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Lincoln Fighting Zebras running back Ryan Henning (3) pushes the ball up the middle for a first down during the first quarter of the Sac-Joaquin Section Division III quarterfinals playoff game in dense fog at Lincoln High School in Lincoln on Friday.

Lincoln High beats Christian Brothers in playoff quarterfinal

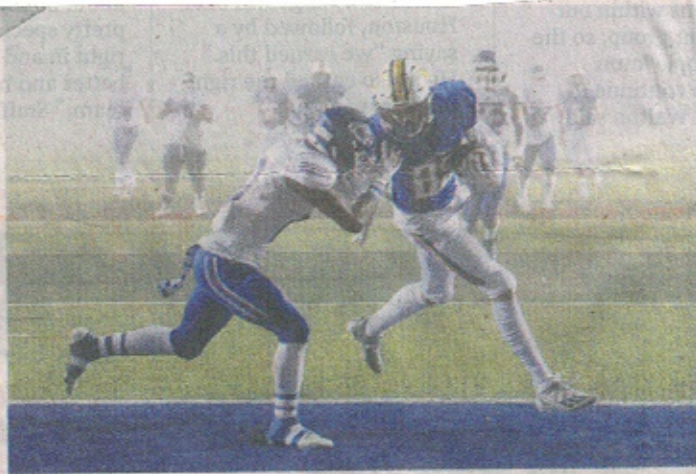
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Magic. Voodoo. Witchcraft. Call it whatever you want, the Lincoln High School football team is into it. The Fighting Zebras came back from a two-touchdown deficit to knock off Christian Brothers 28-21 in a Division III quarterfinal Friday night.

Tied at 21 with a minute and a half left, the Falcons were pushing into field-goal range when the Lincoln defense turned the game over. On third-and-8 from the 38, Lincoln's Jordan Wagner tipped a Jake Elorduy pass to himself, then hauled the ball in and started running. Wagner, a senior, juked a couple of wide receivers near his team's sideline at the Lincoln 30.

With his coaches screaming "go down," Wagner had other ideas. He plowed into an envoy of teammates. The crowd went quiet as it looked like somebody would tackle him. Instead, Wagner popped out the other side, with the entire Christian Brothers team behind him.

The fans, who have never seen a playoff quarterfinal win, went bananas as Wagner just



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Lincoln Fighting Zebras wide receiver Dylan Fear (23) scores a touchdown as Christian Brothers Falcons Demonte Robinson (10) defends in the third quarter of the Sac-Joaquin Section Division III quarterfinals playoff game in the fog at Lincoln High School in Lincoln on Friday. The Fighting Zebras won 28-21.

kept running. The ambulance in the end zone turned on its red-and-white lights as Wagner approached the end zone and scored the game's final touchdown with 1:09 left to play.

On the next drive, Lincoln pulled in its fourth interception of the night to seal the win. Wagner did a backflip for the crowd. Some friends put him on their shoulders after an interview. The party was on,

thanks to that wild interception return. Wagner just grinned. Yeah, he heard his coaches telling him to go down. That wasn't going to happen.

"My teammates blocked their asses off, the best block I've ever seen in my life," Wagner said. "Dylan Shoro. Kyle Morrison, Dylan Fear. Everyone. All 11."

Well, 10 of them. One guy had other things to do.

Lots of other important efforts had to happen to make Wagner's moment possible. Lincoln trailed 21-7 midway through the third quarter. Starting quarterback Johnny Bauser was knocked out of the game in the first half after a player rolled over his ankle. Nothing was going right on offense. Bauser got back on the field in the third quarter and promptly led a scoring drive, hitting Fear on a 16-yard slant to cut Christian Brothers' lead to 21-14 with 9 seconds left in the third quarter.

Wagner said Bauser is "the toughest man I've ever seen."

On the next possession, running back Ryan Henning finally broke out, charging 59 yards mostly untouched to tie the game at 21 midway through the fourth quarter.

Henning ran 29 times for 228 yards and was quick to deflect attention.

"Sam Polkenhorn, our left guard, he might be the best lineman I've ever seen," Henning said. "Dude is the craziest dude. He's a freak. He's fast. He's strong. He does everything."

That's typical of the Zebras. Try to give a guy credit and

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instead they credit everybody else. It took a lot of effort from everybody to knock off the Falcons, who were in control much of the game.

Christian Brothers coach Larry Morla spoke quietly and gave plenty of credit to Lincoln for persevering. Christian Brothers struggled with turnovers and penalties all year and it bit the Falcons hard Friday night. Leading 21-7, a Christian Brothers player ran into the Lincoln punter to breathe life into the Zebras, who later scored on that drive.

"It's the mental errors that decide this game," Morla said. "It hurts because we had all the momentum and then the momentum changed. They have a great team over there. They didn't give up."

"We have some young guys we had that are gonna come back strong next season but it's tough man because these seniors put

it all on the line and (quarterback Jake Elorduy) played his butt off, but those mistakes, you can't turn the ball over four times and expect to win the game."

Of course, Christian Brothers' dejection was Lincoln's joy. The entire stadium seemingly entered onto the field to celebrate with players. It's a special run for Lincoln, which was founded in 1907 but has never played in a Sac-Joaquin Section semifinal. Like a lot of good high school teams, the Zebras are loaded with seniors. A new school opened nearby, Twelve Bridges High School, but the Lincoln seniors had to stay put.

"It is huge for us, and these kids, they're a little bit upset with the new school opening up, and the way our town has been kind of split in half," coach Allen Berg said. "So there's some some built-up frustration with that.



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Lincoln Fighting Zebras wide receiver Dylan Fear (23) celebrates after scoring a touchdown with teammate Michael Dallas (45) during the third quarter of the Sac-Joaquin Section Division III quarterfinals playoff game in dense fog at Lincoln High School in Lincoln on Friday. The Fighting Zebras won 28-21.

And they really want to make a statement: This is the place to be. ... It means more to them."

Henning, a junior, said he got emotional before the game thinking it could be the last time he gets to play with the seniors. Now he

gets to do it all over again, with No. 3 Manteca visiting Friday for a semifinal game. Manteca? Folsom? Heck, bring the San Francisco 49ers to town. Lincoln's up for a game.

"It doesn't matter. All we know is you've got to

go out there and we've got to battle from the very start of the game to the end," Henning said. "No matter the outcome. I'm just happy I get to play with all these guys again."