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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHAMBERSBURG CARDINALS AR NATIONAL CHAMPIONS CARDINALS DEFEAT PREVIOUSLY UNDEFEATED OKLAHOMA THUNDER 19-14

ATLANTA—If fate is a real thing—and Chambersburg Cardinals coach Chad Fauson believes it is—it was realized on a chilly southern Saturday night, in a stadium far from home.

The Cardinals overcame a pair of deficits and a less-than stellar offensive showing, but scored 13 unanswered points to capture the Gridiron Developmental Football League Championship in a 19-14 win over the Oklahoma Thunder at Tara Stadium in Atlanta, Georgia.

The championship is the 13th in Cardinals' franchise history, while the Thunder suffered their first loss over a 53-game streak that spanned four seasons.

"I guess the best way to describe this season is by saying defense wins championships," Fauson said. "As much of a cliché as people think that is these days, I think we took it back to old school tonight and played physical. It's a great example of what happens when defense gets on the same page and starts playing ball."

The Cardinals trailed 14-13 entering the second half and went three-and-out to open the third quarter. With Oklahoma beginning the ensuing possession at their own 11-yard line, the Thunder ran three plays before Cardinals linebacker Jaron Nalewak forced and recovered a fumble at the 18-yard line that set up Chambersburg's go-ahead score. Newly-activated running back Walter Sanders, who was recently released from the Baltimore Ravens, took the ball on the first play of the drive and scored an 18-yard touchdown run—his second score of the game.

The Cardinals managed only 38 yards of total offense through halftime as the offensive line struggled to open holes. When they did, the running backs simply weren't hitting them.

Quarterback Anthony Gardner was sacked three times in the first half, while Sanders

managed only 11 yards on six carries.

"We really couldn't get it together, but it was enough to get a win," Gardner said. "Our new back, Walter, he played well. All-around, we didn't play great. It was the defense that won this championship for us."

Oklahoma remained within striking distance throughout the second half.

The Thunder marched into the red zone twice in that span, but were denied both times. Their first opportunity came on a drive that began with 2:45 remaining in the third quarter. Wide receiver Prentiss Elliot caught a dazzling 23-yard fade pass at the Cardinals' 2 to set up first-and-goal.

But an offsides penalty and back-to-back Chambersburg sacks put the Thunder in a third-and-goal situation at the Chambersburg 20. Watkins' third-down pass to the end zone was incomplete.

On Oklahoma's second-to-last drive of the game, which began at 7:42 in the fourth quarter, the Thunder were set up with great field position when Elliot returned a punt to the Chambersburg 26.

Oklahoma marched as far as the 10-yard line and, on a third-and-goal snap from the 11, linebacker Louis Corum stepped up with a 15-yard sack that stifled the drive.

"We were confident we could stop them," Corum said. "Our defense stays confident. We don't give up, we pat each other on the back and we get ready for the next play."

Ottis Lewis scored the Cardinals' first touchdown on a nine-yard pass from Gardner to open the second quarter. The game would have been tied at 7-7 had Stephen Link's point after attempt not been blocked.

The Thunder took an eight-point lead at 10:33 in the second quarter when Watkins threw a quick pass through traffic and found Willie Ponder in the end zone from 11 yards out.

Chambersburg brought the game to within a point with 44 seconds remaining in the half.

Gardner threw a potential 23-yard touchdown pass into the corner of the end zone, but the ball was picked off. However, officials ruled pass interference on the Oklahoma defender to give Chambersburg a first-and-goal at the 1-yard line.

Sanders darted through a hole on the next play for his first touchdown of the game.

"This win is a testament to the coaching staff, the fans, the hearts of the guys we have here," Cardinals center Adam Hoffman said. "We showed up to practice and we worked hard all year. To have it all culminate with a national championship? Well, the trophy is back where it belongs. It's back in Chambersburg."

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release written by Mike Miller