

Blue Jays end season Saturday with 21-7 loss

By DICK BOYD

Coach Bruce Graber's Norton Community High School football team traveled to Southeast of Saline on Saturday for a Regional football game and suffered a 21-7 loss that ended the Blue Jay season with an 8-3 record and district and bi-district championships.

The Blue Jays lost two of their first three games to state-ranked Oakley and Smith Center, who are still in the playoffs, then put together a seven-game winning streak before losing on Saturday.

For the first time this season, Norton was unable to run the football and the Blue Jays were forced to go to the passing game. The Norton defense was as stingy as normal against the run, allowing an average of only 2.6 yards per carry by the Trojans, but the Blue Jays were unable to stop Southeast of Saline's passing game until the second half.

Meanwhile, the Trojans scored three times on pass plays in the first half to take a 21-7 lead at intermission. Neither team was able to score in the second half.

Although Norton stopped the Trojans in the second half, three pass interceptions by Southeast of Saline and a drive-ending Norton fumble on the Trojan 11 kept the Blue Jays out of the end zone.

Southeast of Saline scored the first three times they had the ball. Their first touchdown came on a 26-yard pass from quarterback Justin Schropp to Austin Barnes on fourth down with 7:29 left. The extra point kick hit one of their linemen in the back and they led 6-0. A pass interference penalty against Norton allowed them to keep their drive going.

The Trojans scored the second time they had the pigskin on a seven-yard pass to Bryson Flax with 1:15 left in the first quarter. Justin Dupes ran for two points and their lead was 14-0.

On the Trojans' third possession, Schropp passed 14 yards to

Joe Rollins for their third touchdown. Garrett Mugler kicked the extra point and Southeast of Saline held a 21-0 advantage with 8:31 left in the first half.

Norton's defense held Southeast of Saline to three-and-out the next time they got the ball and stopped a Trojan drive on the Norton 42 on their fifth possession of the first half. Norton quarterback Seth Mills passed to wide receiver Clay Madden and he carried the ball to the Trojan 44. A face mask penalty moved the pigskin to the 39. Mills passed to tailback Aaron Overlease for a nine-yard gain to the 30. A Mills pass fell incomplete with 37 seconds remaining in the half. After another incomplete Mills pass, he handed the ball to Overlease and he plunged for a first down on the 26. After another incomplete pass, Mills connected with split end Justin Shirk running down the far sideline for a perfect touchdown pass. William Wilhite split the uprights for the extra point and it was 21-7 with 11.5 seconds remaining in the first half.

Overlease gained 17 on six carries; Kats had 10 yards on two tries. Roe gained 1 on one carry and Mills was minus 26 on eight carries.

Shirk was leading pass receiver for Norton with 3 catches for 71 yards. Madden had 2 for 18 yards; Overlease, 1 for 9; Broeckelman, 1 for 7; and Kats, 1 for minus 2. Pffannenstiel had 3 kickoff returns for 28 yards and VanEaton had 1 for 21. Kats returned two punts for 33. Sprigg averaged 40.5 on two kickoffs.

Schropp gained just 11 on 26 carries and Myers picked up 60 yards on 12 carries. Myers gained 29 yards on one play.

"Our problem was with our offense," said Coach Graber. "We couldn't block them or execute our passing game. No matter what level you're playing at, you have to be able to run the ball to be successful.

It was frustrating trying to find a way to move the ball. We tried the option, trap and a lot of things and couldn't move them out far enough to have a crease to run in.

"Once we went to the passing game, we dropped too many passes and missed some open receivers. Defensively, we struggled early because we were so bad offensively. We played really well and hard defensively and shut them out after they put 21 points on the board.

"It was a very physical game and we took the brunt of some blows at times. They played extremely physical on defense. We tried to play physical as well. We lost Paul Juenemann with a concussion in the second quarter. We lost Pffannenstiel and Kats for awhile and Maddy had a beat up arm. We had so many injuries that guys like Matt Engel, Mark Scheetz and Austin Brooks played a lot for us. They made tackles and hits for losses. They've been in before but it has always been when the game has already been decided. It was difficult for them to play in a game like this that was so physical. I was impressed with the way they played. After Paul went out, Heath Vincent had to play all the time on offense in addition to his regular defensive position."

Southeast of Saline is coached by Pat Haxton, a Norton Community High School graduate who was also an outstanding lineman for the Blue Jays in his prep career. The Trojans are 11-0 and undefeated for the first time in school history. They will play at Garden Plain (10-1) on Friday for the Sectional championship.

Phillipsburg (9-2) defeated Hesston 35-20 on Saturday for the Regional championship and will host Conway Springs (11-0) on Friday.

In Class 2A, Smith Center (11-0) rolled over Solomon 78-0, Oakley (10-1) defeated Sublette 49-6, Hoxie lost to Claflin (11-0)



Norton linebacker Blake VanEaton, No. 20, and several of his Blue Jay teammates smother Southeast of Saline quarterback Justin Schropp, No. 12, for no gain during the Regional playoff game on Saturday.

— Telegram photo by Dick Boyd

31-14 and St. Francis (8-3) beat La Crosse 58-14. On Friday, St. Francis will play at Smith Center and Oakley will play at Claflin.

"Pat has done a good job with his players," said Coach Graber. "They play hard and physical. Their quarterback is an outstanding athlete. He gets rid of the ball quickly and throws to the right guy. They should give Garden Plain a battle.

"Our loss would be easier to deal with if I had come away thinking that we played well but I'm extremely proud of this team. When we were 1-2, being in this position seemed to be a remote possibility. We really struggled early in all phases of the game but we developed into an awfully good team that went out every Friday night and took on challenges. We

couldn't have asked more of them.

"This wasn't a team capable of blowing out teams; it was going to be a dogfight every game. We weren't that explosive. Going into the season, we knew it would be a struggle with so many graduates off our team. We lost a lot of talent and had a lot of holes to fill. Even teams with less than we had, thought they saw a chink in our armor and thought they might have a chance to beat Norton.

"It's been very rewarding to be around this group of young men. I'm proud of what they accomplished. Our coaches have done an unbelievable job. They kept believing in them and kept coaching and teaching them every week on the practice field. Our success was due to our coaches and the effort our players gave us.

"We as the coaching staff saw the growth and maturity of our players as leaders and teammates. Even juniors and seniors became better leaders. We just matured as athletes and people."

Seniors on this year's team were Jason Green, Kyle Kats, Seth Mills, Aaron Overlease, Lucas Wiseman, Paul Juenemann, Blake Hillebrand, Michael Sprigg, Justin Shirk and Ryan Maddy.

GAME STATISTICS

Norton	Southeast of Saline
5	First Downs 15
17-0	Yards Rushing 49-126
107	Yards Passing 118
107	Total Yards 244
8-23-3	Passes Compl. 10-20-0
1-2	Fumbles Lost 0-2
8-70	Penalties 5-36
7-33	Punts 5-27

Norton takes loss from Southeast of Saline in playoff game

By DICK BOYD

The Blue Jays received the opening kickoff in Norton's 21-7 Class 3A Regional football playoff loss at Southeast of Saline on Saturday.

Luke Pffannenstiel returned the kickoff to the 18. Quarterback Seth Mills ran the keeper but only made a yard, then ran again and lost three. A third down pass by Mills was incomplete and Chris Davis punted.

Blake VanEaton tackled the punt receiver on the Southeast 38. Illegal procedure cost the Trojans five. Quarterback Justin Schropp ran the ball and defensive end Paul Juenemann tackled him for a one-yard loss. A Schropp pass was incomplete but Norton was flagged for pass interference on a third-down pass and the ball was moved to the Norton 42. Running back Matt Myers ran to the 36 for a first down as defensive tackle Blake Hillebrand nailed him.

Schropp made just one before defensive tackle Michael Sprigg and linebacker VanEaton made the stop. Schropp ran right, then passed back to Myers for a first down on the Norton 19. On the next play, Hillebrand broke through the line to sack Schropp back on the 26. Schropp passed incomplete, then Norton's Kyle Kats knocked down another Schropp aerial. On fourth down, Schropp passed complete to Austin Barnes for a touchdown. The kick for the extra point hit a Trojan lineman in the back and Southeast led 6-0 with 7:29 left in the first quarter.

VanEaton returned the kickoff to the Norton 36. Kats was injured when he knocked down the pass on the Trojans' touchdown drive and Lance Roe replaced him at fullback. Roe carried the ball for one yard. A Mills pass fell incomplete, then Mills ran the keeper for six to the 43 but it was not enough for a first down and Davis punted again.

Justin Shirk made a good tackle to stop the receiver in his tracks on the Southeast 34. Schropp found running room for a first down on the 44 then Myers broke several tackles as he ran for a first down on the Blue Jay 27 where linebacker Roe tackled him.

Schropp ran for three and Kats and Roe made the tackle. Schropp gained two more before Davvid Stanley and VanEaton combined for the tackle. An encroachment penalty cost Norton five and Schropp ran to the 15-yard line where VanEaton and Shirk made the tackle. Myers bulled to the 9 before linebacker Aaron Overlease tackled him. Schropp carried the ball twice and barely picked up a first down on the 5. Myers was tackled by VanEaton for a loss on the 7 but Schropp passed to Bryson Flax for the Trojans' second touchdown with 1:15 left in the first. Justin Dupes ran for two and Southeast led 14-0.

Pffannenstiel returned the kickoff to the Norton 31. Norton was flagged for illegal procedure and lost five, then Mills was sacked, fumbled and Juenemann fell on the ball for Norton back on the 14. Overlease gained four to the 18 and the first quarter came to a close with the visiting Blue Jays trailing 14-0.

Second quarter

Davis punted and Davvid Stanley tackled Nick Hardesty on the Norton 37. Schropp passed to Justin Dupes for a first down on the 24. The Blue Jay defense stiffened as Shirk and Maddy tackled Schropp for no gain, then Maddy and VanEaton also held him to no gain. Schropp passed to Joe Rollins and Pffannenstiel tackled him on the 18. It was fourth and four for the Trojans and Schropp came through for them with a pass to Rollins for a first down by inches on the Norton 14 yard line. Michael Sprigg tackled Myers for no gain but Schropp passed to Rollins on second down for a touchdown. Garrett Mugler kicked the extra point and Southeast led

21-0 with 8:31 left in the first half.

Pffannenstiel returned the kickoff to the 31. Kats gained one yard, Overlease ran for two more and a Mills pass fell incomplete. Davis punted and Hardesty returned the ball to the Southeast 49. Myers ran for four yards before VanEaton and Sprigg tackled him. Schropp passed to Rollins and Pffannenstiel tackled him after a three yard gain. Schropp dropped back to pass again but this time Shirk and Hillebrand sacked him and the Trojans were forced to punt.

Kats returned the punt to the Norton 45. Mills passed to Clay Madden for four yards but lost two yards on second down. Mills passed to Kats in the flat but he was tackled for a two yard loss. Davis punted and the ball rolled dead on the Southeast 20 yard line. Norton had the Trojans pinned deep in their own territory but, two plays later, they were on the Norton 34. Myers ran for eight yards, then Rollins made a diving catch of a Schropp pass on the Norton 49 and a 15 yard pass interference penalty against Norton moved the pigskin to the 34.

The Norton defense stiffened once again, however, as Kats knocked down a Schropp pass, another pass was incomplete and Kats knocked down another pass. On fourth down, VanEaton sacked Schropp on the Norton 42 and the Blue Jays took over possession of the pigskin. Mills passed to Madden and he advanced the ball to the Southeast 44. The Trojan defender inadvertently grabbed his face mask so the ball was moved to the 39. Mills passed to Overlease for a nine yard gain to the 30. A Mills pass fell incomplete with 37 seconds left in the half. Another pass was incomplete, making it fourth and one. Overlease plunged for the first down on the 26. A first down pass was incomplete but Mills connected with Shirk on the far sideline around the 5 and he ran through two potential tacklers for the touchdown. William Wilhite

kicked the extra point and Southeast's lead had been cut to 21-7 with 11.5 seconds left in the half.

Sprigg squib kicked the ball to the Southeast 27 where they fell on it as the first half ended with Norton trailing 21-7.

Third quarter

Bryson Flax returned Sprigg's kickoff to the 24 where VanEaton tackled him. Schropp completed a pass to Rollins for six yards but, on second down, he was mobbed by a whole host of Norton players for a two yard loss. On third down, the Norton defenders came charging through the line to drop Schropp back on his 15. Southeast punted and the ball rolled dead on the Norton 36.

Overlease took a pitch from Mills but could only gain two yards. Mills went to the air, his pass was batted by a defender, intercepted by James Hemphill and returned to the Norton 42. Myers gained four yards but illegal procedure cost the Trojans five yards. Schropp ran a keeper to the 34, then ran for two more yards but a holding penalty moved the ball back to the 44. Encroachment cost Norton five yards. Myers plowed ahead for three yards before Roe tackled him. On fourth down, Schropp ran the keeper and picked up a first down by a foot on the 32.

Myers plunged to the 26 but Jimmy McDowell gained nothing and Schropp gained nothing. A fourth down pass was broken up by Pffannenstiel and the Norton defense had held. Unfortunately, the Norton offense could not respond. Overlease lost two yards and Mills ran a keeper for no gain. Pffannenstiel replaced Mills and his pass fell incomplete. Davis punted out of bounds on the Southeast 43.

Myers carried the ball for the Trojans but Hillebrand tackled him for no gain. A Schropp pass was incomplete and a holding penalty on Southeast moved the ball back to the 33. Austin Brooks

sacked Schropp for a loss, a pass was incomplete and the Trojans punted. Kats returned the ball to the Norton 46.

A Mills pass fell incomplete, then a Mills pass bounced off an intended receiver and into the waiting arms of McDowell on the Norton 49. Dupes gained three yards, then ran for a first down on the Norton 33 as the third quarter came to a close with Southeast leading 21-7.

Fourth quarter

Dupes gained five more yards to the 28 and Myers plunged to the 24. Dupes got the call again but was stacked up for no gain. It was fourth down and inches for the Trojans. Dupes was called on to try and penetrate the Blue Jay defense for a first down but he was stopped again for no gain and Norton took over possession of the pigskin with 9:51 left in the game. A Mills pass fell incomplete and a holding penalty cost the Blue Jays 10 yards. Mills gained nothing, then passed to Nathan Broeckelman on the 25. A third down pass fell incomplete, however, and Davis punted again. The ball rolled dead on the Southeast 38.

Schropp gained one yard before Roe tackled him. A pass was incomplete, then Schropp was limited to one more yard. Southeast punted and the ball rolled dead on the Norton 39. Mills was sacked on the 27 and a pass fell incomplete. On third down, Mills com-

pleted a pass to Shirk and he ran to the Norton 48. On fourth down, Overlease found running room and picked up a first down on the Southeast 45. Mills completed a pass to Shirk for a first down on the 20 and Norton appeared to be driving for another touchdown with 5:08 left in the contest.

Kats took a handoff and ran around right end. He was picking up good yardage when he was hit and fumbled and Southeast recovered on the 11 yard line. Dupes got loose around right end for a first down on the 24. Myers gained two yards before Hillebrand dropped him to the turf. Dupes got the call again and Sprigg and Shirk combined to tackle him for no gain.

Schropp ran a keeper up the middle to the 30 and it was three-and-out for the Trojans. Their punt was returned by Pffannenstiel to the Southeast 48 with 2:36 left. On first down, a Mills pass was intercepted by Barnes and he was tackled on the Trojan 30. Schropp lost three yards, Myers gained four and Schropp gained four.

On fourth down, Norton defenders made a great effort to block the punt and were penalized for roughing the kicker. The 15-yard penalty moved the ball to midfield and gave Southeast a first down.

Schropp took a knee and the game and season were over, much to the dismay of the Norton team, coaches and fans.

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