BINGHAMTON – With the remnants of Hurricane Willa falling over upstate New York, football playoffs were underway as Waverly reigned over Newark Valley with a sloppy 20-5 win.

 “We did a pretty good job dealing with it – you know the ball was on the ground,” Waverly coach Jason Miller said. “I thought it would be an issue of who held on the ball better and we had our fumbles and they had their fumbles.”

 Initially, both teams had trouble holding onto the ball. After the Wolverines forced the Cardinals to punt, Waverly muffed the return, but recovered. Avoiding putting the ball in the air during the torrential downpour, the Wolverines went to the ground and David Hallett, who carried the ball six times on the drive for 22 yards.

 Facing a fourth-and-five, Waverly lined up to go for it, but a procedure call moved them back five yards, so they lined Nate Bowers up for a 39-yard field goal that went wide left.

 Once again, the Wolverine defense stopped the Cardinals and once again Waverly had trouble fielding punt, Jalen McCarthy allowed the slick pigskin to slip through his fingers at the 43, but he did manage somehow to recover the ball at 20 among a crowd of Newark Valley players.

 After a Hallett run for a yard, Colby Sindoni fumbled the ball and Evan Powell recovered at the nine-yard line. Two plays later, quarterback Kyle Collins fumbled and McCarty recovered the ball for the Wolverines at the one-inch line. After an incomplete pass, Hallett ran wide and the Cardinals pulled him down for a loss and a safety.

 Following the Waverly kickoff, Newark Valley took over at their own 47 and moved into Wolverine territory after a nine-yard run by Ivan Aylesworth. Then the Wolverines held tough and stopped Aylesworth short of a first down on a fourth-and-four.

 Waverly stayed on the ground with Hallett until they found Sindoni. The last four plays of the drive, Sindoni called his own number for a total of 29 yards with the final tote gaining 11 yards for the score. The Wolverines went to Sindoni on the conversion but he came up short and Waverly led at halftime with a baseball-like score of 6 to 2.

 McCarty returned the second kickoff to the Waverly 43. Two plays later Sindoni hit Montana Davis for a 42-yard pass play. After two runs by Hallett, the Wolverines found themselves at the ten ready to extend their lead but a procedure and an unsportsmanlike call cost Waverly and they ended up turning the ball over on downs on a fourth-and-twenty.

 After forcing a short possession, the Wolverine mounted an 11-play drive – all runs by the law firm of Hallet, Davis, and Sindoni. Again, Waverly turned the ball over on downs.

 “I was very disappointed,” Miller said. “We had two drives in the second half there that we came up with nothing. On those third quarter drives we weren’t able to come up with anything. That’s not good.”

 The Cardinals then went to Caden Bennett, who carried the ball seven times for 36 yards and gained 18 yards on a screen pass from Collins on the drive. A personal foul also helped the Cardinal cause. Newark Valley had a first-and-goal on the two. A holding call wiped out a two-yard touchdown run by Bennett and the Cardinals had to settle for a 29-yard field goal by Collins. The Cardinals were now down by one with the winning run on deck.

 Waverly received the ball with 8:49 on the clock and came up big *literally* on consecutive third downs when Sindoni connected with Dylan Ward for eight yards and then with 6-foot-7 Scott Woodring for a 14-yard gain. The 11-play drive came up fruitless but took seven minutes off the clock.

 Newark Valley took over on their 33, but a holding call and procedure penalty set the Cardinals back to their twenty. Facing a third-and 23, Newark Valley went to the air and Davis came up with an interception and returned it to the Cardinal 21-yard line.

 After a Hallett run for 12 yards and already burning their timeouts, Newark Valley allowed Hallett to score from 8-yards out and the Wolverines led by eight, 13-5, after a Bower extra point.

 A workhorse, Hallett finished the game with 131 yards on 28 carries.

 Following a pooched kick, the Cardinals took over on their 38. After two incompletions by Collins, Davis picked off his second pass and returned it for a score to ice the game for a 20-5 victory.

 “Our defense played well,” Miller said. “Montana played well. Getting them into a situation where they have to throw it, that’s to our advantage. I think we did a great job on Caden Bennett.”

 Miller added, “This was our goal to get back to the sectional championship. We know whoever we face – Susquehanna Valley or Watkins Glen – are going to be tough opponents, so we are excited right now. This was a goal of ours and we made it. Whatever we get from here is icing on the cake.”