athlete who also has a great intuitiveness for the game, and that makes him that much more difficult to deal with."

Last season as a junior, Bell had 131 tackles, including 25 for a loss, and 11 sacks, and he continues to wreak absolute havoc from his line-backer spot. In last week's 56-6 beat down of Baldwin, he also rushed for 105 yards and two touchdowns.

In the season opener against Penn Hills in a rematch of last year's WPIAL championship game won this time by Gateway, 45-17, it was running senior running back Brian Williams — all 5-foot-7 and 155 pounds of him — going off for 210 yards on just 25 carries, and he now totals 268 in 38. And junior quarterback Rob Kalkstein (5-10, 165), who has started every since he was a freshman, has already thrown for 329 yards and five touchdowns (25 of 38) after passing for 2,522 yards his previous three seasons, including 1,187 — and 12 scores — last year.

Then there's Corey Brown (6-1, 180, Sr.), who had eight catches just last week for 64 yards and is also heading to Ohio State as a defensive back after making four interceptions and 34 tackles a year ago. In all, the Gators have eight — count 'em — players expected to go NCAA Division I, including offensive lineman Colin Rodkey (6-5, 270, Sr.), who hasn't even practiced yet this season because of an injury, to Indiana, and defensive end B.J. Stevens (6-2, 240, Sr.) to Miami* (Ohio), and return seven starters on offense and eight on defense from the team that finished as WPIAL runner-up.

So, although it hasn't had much luck in the past against teams like Gateway, Greater Latrobe will again try to defend the Gators with its offense. With that in mind, the Wildcats will actually use a huddle — something they don't normally do in their spread, one-back set — in an attempt to take time off the clock and keep Gateway's offense off the field.

"That's our plan," Murray acknowledged. "And that means we not only have to move the ball, but score when we do have it."

GL has been able to do that in its first two games, posting 59 points and 600 yards behind the quarterbacking of Shaffer (6-1, 190, Jr.), who has passed for 337 yards and a pair of TDs (two interceptions) on 22 completions in 46 attempts with 11 going to wide receiver Ryan LaDuke (5-9, 165, Sr.) for 196 yards and those two scores. Shaffer has also rushed for four touchdowns and 51 yards.

Lonigro (6-1, 170, Sr.) has another seven catches for 93 yards. The Wildcats are also running the ball better than they did last year as Brad Burkley (6-1, 175, Jr.) has an even 200 yards on 42 carries.

Greater Latrobe will be without one of its top linemen in Matt Shrum, who is out with bruised ribs, but its starters remain intact. The others are Connor Shields (6-2, 200, Sr.) at wide receiver, Jerid Gondosh (5-7, 155 Jr.) at slotback, Carmen Sylvania (5-10, 265, Soph.) at center, Steve Kolman (6-0, 275, Jr.) and Joe Siwiak (5-8, 235, Sr.) at guard, and Tony Lamosek (6-0, 220, Sr.) and Andy Armor (6-2, 245, Sr.) at tackle.