



**NCHS end season a high note with 41-21 win over Benton**

**NATCHITOCHEES, La.** - The Natchitoches Central Chiefs celebrated ‘senior night’ Friday night in the season finale with a 41-21 win over the Benton Tigers at Turpin Stadium.

NCHS (2-8, 1-7 in 1-5A) honored 17 seniors prior to the game in honor of their final home game with first-year head coach Brad Laird.

As for the game, the Chiefs’ offense got things started nicely. Quarterback Owen Smith capped off a 65-yard scoring drive with a 15-yard touchdown run with 7:40 left in the first quarter (point after attempt no good) as NCHS led 6-0.

Benton (1-9, 1-7 in 1-5A) took the lead, 7-6, on their first possession after a two-yard touchdown run and a successful extra point with under a minute to go in the first quarter.

The Chiefs responded with five-yard touchdown pass from Smith to Jordan Carpenter with 10:45 left in the second quarter to make it 12-7 NCHS.

Benton answered right back with a short touchdown run to retake the lead, 14-12, with 6:46 left in the second quarter.

NCHS appeared to be moving towards retaking the lead. However, the Chiefs fumbled inside the Benton one-yard line into the endzone for a touchback with 2:30 left in the half as the score remained 14-12 at halftime.

In the third quarter, NCHS retook the lead as Smith found Newton again in the middle of the field who outran the defense for an 87-yard touchdown pass (two-point conversion successful – Smith to Carpenter). The Chiefs led 20-14 with 5:46 left in the third.

The see-saw affair continued as Benton scored on a 30-yard touchdown on the following possession (PAT good) making it 21-20 Tigers.

Natchitoches Central then returned the kickoff 83 yards as Kelton Howard exploded all the way down to the Tigers' 10-yard line as the third quarter ended.

Two plays into the fourth quarter, senior Kerry McGraw scored on a 3-yard touchdown run to give the Chiefs the edge, 26-21 with 11:23 left.

The Chiefs' defense made a stance on the next possession. Benton faked a punt on 4<sup>th</sup> and six at their own 40 put was stopped short of the first down as NCHS took over. The Chiefs would cash in as Smith found Derrian Anthony for a 14-yard touchdown reception (Anthony catches two-point conversion pass) to make it 34-21 with 8:37 to go.

NCHS added another score with 3:13 left as McGraw scored his second touchdown on a two-yard run to make it 41-21.

Natchitoches Central snapped an eight-game losing streak to end the season as the future appears to be bright for a Chiefs' team slated to return 15-20 starters in 2025 under Laird.