

This Week in Football – Week 7

By Tom Downs, Essex Chargers 7/8 Offensive Coordinator

For the third straight week, the Chargers competed for all four quarters against Chittenden East. Chittenden East is a well-coached team and almost every year they put together a team that is very competitive. This year was no different. I do not know what the other teams are feeding their kids, but damn, every team we face seems much bigger than us. While every team we have faced this year is bigger than us, we seem to be learning to compete against that size.

Coach Dave reminds me every week that our guys start games slowly. We seem to need to take the other team's best punch first before we wake up and start to play Charger football. The same thing occurred this past week. We went nowhere on our first possession and then allowed Chittenden East to move the ball down the field where they eventually scored on a big play. Our next possession was no better and we were forced to punt. However, the punt pinned Chittenden East on their own goal line and then you could see the momentum shift. We were able to capitalize on a fumble in the end zone and got a safety. Then in our next possession we scored a touchdown and a two-point conversion.

While I appreciate that the team starts off slowly and then comes back, it is not an ideal way to go into a game. It is taking years off my life from the stress. We as coaches and players need to find a way to jump on the other team early or at least go toe to toe at the beginning of the game. I do not know what the answer is, but we will continue to strive to get off to better starts.

To finish off the first half's scoring, Chittenden East scored on another big play to make it 14-10. Essentially both of their scores in the first half were on big long plays. We went into half time using that as a positive because most of the rest of that first half, we held Chittenden East in check. We just needed to cut down on the big plays.

Chittenden East had the ball first in the second half and slowly marched down the field almost using the entire clock in the third quarter. The difference this time was we did not give up the big play. In youth football, the longer you can keep from giving up the big play, the more likely the other team will falter or turn the ball over. In this case we were able to stop them on our own 10-yard line after a long drive. We showed we could adjust in the

second half and had a bend but don't break attitude on defense. It was exactly how we try to teach it.

With 4:30 left on the clock in the fourth quarter, we finally got in the end zone again. We completely relied on Tobey's legs, running the ball with him on three consecutive plays. On the third play, Tobey was able to break away and score. On that play, it was almost a completely individual effort. It was a broken play where a few assignments were missed, but Tobey's athleticism covered up for those mistakes. Chittenden East is a very disciplined team and they do a great job of staying at home on defense and covering all the gaps. To finally find a chink in their armor was an incredible relief.

Now I mentioned bend but don't break earlier. Well, that was again on display on Chittenden East's final drive. They had the ball with 4:30 left on the clock along with time outs. We needed to hold them from getting the big play and wait for a mistake. The problem was no mistake appeared for nearly 4 minutes.

The final approximately 40 seconds of the game were excruciating. Players, parents and coaches had to endure 4 more plays. The first three we stopped them with no gain, and then came the final play. The Chittenden East QB floated one to their receiver who caught it around the 9-yard line and then proceeded to run towards the goal line. We had two Chargers blocking his path. The Chittenden East player was able to make the first guy miss, and then Tobey reacted to that maneuver and came in and put the player to the ground around the five-yard line with authority allowing everyone on our side of the field to exhale a sigh of relief. While our Rutland game earlier in the year was a great comeback on our part, it did not have the stress level this game contained. My adrenaline took some time after the game to come down.

Our next opponent, Winooski/Burlington, is a bit of a mystery to us. They have been putting up impressive scores but we know little about them. That will change this week for two reasons. First, we will be playing them of course. Second, we will be practicing with them this Thursday to promote more bonding and community spirit between the teams. It should be a fun experience both on Thursday and on Saturday at the game. Tony and I have fond memories of Winooski high school's field. The Chargers won both the 1999 and 2005 championships on that field. After Saturday, I hope to continue to look at Winooski high school's field fondly.

As always, we have nothing to lose which will allow us to play like we have everything to lose. Let's leave it all on the field Chargers and play loose. Let's bring it to Winooski/Burlington.

This week's Charger Highlights

Charger Highlights:

Tobey – Carried our team on his shoulders on our final scoring drive.

Hunter – Continues to show he is an impact player no matter where we put him on the field. He may end up playing nearly every position by the end of the year.

Coach Dave – Has worked with me the last three weeks to script 12 plays prior to the game. He is a constant resource in my ear in every game and brings a welcome perspective.

#41 from Chittenden East – I think it is okay to give Charger shout outs to members of the opposing team from time to time. This kid had me nervous as soon as he showed up at the field. He walked toward me during the 5th-6th grade game as he headed to the Chittenden East sideline. My thought was “man he looks tough”. He walked in like he owned the place but not in an arrogant way. He was just sure of himself. He looked me straight in the eye and said “Hi coach, good morning, how are you?” I responded in kind and then thought to myself, “Now I know he is tough”. He gave us fits the whole game and he played the game the right way. He got dinged up at the very end of the game. I hope he recovers quickly and gives his next opponent the same fits he gave us.

Tyler Deguise – Sadly, we say goodbye to a Charger that has passed well before his time at the age of 32. Tyler played for us during the 1999 and 2000 seasons. He led us to a championship in 1999 and a runner up in 2000. He is, I will not say was, the toughest Charger Tony and I have ever coached. There is not even a close second. Tyler played the game with reckless abandon and could do things other players we have coached just could not do, or were not willing to do. He was a breed apart. Tyler's family was the Chargers. Tyler needed football and football needed him. He bled blue and gold. My first memory of coaching Charger football was showing up for my first practice in 1999 not knowing anything. I was just there to help. I saw Tyler, I had no clue who it was at the time, and asked if he wanted to throw the football with me while we waited for everyone else to show up. He was my very first player interaction as a coach. I never understood why that

memory stuck with me, or why I often thought about it over the years. Maybe now I know the reason. I will try to never forget.

My other personal memory of Tyler is giving him rides to the games from time to time. Now if you are in my car, you listen to my music, and unfortunately for some, I listen to heavy metal. Now Tyler is, will not say was, not a heavy metal fan. He made that clear. However, at the end of the year banquet (Tyler was loud on the field but not much of a talker otherwise), he talked in front of everyone thanking me for giving him rides and that perhaps heavy metal is real music too. It still cracks me up. Now if you want some more colorful Tyler stories, please reach out to Tony. He has many he may or may not share with you.

Tyler, you will be missed but your impact on the Charger family will not be forgotten. Once a Charger, always a Charger, and you were the ultimate Charger. Like the great Bob Lilley, who was also a great linebacker, that played for the Cowboys (sorry my article, my favorite team gets mentioned) who was known as Mr. Cowboy, you are Mr. Charger.

With a heavy heart, that is it for now. I hoped you all enjoyed a little peak into the week that was. See you all next week!