

Bluejays over Oberlin in shortened game

By DICK BOYD

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Coach Lucas Melvin's Norton Community High School football team shutout a visiting Oberlin eleven 33-0 in a rain-shortened contest on Friday night at Travis Field in Norton.

Norton had just scored its fifth touchdown with 6:33 left in the third quarter when officials called a 30-minute lightning delay which led to finally calling the game.

Gaining about the same number of yards on the ground and through the air, the Blue Jays held a 6-0 lead after one quarter, were on top 27-0 at halftime and scored one more touchdown in the third quarter.

The Norton defense was very stingy, giving up just 34 yards rushing on 18 attempts for a 1.9 yard average. Oberlin entered the game with a highly touted passing attack but it never materialized. The Red Devils completed three passes for 12 yards.

Meanwhile, Norton ground out 136 yards rushing on 28 attempts for an average of 4.9 yards per carry and passed for 133 yards on eight completions for an average of 16.7 yards per catch.

First quarter

Norton's Caleb Laughlin kicked off to start the game and Oberlin punted after three downs. Senior quarterback Connor Pfannenstiel returned the punt to the Oberlin 36. In three rushes by senior fullback Zane Perez, he was in the end zone. Zane scampered 29 yards to the 7, then drove 4 yards to the 3 and bulled into the end zone on third down. Laughlin's extra point kick was blocked but the Jays held an early 6-0 lead with 9:19 left.

Laughlin kicked off again and once again the aggressive Norton defense caused a three and out for the visitors. Oberlin punted out of bounds on their own 29-yard-line. Perez had good blocking and rambled to the Oberlin 19 for a first down. After a loss on the ground, Pfannenstiel saw two passes fall incomplete. On fourth down, a 10-yard-pass was good to senior tight end J.D. Gall but was not enough for a first down.

Again, the gang-tackling Norton defenders forced a three-and-out for Oberlin and they punted to the Norton 47. After the Jays earned another first down, Pfannenstiel connected with Gall again and this time the play went for a first down 26 yards later on the Red Devil 14. Pfannenstiel passed to senior wide receiver Landon Hamel and he made a diving catch on the 7 as time ran out in the first quarter with the Jays ahead 6-0.

Second quarter

After a dead ball penalty against Oberlin moved the ball to the 2, junior tailback Jeremy Sproul drove to the 1. Next down, Pfannenstiel sneaked into the end zone for the second touchdown of the night.

Pfannenstiel picked up two extra points by passing into the end zone to Perez and Norton led 14-0 with 11:30 left in the half.

After Laughlin's kickoff, Oberlin was still frustrated by the Blue Jay defense as junior defensive back Justin Shirk intercepted a pass from quarterback Wiley Farr and returned the pigskin to the Oberlin 35.

Pfannenstiel went upstairs again and spotted senior wide receiver Ashton Draper on the sideline. He fired the ball to Draper but it was a little high. No matter, Draper went high enough to pull the ball down with an Oberlin player all over him. That play set Norton up on the visitors' 12.

Sproul powered to the 4 and, in three plays, Perez scored from the 2. The extra point kick was wide but Norton led 20-0 with 9:45 left.

Laughlin kicked off and Oberlin returned the kick to the 26. Farr ran a keeper for 7 yards, then passed to senior wide receiver Toby Peters, who caught over 900 yards in passes for the Red Devils last season. Peters gathered the ball in for an 8 yard reception and his only catch of the night. The play earned Oberlin their first of only four first downs in the game.

On the next series of downs, Norton forced another Oberlin punt and Hamel returned the kick to the Norton 26. Gall made a leaping catch of a Pfannenstiel pass on the Norton 46. After an incomplete pass, Sproul drove for eight yards on two carries but Norton punted for the only time in the game.

Gall got off a good kick to the Oberlin 14. The Red Devils earned their second first down, then Norton was whistled for roughing the passer and they got their third first down at mid-field.

Any thoughts by the Red Devils of advancing the ball further were quickly extinguished when Hamel intercepted a Farr pass and danced his way for another Norton touchdown! Laughlin's extra point kick lengthened the Blue Jay lead to 27-0 with 2:40 remaining in the half.

Keithen Fortin got the Oberlin players and fans' hopes up once again when he returned Laughlin's kickoff to the Norton 32 where Laughlin made the tackle. With Farr picking up most of the yardage on keepers around the end, Oberlin moved closer to the Norton goalline. They had the ball on the Blue Jay 20 when Farr went to the air and Shirk grabbed his second pass interception of the night on the 10!

With 1:03 left in the half, Norton also went to the air and a Pfannenstiel pass was intercepted by Toby Peters and returned to the Blue Jay 10. Surely, now Oberlin would be able to penetrate the Norton end zone.

But, the gang-tackling Blue Jays would not allow it. Farr lost one yard, then nine yards as Trey Millan and Justin Griffith made the stop. The half ended on the next play with Norton leading 27-0 when defensive end Sproul delivered a tremendous hit on a blocker and pushed him into Farr.

The quarterback went down in a heap and got up very slowly, ready for intermission.

Despite the rainy weather, David Will's Norton Community High School marching band performed admirably. Dressed appropriately, the band played music made famous by the Beach Boys.

Third quarter

The second half got underway with Hamel making a good return of the kickoff to mid-field. The Blue Jays drove to the Oberlin 10 where they fumbled the slippery ball for the only time in the game. The Norton defense was equal to the occasion once again, forcing Oberlin to punt to their 40.

Junior quarterback Spencer Shirk took over the Norton offense and promptly ran for 7 yards. Next, he spotted Hamel running down the sidelines and hit him with a perfect pass for a 33 yard touchdown!

With 6:33 remaining in the third quarter, lightning was threatening enough that players were ordered off the field and into the locker room. Thirty minutes later with no letup in the weather conditions, the game was declared in the books with Norton winning 33-0.

Perez ended the game with 68 yards rushing on 9 carries for a 7.55 yards per carry average. Gall caught 3 passes for 55 yards and an 18.3 yards per grab average.

Pfannenstiel completed 7 of 14 passes for 50 percent and 99 yards.

"Our defense was awesome," said coach Melvin. "Our boys came out and played hard and didn't let down."

"Last year, we let Oberlin back in the game in the second quarter before beating them."

"We put a good rush on their quarterback and didn't give him much time to pass. When he did pass, we had good coverage."

"We had too many penalties again but they were aggressive penalties, not bonehead penalties like offsides."

Coach Melvin started the following players on the offensive line: junior Ryan Blecha, left tackle; senior Marcus Herman, left guard; junior Kaid McKenna, center; junior Luke Nimmire, right guard; junior Landon Keiswretter, right tackle; senior J.D. Gall, tight end; senior Ashton Draper, wide receiver and senior Landon Hamel, wide receiver; The backfield consisted of senior Connor Pfannenstiel, quarterback; senior Zane Perez, fullback; junior Jeremy Sproul, tailback.

On defense for the Blue Jays were: junior Rylee Stanley, defensive end; Sproul, defensive end; senior Tyler Cook, defensive tackle; Herman, defensive tackle; Gall, McKenna, Draper, Shirk, Pfannenstiel, linebackers; Hamel, Perez, defensive backs.

Individual statistics

In addition to Zane Perez's rushing yardage, Sproul gained 36 yards on 11 carries, Pfannenstiel



The big hit of the Norton-Oberlin football game came right before halftime when Norton defensive end Jeremy Sproul delivered a tremendous hit on a Red Devil player trying to block him! His blow was so powerful that he knocked the would-be blocker back into quarterback Wiley Farr and he was on the turf for some time before he regained his senses.

- Telegram photo by Dick Boyd

had 24 yards on 6 carries, Shirk had 7 on 1 carry and Gall had 1 on 1.

Laughlin kicked off 5 times for a 46.8 yard average.

Passes caught, in addition to Gall's were: Hamel, 2 for 41; Perez, 2 for 14 and Draper, 1 for 23.

Leading tackler for Norton in the game was Hamel with 6 solos, 2 assists, 8 total. Pfannenstiel had 3 solos, 3 assists, 6 total, followed by Shirk, 3 solos, 2 assists, 5 total; McKenna and Perez, each 2 solos, 2 assists, 4 total; Draper and Gall, each 2 solos, 1 assist, 3 total; Stanley, 1 solo, 2 assists, 3 total; Cook, Sproul, each 1 solo, 1 assist, 2 total; Millan, 2 solos; Herman, Laughlin, Griffith, each 1 solo.

Next action

Norton will have a big challenge this Friday night when the Blue Jays travel to Smith Center to play the Redmen in a 7 p.m. contest.

Smith Center has a 69-game winning streak and has received national attention for their program orchestrated by head coach Roger Barta. The Redmen have won the last five Class 2A state championships.

The Blue Jays have played the Redmen closer than any other team during their win streak. That game was just last season when Smith Center prevailed 22-20.

Smith Center has reloaded again this season, defeating Plainville and Trego Community so far, both by 59-0 scores.

Norton defeated an excellent Phillipsburg eleven 21-14 in their

opener.

"I'm excited to be playing Smith Center and our boys are excited," said coach Melvin.

"You always want to play good teams. We'll do the same thing to prepare for them as we do for any team."

"Every game is our biggest game and this is our next game."

GAME STATISTICS

Norton - Oberlin	10 First Downs
136	Yards Rushing 34
269	133 Yards Passing 12
8-15-1	Total Yards 46
1-1	Fumbles Lost 0-0
1-38	Punts 5-26.6
	6-70 Penalties 3-14



Oberlin backs found little running room on Friday night against Norton. Above, the Blue Jays' Justin Griffith, No.82, and Trey Millan, No.8, threw a Red Devil back for a big loss. Oberlin had just 34 yards rushing in the contest, won by Norton 33-0.

- Telegram photo by Dick Boyd

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