Kenny Howell

Managing Editor

Going into this season, it was unclear just how good this Mt. Juliet team could be.

The Bears had graduated 27 seniors from a semifinal team, many of who started, some of who have gone on to college ball.

Even though there was plenty of talent left, many with starting experience, there would be several newcomers filling key roles.

Friday, Mt. Juliet answered how good they could be with a 31-20 win over Brentwood to earn a spot in the semifinals for the second straight year, and just the third time in school history.

“We feel blessed to be able to play in the semifinals again,” said Head Coach Roger Perry after the game. “I couldn’t be any more proud of this team.”

Mt. Juliet rode the back of Contrez McCathern’s 35 carries, as he grinded out the tough yards, and a stingy defense which got big stop after big stop.

McCathern picked up 244 yards on the night and a touchdown.

“It’s the best feeling right now,” said McCathern.

McCathern said before the game that Perry came to him and told him that they were going to see how Brentwood handled it up the middle. He wanted to smack them in the mouth and see how they responded.

Early on, the big Brentwood defense handled it well, as Mt. Juliet was only able to get three points on a Ryan Jenkins’ 46-yard field goal in the first quarter.

Brentwood’s Sam Mullaney got a huge kick return for the Bruins on the ensuing kickoff down to the Mt. Juliet 18-yard line. They got it first and goal on the 4-yard line, but they wouldn’t get it into the end zone. A Ben Green run to the outside on fourth down was strung out and stuffed by the Mt. Juliet defense and the Bears took over.

With 95 yards of green in front of them, Mt. Juliet went to work. A 19-yard McCathern run got them out of the shadow of their own end zone, and a 39-yard run a few plays later set them up at the 20. Six plays later, Caleb Hopkins went in for the score from six yards out, and Mt. Juliet led 10-0.

Mt. Juliet’s defense stood tall again on the next Brentwood drive and got the ball back. A 22-yard run by McCathern and 29 yards by Ben Cheatham set the Bears up with first and goal. Two plays later, it was Hopkins again for a 5-yard score, and the Bears led 17-0 late in the half.

Brentwood would threaten, but a pass in the end zone fell incomplete as time expired in the half.

Mt. Juliet had to punt it away on their first drive of the second half, and a reenergized Bruin team got big gains on the way to the end zone. Green scored from four yards out to cut the lead

to 17-7.

The Bears would answer with a bruiser of a drive. Mt. Juliet went 80 yards in 16 plays, and took nine minutes off the clock. They would have to convert two fourth downs, the first being at their own 39-yard line. They needed one yard, and McCathern picked up a yard and a foot. They had fourth-and-1 again at the Brentwood 13-yard line, and McCathern was able to go four yards. Cheatham would get a touchdown on the next play from nine yards out, and the Bears lead had expanded to 24-7 in the fourth quarter.

Brentwood would fail on fourth down, and Mt. Juliet would get one more scoring drive. From the 49-yard line, Cheatham scampered for 23 yards, and five plays later, McCathern got his first touchdown of the night on his 35th carry.

The Bruins would score two touchdowns in the final few minutes, but it wasn't enough.

McCathern's 35 carries was the most of his career.

"It's different" said McCathern of getting that many carries. He said he was used to getting around 17 carries. McCathern, traditionally the fullback in the Wing-T, got several carries as tailback out of the I-form, something the Bears have used, but not as much as they did Friday.

"He was a workhorse tonight," said Perry.

Perry also applauded Cheatham, who had several big blocks and runs on the night, as well as the offensive line. He said the stops by the defense were huge as well.

Mt. Juliet will now meet another familiar foe in Whitehaven (13-0) in the semifinals. The Bears played them last year in the semifinals in a 44-10 loss. Mt. Juliet will travel to Whitehaven, which is in Memphis, for a 7 p.m. kickoff Friday.

The Mt. Juliet Quarterback Club will be taking several buses to the game Friday. All seat reservations are $40 per person round trip. Non-refundable once reserved. Buses will leave at 1 p.m. Reservations have to be made by Wednesday by 6 p.m. Fill out form on www.mjhsfootball.com and email it to vicepresident@mjhsfootball.com, or go to the Bear Barn at the football complex Wednesday from 4 to 6 p.m. If you would like to send the players off in style, there will be a community send off, 9:30 a.m. Friday morning.

The quarterback club is also asking businesses around the community to show your support for the Bears by decorating your business in black and gold. If you would like a flag, contact 506-9907.