

Tagoe does it all in win for Paint Branch

BY MARK GIANNOTTO

When Paint Branch Coach Mike Nesmith first arrived at the school three years ago, he looked through the statistics from the Panthers' junior varsity team the previous season and assumed sophomore Ivan Tagoe was the big, burly type.

The previous coaching staff had Tagoe listed as a guard and a defensive lineman. The only reason he piqued Nesmith's interest was that he led the team in sacks.

"When I finally met him, he was this lean, muscular guy," recalled Nesmith on Friday before Tagoe hauled in a touchdown pass in Paint Branch's 14-6 victory over Clarksburg in a Montgomery County nonleague game. "So I figured he must not be able to catch, but he showed right away that [wide receiver] was his position."

The lineman instincts, though, would come in handy against the Coyotes (6-2). On top of finishing with two catches and that first-half touchdown, Tagoe's defensive performance ensured that score would stand as the Panthers moved to 7-1. Playing on the edge as a hybrid linebacker-strong safety, he spent much of the night eyeing Clarksburg's dynamic quarterback Andrew Veith.

Veith entered Friday night's game with a string of four consecutive 100-yard rushing performances, but was held to just 37 yards thanks in large part to Tagoe and his defensive counterparts. Linebacker Courtney Wallerson had a team-high eight tackles, while Tagoe made life miserable for Veith, finishing with seven tackles, 1.5 sacks, and several quarterback hurries.

Before Friday night, though, many around the area had grown accustomed to Tagoe's exploits on offense. Through eight games, he has 29 catches and 11 touchdowns total. As a result, Nesmith said he still teases some of his assistant coaches that were around when Tagoe was first placed on the of-



Paint Branch's Ivan Tagoe, right, hauled in a touchdown reception against Clarksburg.

PAINT BRANCH | CLARKSBURG
14 | 6

Hawk in the House: Former Quince Orchard star and current Maryland football player Travis Hawkins was in attendance for Friday night's game.

Breath Easier? After Paint Branch looked like it had sealed it with a 23-yard touchdown from running back Bene't Willis with two minutes remaining, Clarksburg responded with a 66-yard touchdown pass to Sam Collins. Clarksburg had one last chance to tie, but its Hail Mary pass was intercepted.

fensive line.

"I asked to play wide receiver," said Tagoe, who's listed at 6-feet, 205 pounds. "They said I looked more like a tight end. Then when they saw the way I blocked, they moved me to offensive line."

Now it's Tagoe who's getting the last laugh. His strong showing this fall has brought more attention from college recruiters. He said he's been in contact with coaches from Connecticut, William & Mary, and Rhode Island, most of whom envision him as a defensive back.

"He's been slowly getting interest because he's not blazing fast," said Nesmith. "But whoever gets the young man will be really lucky."

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