**Antelope Valley Wins Season Opener at Grace Brethren**

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Antelope Valley (CA) - With a rousing 32-26 victory over Grace Brethren in their road opener last Friday, the Lopes vindicated a pair of losses from the 2017 season and moved to No.2 in the Southern Section Division 5 rankings, downing the Lancers on their own turf.

A game that saw six lead changes and a 95-yard kickoff return from Antelope Valley standout Jamaal Bell provided more than enough excitement for AVHS Head Coach Jermaine Lewis. “Going in we knew the game was going to be a hard fought back and forth battle. Luckily we had some key players step up down the stretch.” Lewis said after the game, adding, “We knew that we couldn’t make a lot of mistakes, even though we had more than we wanted, we were able to minimize those mistakes and execute.”

Senior wide-receiver Bell added two more receiving touchdowns to seal the deal for the Lopes on their way to a closely contended and hard fought win. Regarding Bell’s offensive play, Lewis said, “Jamaal needs to continue to be himself, an electric player with a lot of energy. What he brings to the team in swagger and confidence, the other players feed on that.”

Offensive coordinator Hinton said with a chuckle, “We know those guys [Grace Brethren] in and out, and I think we did just about everything we could to give it away, but our defense really stood up down the stretch.” AVHS defense certainly did their part, recovering two crucial fumbles, one late in the 3rd quarter and the other to start the 4th quarter just inside the Lopes 10-yard line. The latter led to an 88-yard connection between AVHS Quarterback Caden Hinton and Bell, which all but sealed the game for the Lopes.

When asked about the play of his Senior Quarterback, Lewis responded, “Cayden played a remarkable game. He had never beaten [Grace Brethren] and has played them four times in his career. What a difference a year makes. He and Jamaal have really learned their timing. His [Hinton’s] decision making and confidence has grown.”

The Lancers certainly made it interesting deep into the 4th quarter. The home favorites battled back, down two scores, with about 5 minutes left, receiving the ball at midfield after AVHS turned over on downs. Grace Brethren proceeded to drive down the short field in under three minutes for a touchdown which brought them within a field goal of tying AVHS with two minutes remaining in the contest.

Grace Brethren, after again regaining possession of the ball on downs, eventually missed a 47-yard field goal with under a minute left in the game and came up just short of forcing overtime against the highly-touted Lopes.

With the win, Antelope Valley moves to #18 in the Southern Section rankings heading into a their home-opener matchup against Division 4 opponent Golden Valley High School of the Santa Clarita Foothill League. Coach Lewis has no misgivings about the challenges that face the Lopes headed into the season, saying, “It’s definitely hard to fill Deven’s shoes,” referring to 2017 five-star recruit Deven Williams, who is now at USC, adding, “I believe guys like Derrell [Lloyd] are capable of that task.”

Running back Jermaine Marshall was the first 100 yard rusher that Grace Brethren has allowed in nearly four years. Which certainly says a lot about his level of talent. Marshall is among the top 20 running backs in the state heading into the season and already being heavily recruited by top Division I college programs.

Lewis, when asked about the close nature of the opening game, responded, “Early in the season we can live with that. We turned the ball over more than we liked. We forced some turnovers, and fortunate for us, theirs came at costly moments in the game.”