

Jays put up a good fight

By DICK BOYD

nortontelegram@nwkansas.com
In one of the hardest fought, hardest hitting high school games most fans have seen for years, coach Lucas Melvin's Norton Community High School football team was outscored 20-14 by Smith Center in Mid-Continent League play on Friday night on the Redmen's home field.

Before a standing room only crowd on both sides of the field, the Blue Jays were the aggressors versus the highly publicized Smith Center eleven, the five-time defending Class 2A Kansas state football champions and holder of a 69-game winning streak, the longest in the nation.

Since last season's state championship, a best selling book has been written about the town of Smith Center and their team as well as several feature stories in national magazines.

Running the wishbone offense under the guidance of veteran head coach Roger Barta, the Redmen started the 2009 season with duplicate 59-0 wins. The Blue Jays were also 2-0 with wins over a quality Phillipsburg team and shutout of Oberlin.

The fired up visiting Blue Jays moved right down the field on their first possession to take a 7-0 lead and it held up for a quarter. Smith Center scored twice, however, in the second quarter to take a 14-7 lead into the locker room.

Norton started the third quarter as the Blue Jays had the first quarter by driving for a game tying touchdown! Showing their pride and determination to protect their winning streak, the Redmen answered on the ensuing kickoff with their final touchdown.

The Blue Jays stood toe-to-toe with the Redmen the entire game and missed several opportunities to score another touchdown or two.

On the other hand, Smith Center's sleight of hand backfield provided their linemen with a slight advantage and the magic on just one play enabled them to score the winning touchdown.

The score came when Smith Center's running back Aaron McNary ran over the right side and sprinted 74 yards untouched to the end zone with 5:11 left in the third quarter. Norton's Ashton Draper blocked the extra point kick. There appeared to be plenty of time for the Blue Jays to answer with another touchdown of their own and possible extra point kick for a 21-20 victory but there was no more scoring the rest of the game.

"We really played hard but didn't take advantage of opportunities in the red zone," said a disappointed coach Melvin. "We were inside their 20-yard-line two times in the first half and didn't score. We just didn't execute as good as we could have.

"Our young men played really, really hard. Our special teams were awesome; I don't know when we've had special teams play that well." The special teams gave Norton good field position on a number of occasions.

"Our offensive line also played especially well," said coach Melvin. "Our defense played very hard and did okay but blew some assignments. They changed the way they ran one play and that enabled them to get outside more on us. We allowed too much rushing yardage.

"Our young men are hurting after the game because they sure wanted to win.

"Their two scores in the second quarter hurt but we kept fighting. We came out to start the second half and put together a good drive to score.

"Good teams bounce back. We'll use this game as a motivation and bounce back!"

Coach Melvin started the following players on the offensive line: junior Ryan Blecha, 185 pounds, left tackle; senior Marcus Herman, 175 pounds, left guard; junior Kaid McKenna, 175 pounds, center; junior Luke Ninemire, 190 pounds, right guard; junior Landon Keiswetter,

175 pounds, right tackle; senior J.D. Gall, 180 pounds, tight end; senior Ashton Draper, 180 pounds, wide receiver and senior Landon Hamel, 160 pounds, wide receiver.

Starting in the backfield for the Blue Jays were senior Connor Pfannenstiel, 155 pounds, quarterback; senior Zane Perez, 180 pounds, fullback; junior Terrell Lane, 210 pounds, tailback.

On defense for the Blue Jays were: junior Jeremy Sproul, 200 pounds, defensive end; senior Tyler Cook, 215 pounds, defensive tackle; junior Rylee Stanley, nose guard; Herman, defensive tackle; junior Justin Griffith, 180 pounds, defensive end; Gall, McKenna, Lane, linebackers; Hamel, Perez, junior Spencer Shirk, 165 pounds, defensive backs.

"Kaid McKenna, J.D. Gall, Landon Hamel and Zane Perez all stepped up and played really well," said coach Melvin. "I also want to recognize our interior offensive linemen, Ryan Blecha, Marcus Herman, Kaid McKenna, Luke Ninemire and Landon Keiswetter for their exceptional play," said coach Melvin.

One game statistic that really stood out in Norton's favor was return yards. The Blue Jays gained 134 yards on kickoff returns and 71 yards on punt returns compared to 23 yards on kickoff returns and zero yards on punt returns for Smith Center.

Norton rushed 44 times for 177 yards and 4 yards per carry average but Smith Center gained 375 yards rushing on 51 carries for a 7.4 yard average.

The Blue Jays had 9 first downs compared to 13 for the Redmen.

Neither team had many penalties. Norton had 3 for 15 yards and Smith Center had 4 for 31 yards.

Norton completed 4 passes for 37 yards; Smith Center had 1 pass but did not complete it.

The Blue Jays punted 4 times for a 36.75 yard average and the Redmen kicked 5 times for a 36.6 yard average.

Individual statistics

Zane Perez had another outstanding rushing game. The hard-driving senior gained 80 yards on 12 carries for a 6.6 yard average. He also had one kickoff return for 59 yards.

Landon Hamel returned 4 punts for 71 yards and a 17.8 yard average. He also had 1 kickoff return for 75 yards.

Norton's other ball carriers were: Terrell Lane, 21 carries for 55 yards and Connor Pfannenstiel, 11 carries for 42 yards. Pfannenstiel completed 4 of 10 passes for 37 yards.

Gall caught 1 pass for 16 yards, Draper caught 1 for 3 yards and Hamel had 2 catches for 18 yards.

Caleb Laughlin kicked off 3 times for a 53 yard average.

Gall punted 4 times for a 36.8 yard average.

Smith Center's Colt Rogers gained 130 yards on 14 carries and the Redmen's Matt Atwood rushed 23 times for 106 yards.

First quarter

The Blue Jays served notice on the opening play that they had come to Smith Center with victory on their minds when Laughlin kicked off and the Norton players charged down the field and dropped Redman back Aaron McNary on their 10-yard-line!

After 6 yards by Rogers and nothing on two more plays, Smith Center was forced to do something they don't do very often and that was punt.

After the kick, Norton had the ball on the Smith Center 39. The fired up Blue Jays were not to be denied. Terrell Lane gained 8 yards on 2 carries and Zane Perez got a first down on the 28. Lane plunged for 6 yards and Perez ran up the middle to the 19.

After an incomplete pass, Perez got the ball again and rammed ahead over left tackle for a first down on the 16. Lane plunged for 2 yards on 2 tries but Smith Center was penalized for a late hit and the ball was moved to the 9-yard-line. Next, Perez ran around left end and, as if shot out of a cannon,



Norton senior fullback Zane Perez broke a tackle and his momentum carried him into the Smith Center end zone for the first score of their Mid-Continent League battle on Friday night. Zane's touchdown and

Caleb Laughlin's extra point kick gave the Blue Jays an early 7-0 lead but the Redmen eventually won the contest by a 20-14 score. —Telegram photo by Dick Boyd

barreled into the end zone!

Laughlin kicked the extra point and Norton led 7-0 with 5:37 left in the first quarter.

Laughlin kicked off and, once again, the Blue Jays came charging downfield. Hamel tackled Rogers on the 7-yard-line! The swarming Norton defense limited the Redmen to three-and-out for the second time in a row. Hamel received the punt on the Norton 37.

The Smith Center defense was equal to the occasion this time and Norton also went three-and-out. J.D. Gall punted and the ball rolled dead on the Redman 38. After one first down, Smith Center fumbled and Kaid McKenna recovered the pigskin for the Blue Jays on the Norton 33.

Again, however, Smith Center's defense stiffened and, after three downs, Gall punted again and the ball rolled dead on the Smith Center 19 as the first quarter came to a close with the visiting Blue Jays on top 7-0!

Second quarter

Smith Center fumbled but recovered and tried their only pass of the game but it fell incomplete and they punted back to Norton. Hamel took advantage of several good blocks by his teammates and returned the ball all the way to the Smith Center 46.

Smith Center's defense met the challenge again, however, and Norton punted. Gall's kick rolled dead on the Redmen 26. This time, Smith Center's precision offense produced their first touchdown of the night. Matt Awood scored from 5 yards out and Timur Schubart kicked the extra point to tie the score at 7-all with 6:46 left.

On the ensuing kickoff, Hamel put the Blue Jays in scoring position once again when he returned the pigskin 75 yards to the Smith Center 16! Three plays later, a Connor Pfannenstiel pass was intercepted by Shawn Stansbury and the Redmen used that momentum to put together another scoring drive. Rogers made two long runs on the drive and also ran the final 12 yards for the go-ahead score. Schubart kicked the extra point and the Redmen led 14-7 with 2:48 left in the half.

Schubart kicked off into the end zone and Norton took over on their 20. Perez got the ball on first down and kept his legs driving as Redman after Redman tried to get him down. Finally, he was dragged to the turf on the 33. Pfannenstiel found running room on a keeper to the Smith Center 40, then Perez got loose and was not tackled until he reached the 9-yard-line!

The Redman defensive line stiffened, however, and Norton was unable to get past their 1-yard-line and the half ended one play later with Smith Center ahead 14-7.

Third quarter

The Norton Blue Jays came out of the locker room for the second half determined to score the touchdown that eluded them late in the first half and their determination was rewarded on their first possession. Schubart kicked

off and again put the ball in the end zone.

With Terrell Lane and Perez making most of the yardage, the Blue Jays moved downfield. A pass interference penalty against the Redmen helped keep the drive alive and put the ball on the Smith Center 15. Perez ran to the 1-yard-line on 3 carries and Pfannenstiel sneaked in for the touchdown. Laughlin split the uprights with the extra point kick and it was 14-all with 5:29 left.

Rogers returned Laughlin's kickoff to the 26 but, on first down, the Redman magic was successful once again and the Blue Jay defense was mystified. Aaron McNary ran over the right side of the line and, unbeknownst to the Norton defenders, quarterback Shawn Stansbury slipped the ball into his hands. McNary broke into the open and Blue Jay defenders were unable to catch him as he sprinted 74 yards to the end zone for what turned out to be the winning touchdown.

On the extra point kick attempt, Norton's Ashton Draper found a hole in the Redman defense and ran up the middle to block Schubart's kick! With 5:11 left, the Redmen led by just 20-14.

Perez returned the kickoff 59 yards to the Smith Center 30 and the Blue Jay offense appeared to be back in business. The Redmen had other ideas, however, and held Norton without a first-

and-ten.

The Blue Jay defense was also stingy. After Smith Center earned two first downs, they were forced to punt. Hamel gathered in the pigskin and literally flew down the sideline, jumping over a would-be tackle in the process! He was finally tackled on the Smith Center 42 after a 51 yard return. The quarter came to a close one play later with Norton still trailing 20-14 but with some extra momentum from Hamel's return.

Fourth quarter

The Smith Center defense had other ideas, however, and Norton was forced to punt. Gall's punt was a beauty, rolling dead on the Redman 3-yard-line! It was three-and-out for the Smith Center eleven versus the swarming Blue Jay defense.

A roughing the kicker penalty against Norton gave the ball back to Smith Center on their 30. Once again, they could not earn a first down against the gang tackling Blue Jay defenders and they punted. Hamel received the punt but could not advance it past the Norton 36.

Lane plunged for 1 yard and Perez picked up 3. Pfannenstiel passed to Hamel and he made a diving catch on the Smith Center 44 for a 16 yard gain! Pfannenstiel got loose on a keeper over right tackle and appeared to be running for another Norton first down

when he was hit hard by Smith Center defenders and fumbled. The Redmen recovered on their 37 with 3:42 left in the game.

With Matt Atwood making most of the carries, Smith Center moved the ball deep into Norton territory but did not score before the final whistle and their 70th straight victory by a 20-14 score over the "fighting Blue Jays"!

Next action

It will be Homecoming for Norton this Friday night when the Blue Jays host Osborne, another Mid-Continent League team.

Coronation of Homecoming Royalty will be at 6:40 p.m. at Travis Field with kickoff for the football game set for 7 p.m.

Osborne runs the flexbone offense and 4-4 defense.

They have 14 returning lettermen and seven returning senior starters, including running backs Jason Knoll, Danny Floyd and Damon Schurr, all of whom are quick and elusive ball carriers.

GAME STATISTICS

Norton	Smith Center
9	First Downs 13
177	Yards Rushing 375
37	Yards Passing 0
214	Total Yards 375
4-11-1	Passes Compl. 0-1
1-2	Fumbles Lost 1-3
4-36.75	Punts 5-36.6
3-15	Penalties 4-31

High School Sports This Week



Norton Blue Jays



Northern Valley Huskies



Logan Trojans

FOOTBALL:

Norton Blue Jays vs. Osborne Bulldogs (Homecoming) 7 p.m. Friday in Norton
Norton Junior Varsity vs. Goodland 5:30 p.m. Monday in Goodland
Northern Valley Huskies vs. Southern Cloud 7 p.m. Friday in Alma
Northern Valley Junior Varsity vs. Hill City 6 p.m. Monday in Hill City
Logan Trojans vs. Hill City 7 p.m. Friday in Logan

VOLLEYBALL:

Norton Lady Jays vs. Hoxie, Hill City V, JV 4:30 p.m. Today in Hoxie
Norton Lady Jays vs. Atwood, Colby V, JV 4:30 p.m. Tuesday in Norton
Norton Lady Jays C-team vs. Hill City, Ellis, Oakley, TMP, Phillipsburg, Osborne 8:30 a.m. Saturday in Hill City
Northern Valley Lady Huskies vs. Logan, Alma 5 p.m. Today in Alma
Logan Lady Trojans in Osborne Round Robin 8 a.m. Today in Osborne
Logan Lady Trojans vs. Western Plains, Palco 4 p.m. Friday in Ransom

CROSS COUNTRY:

Norton Cross Country V, JV in Hill City Invitational 5 p.m. Thursday in Hill City
Norton Cross Country V, JV in Oberlin Invitational 5 p.m. Tuesday in Oberlin
Northern Valley Huskies vs., JV in Hill City Invitational 5 p.m. Thursday in Hill City
Northern Valley Huskies vs., JV in Oberlin Invitational 5 p.m. Tuesday in Oberlin

TENNIS:

Norton Lady Jays in Goodland JV Tournament 3 p.m. Today in Goodland
Norton Lady Jays in Russell Invitational 1 p.m. Thursday in Russell
Norton Lady Jays in Phillipsburg JV Tournament 9 a.m. Saturday in Phillipsburg
Norton Lady Jays in Trego Invitational 9 a.m. Saturday in WaKeeney
Norton Lady Jays in Colby Tournament 3 p.m. Tuesday in Colby