

HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

Maryvale continues to roll with win

Logan Stanley

Arizona Republic
USA TODAY NETWORK

Why not?

The simple phrase has become the motto for Maryvale's football team. After years of struggles, which included multiple winless and one-win seasons, the Panthers have turned their fortunes around under co-head coaches Mark and Marcus Carter.

Phoenix Maryvale dominated Phoenix North Canyon 49-13 on Friday, Oct. 2, in a pivotal 4A matchup, improving to 5-1. It's the team's best start since 2010 and has improved its postseason chances.

Phoenix Union High School District programs have particularly struggled in recent years, as suburban growth – and the newer schools that came with that – cultivated football powers over the past few decades. Maryvale High School is located near 59th Avenue and Osborn Road in west Phoenix.

"Everybody loves the underdog story," Marcus Carter said. "This community has gone through a lot of trauma the past couple years. 'Why Not?' is letting people know that whatever you put your mind to – if you have a great collection, admin, coaches, students everybody bought in – that you can do whatever you want."

It was a statement win for Maryvale, as North Canyon (4-2) was the only school in the 4A Copper Sky region with a current winning record. Maryvale sits at No. 14 in the latest AIA rankings – 24 teams make the conference playoffs. North Canyon was No. 31 before the game.

"That's what we're trying to do every single game, make a statement," Mark Carter said. "Marcus was talking about the underdog. I don't think we're really the underdog anymore. We have to show and improve that we belong. A game like this, against a well-coached team that was 4-1 as well, to come out and show that we can compete, do great things in all three phases, that boosts our confidence."



Maryvale running back Dionte Brandon (6) breaks a tackle against North Canyon during a game at Maryvale high school in Phoenix on Oct. 2.

PATRICK BREEN/THE REPUBLIC

Maryvale led from start to finish.

Freshman running back Dionte Brandon got the scoring started with an 18-yard touchdown run, the first of two on the night, to go up 7-0 with 3:32 left in the first quarter. After sophomore safety Alijah Cross intercepted a pass and gave the Panthers the ball at the Rattlers' 8-yard line, Brandon punched it in to make it 14-0.

Then senior wide receiver and defensive back Miles Woods took over the game.

First, Woods returned a punt for a touchdown to make it 21-0 with 8:01 left in the second. On North Canyon's next drive, Woods intercepted a pass to get the ball back at the 50. Five plays later, Woods hauled in an acrobatic 21-yard touchdown to extend the lead 28-0 with

5:27 to play in the second quarter – effectively putting the game away. Woods added another interception in the game later in the third quarter.

Woods, an Idaho commit, came over from Phoenix Carl Hayden last season as a transfer and has been a key figure in the Carters' rebuild of the program.

"Miles is our leader," Mark Carter said. "Did our relationship start out perfect? Absolutely not. However, he's transforming – not to say that he wasn't a great young man before – he is getting even greater. For him, with so much stardom and so much stuff going on, for him continue to transform and continue to get better, it shows our younger guys that you're not above getting better, no matter how many clicks you got, no matter how many offers you got. That

trickles down.

"Miles just showed up. He could have went anywhere. He believed in what we're doing. We're just so happy and proud that we're able to give him the experience that he was looking for."

While nothing is guaranteed – Maryvale won the region last season and still missed the playoffs – the Panthers are in a prime position to make the postseason this year, with a schedule that includes opponents with a combined 3-18 record.

"I feel like it's an all-time high," Woods said. "I feel like everybody's finally gelling together, finding their role."

But the Carters know that one slipup could be incredibly costly.

"Let's keep our foot on the gas," Mark Carter said. "Don't let up. Keep being dominant. Don't fall down to level of our competition. Just keep getting better. We're not at our best yet. We don't want to be our best until games 11, 12, 13, and 14."

For North Canyon, it's a tough loss after one of the best starts to a season in a long time.

Like Maryvale, North Canyon football has struggled in recent years, including winless seasons. But coach Anthony Johns is beginning to turn that program around.

"It's a testament to our guys," Johns said. "They put the work in. We put a plan in place and then they have to do the work. So for us, it is more about our guys and then following the plan and understanding that they know we know what we are talking about because they have seen growth, right, so small easy wins. Then in terms of like, hey, we are winning in the weight room, we're winning on the track, we're winning in speed training. It has just been step-by-step."

Logan Stanley is a sports reporter with The Arizona Republic who primarily focuses on high school, college and Olympic sports. To suggest ideas for human-interest stories and other news, reach out to Stanley at logan.stanley@usatodayco.com or 707-293-7650. Follow him on X, formerly Twitter: @RLSScribe.