

Down 28-3, the Western receiver's four straight touchdown catches spurred an improbable and stunning comeback.

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HAMILTON — Clearly, Andy Fantuz was sick and tired of always losing to the McMaster football team.

After his Western Mustangs spotted the Marauders an early and seemingly insurmountable 28-3 lead, the big fourth-year star receiver engineered one of the great comebacks in school history by scoring four straight touchdowns as the Mustangs piled up 45 consecutive points in a stunning 55-31 victory yesterday at Ivor Wynne Stadium.

Before yesterday, Western had dropped six straight games to Mac, including a couple of blowout victories that had temporarily tarnished the Mustangs' proud football tradition.

"It's the best I've ever felt after a game," said Fantuz, the six-foot-four receiver from Chatham. "We had never beaten Mac (in his four years) so this was huge. They had a good start but we didn't quit. We kept going and you could see the game changing and they were getting tired."

Fantuz, who underwent emergency surgery to repair a serious thigh injury this summer, showed a national television audience why he is a leading Hec Crighton Trophy candidate and the favourite to be the first pick in next year's Canadian Football League Canadian colleges draft.

He pulled in three improbable touchdown passes in a 3:44 span late in the second quarter. He didn't get a sniff of the ball until five minutes before halftime but once he caught one, the Marauders had no answer for him.

"There was a pass in the first quarter that I thought I was held on but they didn't throw a flag and I wasn't going to complain," he said. "Once the ball gets thrown up there, it's my ball."

"He's the best player in the country. Is there any doubt," Western head coach Larry Haylor said. "I told (Mustangs defensive back coach and doctor) Kevin Willits (who performed Fantuz's surgery) Andy just made him the most famous orthopedic surgeon in the country."

Mac set a Canadian university attendance record of 27,821 by making the game part of a dou-

GAME GLANCE

Mustangs 55, Marauders 31

Western touchdowns: Andy Fantuz (four), Jay Akindolire, Josh Starr, Laran McCann

McMaster touchdowns: Rob Serviss, B.J. Malott, Jeff Robertshaw, Adam Archibald

Next: Western heads to Waterloo to face the Warriors on Saturday at 7 p.m.

bleheader with the Ticats' CFL game last night, though the actual number of people in the seats wasn't close to the number of tickets sold.

After a terrible first quarter, Western quarterback Michael Faulds rebounded to throw six touchdown passes — one short of former Mustang Chris Hessel's Ontario university record of seven in a playoff game against Windsor in 2002. Hessel, who was at the game yesterday, shook his former teammates' hands and joyfully lit a celebratory cigar.

"Our offence met on the sideline after it was 28-3 and talked about getting it together," said Faulds, a transfer from the University of Toledo. "I had heard about how great Mac was and I thought we gave them too much respect early in the game. Once we got it going, you could feel the game changing and we didn't stop."

Mac racked up 122 yards in penalties in the first half and 226 in the game — a big reason why the Mustangs managed to make multiple trips to the red zone and erase the massive deficit.

"We lost our focus — I thought we could've had 42 points in the first half and maybe that would have put them away," Mac head coach Marcello Campanaro said. "But I thought they (Western) had pretty good field position after it was 28-3 and they never gave up. Andy (Fantuz) is a guy who when you throw it up there, it's not 50-50 (per cent) that he's going to catch it. It's more like 90-10 he'll get it."

Down 28-3, Western's defence dug in and didn't allow another point until a meaningless Mac field goal in the fourth quarter.

"Down 28-3 and coming back to win in their place, that's the definition of a comeback," Western defensive back Nick Kordic said. "In my three years here, we have never had a win like that to rally around. For this group, Mac was the only team we hadn't beaten. But we did it, we're unbeaten and hopefully we'll feed off this for the rest of the season."