

Blue Jays win 3A Sectional championship

By DICK BOYD

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Coach Lucas Melvin's Norton Community High School football team used a swarming defense and aggressive offense and committed fewer turnovers to defeat previously unbeaten Hutchinson Trinity 17-7 to win the Class 3A Sectional championship on Saturday afternoon in front of large crowds on both sides at Travis Field in Norton.

The hard-hitting Blue Jays ended the Celtics' season at 11-1 and stamped their ticket to play Wichita Collegiate, unbeaten at 12-0, for the Sub-State championship this Saturday at 2 p.m. at Travis Field in Norton.

A sub-state victory for 9-3 Norton would propel them into the Class 3A State championship game at 1 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 28 in Hutchinson.

Wichita Collegiate defeated Scott City 19-17 on Saturday to prevent the Blue Jays and Beavers from meeting again. Scott City defeated Norton 14-6 in Scott City to win the district championship. As runner-up, Norton continued on and defeated Lakin and Beloit in addition to Hutch Trinity.

Norton has now hosted two straight home playoff games but Wichita Collegiate has hosted three straight so they must make the trip to Norton to play on a field where the Blue Jays seldom lose.

Norton's other losses were to unbeaten Smith Center, who defeated Meade 10-0 on Friday, and Ellis, who lost 3-0 to unbeaten Oakley on Friday. Smith Center and Oakley will play in the sub-state on Friday in Smith Center to determine who will play in the Class 2A state championship game.

Norton is now one of four remaining Class 3A football teams playing to reach the state championship game. In the eastern playoff games over the weekend, Marysville defeated Silver Lake 21-14 and Galena outscored Ross-ville 26-15. Marysville and Galena will play Friday for the right to play the Norton-Collegiate winner for the 2009 state championship.

Norton scored first in Saturday's win over Hutch Trinity. After one offensive possession, Norton got the ball back when defensive back Connor Pfannenstiel intercepted a pass and returned it to the Celtics' 21-yard line. Pfannenstiel was shaken up on the play so the Jays' starting quarterback was replaced by Spencer Shirk, who drove them down the field to score. Shirk tallied from 1 yard out and Caleb Laughlin kicked the extra point to put Norton ahead 7-0 with 6:02 left.

After a Hutch Trinity three-and-

out, Landon Hamel returned their punt for an apparent touchdown but a blocking in the back penalty nullified the score. Norton punted to the Celtics and they put together their only scoring play of the game.

Quarterback Derek Racette connected with running back Tanner Engweiler for a 77 yard touchdown. Michael Mesh kicked the extra point and the Celtics had tied the score at 7-all with 1:09 left in the first quarter.

Norton came right back after the ensuing kickoff and drove down the field. The drive stalled, but Caleb Laughlin boomed a 32 yard field goal to put Norton on top 10-7 with 11:13 left in the half.

After the kickoff, the Norton defense bent but didn't break and Norton got the ball back. Two Shirk passes to Hamel and a 16-yard run by tailback Terrell Lane and Norton was on the Celtics' 27. Another Shirk pass was intercepted, however, and Norton was unable to score again before halftime.

As the third quarter started, Hutch Trinity kept the ball after a roughing the kicker penalty on Norton but gave it up when J.D. Gall recovered their fumble on the Norton 16-yard line. Norton put together another drive but a holding penalty stalled it and Gall punted.

After an exchange of fumbles, Hamel got a great punt return with help from two big blocks to put the pigskin on the Celtics' 40. Norton then drove for their final and game-deciding touchdown. Jeremy Sproul made a great run for the last 4 yards, running through two defenders and leaping over another as he churned into the end zone. Laughlin's extra point kick made it 17-7 with 5:31 remaining.

Next, Hutch Trinity took to the air exclusively but pass interceptions by Hamel and Lane ended their season with a 17-7 Norton Blue Jay victory!

"It was a great win for us," said coach Melvin. "We played well except for a few mistakes such as blocking in the back on the punt return.

"Our defense did a great job. Except for that one long touchdown pass play, we did a great job of bending and not breaking. Our defensive linemen and linebackers did a good job of rushing their passer and our defensive backs did a good job of covering their receivers.

"Our offensive line did a tremendous job of blocking their bigger players which allowed us to dominate the line of scrimmage. Our linemen aren't the biggest but they are quick and aggressive.

"Caleb Laughlin did another great job of kicking. His field goal



Norton senior fullback Zane Perez cuts behind a great block by senior teammate J.D. Gall to pick up more yardage against

Hutchinson Trinity. Perez carried the ball 10 times for 96 yards and a 9.6 yard average.

-Telegram photo by Dick Boyd

could have been the difference in the game and was when he kicked it. His kickoffs were also nice and deep.

"Spencer Shirk came in for Connor Pfannenstiel when he was injured and did a great job offensively and defensively.

"It still takes a team effort to win games and we had that. We beat a good team who played hard and didn't quit. Hutch Trinity beat the defending state champions when they defeated Conway Springs.

"Our young men have big hearts and play with a lot of heart. We will have to do this again on Friday against Wichita Collegiate. We will have to play our best game of the season to beat them."

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 were: senior Connor Pfannenstiel, 155 pounds, quarterback; senior Zane Perez, 180 pounds, fullback; junior Terrell Lanes, 210 pounds, tailback.

Starting on defense were: junior Jeremy Sproul, 200 pounds, left end; junior Justin Griffith, 180 pounds, left tackle; senior Tyler Cook, 215 pounds, right tackle; junior Rylee Stanley, 150 pounds, right end; Lane, McKenna, Gall, linebackers; Draper, Hamel, Pfannenstiel, Perez, defensive backs.

Both teams had 14 first downs. Norton had 45 rushing attempts for 245 yards and a 5.4 yards per carry average. Twenty-seven passing yards by the Blue Jays brought their total yardage to 272.

Hutch Trinity had just 74 yards rushing on 34 attempts for only 2.2 yards per carry. They completed 12 of 27 passes for 44 percent and 250 yards for 324 total yards. Norton intercepted 3 Celtic passes.

Norton lost 1 fumble and the Celtics' lost 2. The visitors had 98 yards in penalties compared to 42 for Norton.

Leading ball carrier for the Blue Jays was Zane Perez with 96 yards on 10 carries, an average of 9.6 yards. Other Norton ball carriers were: Terrell Lane, 14 for 59; Jeremy Sproul, 8 for 32; Connor Pfannenstiel, 6 for 25; Landon Hamel, 4 for 20; Spencer Shirk, 3 for 13.

Caleb Laughlin had 4 kickoffs for a 50.8 yard average. J.D. Gall punted 4 times for a 32.8 yard average. Landon Hamel had 2 punt returns for 36 yards and 2 pass receptions for 27 yards.

Leading rusher for Trinity was Engweiler with 9 carries for 42 yards. He also caught 5 passes for 130 yards and Mesh caught 6

for 98 yards.

Leading tackler for Norton was linebacker Kaid McKenna with 11 solo tackles and 2 assists for 13 total. He was followed by Landon Hamel, 5 solos, 2 assists, 7 total; Zane Perez, 2 solos, 4 assists, 6 total; J.D. Gall, 4 solos, 1 assist, 5 total; Terrell Lane, Jeremy Sproul, 3 solos, 1 assist, 4 total each; Spencer Shirk, 4 solos; Ashton Draper, 3 solos; Justin Griffith, 2 solos, 1 assist, 3 total; Tyler Cook, Rylee Stanley, 2 solos each.

First quarter

Hutch Trinity kicked off to Norton but a fumble, which the Jays recovered, and an offsides penalty, forced Gall to punt on fourth down.

The visitors took over on their 19. Three plays later, Pfannenstiel intercepted a Racette pass and returned the ball to the Celtic' 21 where he was injured. Perez gained 2 yards, Lane ran to the 12 and Perez got a first down on the 7. Perez plunged to the 5 and Lane powered to the 1. Spencer Shirk, who had replaced Pfannenstiel, got good blocking as he sneaked into the end zone. Laughlin split the uprights and the Blue Jays held a 7-0 advantage with 6:02 left.

Chase Clark returned Laughlin's kickoff to the 30 where Shirk made the tackle. A rollout pass was incomplete, then Racette gained 5 before Shirk stopped him. Gall and Sproul combined to throw Racette for a 2 yard loss and they punted.

Hamel returned the punt all the way for an apparent touchdown but it was nullified by a block in the back. Norton was unable to move and Gall punted to the Celtics' 28. Clark gained 4 before Hamel tackled him. Fullback Tyler Dyer got 3 and Engweiler got a first down on the 44 before McKenna and Stanley made the tackle. A long pass was incomplete and a holding penalty put the Celtics' back on their 23. Another long pass was good for a 77 yard touchdown from Racette to Engweiler and Mesh kicked the extra point to tie the score at 7-all with 1:09 left in the quarter.

Hutch Trinity kicked the ball off on the ground and Tye Nickell returned it to the 38. Lane bulled for 3 yards, then Shirk passed to Hamel for a first down at mid-field.

Second quarter

Perez got the call and charged ahead, broke two tackles and was finally downed on the Celtics' 16. Shirk got nothing, Lane 2 and a pass was incomplete. On fourth down, Laughlin booted the 32-yard field goal that put Norton ahead 10-7 with 11:13 left in the first half.

Laughlin got another long kickoff. Hutch Trinity got a blocking in the back penalty and started on their 10. Engweiler gained 9. Koenigsman gained 1 for a first down before McKenna tackled him. Racette passed to Mesh for a first down on the 34 before Gall and Draper made the stop. The Jays got a good pass rush that caused Racette to intentionally ground the ball and they were

penalized back to the 21.

Mesh made a leaping catch of a Racette pass on the Hutch Trinity 45. Engweiler got the ball on a reverse but Gall, Sproul and Griffith smashed him to the turf for a 4 yard loss! Hamel tackled Koenigsman after 5 and, the next down, several Norton players hit the Hutch Trinity runner so hard he fumbled. Norton got on the ball but the Jays were called for a face mask penalty and the Celtics got the ball on the Norton 45.

Two rushing plays later, they were on the Norton 35. Gall stopped Engweiler after 1, a flat pass to Mesh was good for just 2 as Draper and Perez made the stop. Next, Sproul and Stanley sacked Racette for a 12 yard loss!

Hutch Trinity punted and Hamel made a fair catch on the Norton 14. On third down, Shirk passed to Hamel over the middle for a 14 yard gain. He went back to Hamel for another 14 yard gain to the Norton 43. Lane ran 16 yards to the Hutch Trinity 41. After an incomplete pass, Shirk ran a keeper for a first down on the 29. Perez gained 2 but Hamel slipped for no gain. A Shirk pass was intercepted by Racette on the 12 and the half ended three plays later with Norton on top 10-7.

Third quarter

After another booming kickoff by Laughlin, Hutch Trinity took over on their 18. Engweiler gained 8 before Perez and Griffith tackled him. Racette sneaked for a first down by inches. Racette gained 2, then threw a pass to Mesh and his long run was cut down due to a face mask penalty on him. The ball was taken back to the Norton 28. Hamel tackled Engweiler after a 4 yard pass reception. A holding penalty set the Celtics back to the Norton 35.

Racette was sacked by Sproul and Griffith, then he was sacked by McKenna and Sproul. Hutch Trinity punted but Norton was penalized for roughing the kicker and they retained the ball. After a 9 yard pass play, Hutch Trinity lost 5 yards for illegal procedure. McKenna and Lane tackled Engweiler after 6, then Dyer appeared to have a first down but was hit hard by a Norton player and fumbled. Gall recovered on the Norton 16!

Lane gained 2, then took a pitch and rambled for a first down on the 33. Lane gained 4 more, then Perez ran over the left side of the line for a first down on the Celtic's 48. Pfannenstiel ran a keeper to the 22. On third down, Perez ran for a first down but it was nullified by a holding penalty. The ball was moved back to the 37 and Gall punted into the end zone. After a 15 yard pass completion, illegal procedure cost the Celtics 5 yards as the third quarter ended with the score still 10-7.

Fourth quarter

On the first play of the final quarter, the swarming Norton defense appeared to have Racette sacked but he got away. He was hit hard by a Blue Jay defender and fumbled and Hamel fell on the ball on the Norton 46!

Sproul bulled for 3, then Perez got loose to the Celtics' 35. Perez got 5 more, Sproul gained 1 and Pfannenstiel ran the keeper to the 20. Lane got the call again but fumbled when hit. Hutch Trinity recovered on their 21.

After an incomplete pass, Griffith, Sproul and McKenna sacked Racette. An offsides penalty cost the Celtics 5 more yards. A long pass was incomplete as Draper provided good coverage and Hutch Trinity punted. Hamel took advantage of great blocks by teammates J.D. Gall and Landon Keiswetter to return the pigskin to the Hutch 40 and the Blue Jays were on their way to their final touchdown.

Perez drove to the 30, Pfannenstiel ran to the 20, Sproul added 6 more yards to the 14. Norton fumbled but recovered on the 6, then Sproul plunged to the 4. Next, Sproul got the call again and ran over left tackle. Near the goalline, he ran through two Celtic defenders, then leaped over another as he jumped into the end zone!

Laughlin's extra point kick extended the Norton lead to 17-7 with 5:31 left. An unsportsman-like penalty against Hutch Trinity on the play set them back on the kickoff and Laughlin easily boomed the ball into the end zone. Racette went to the air and completed 3 passes to Mesh as the Celtics moved the ball to the Norton 15.

That's where the drive ended. Shirk sacked Racette back on the 30, Draper knocked down a pass and Hamel intercepted another Racette pass!

Norton was three-and-out and Gall punted to the Celtics' 34. This time, Racette was unable to complete a pass and even had one knocked down at the line of scrimmage by Shirk. Finally, Lane intercepted another Racette pass and the Blue Jays ran out the clock for the big 17-7 sectional victory!

Next action

Norton's next opponent is unbeaten Wichita Collegiate who runs a shotgun spread offense with emphasis on passing. In their 19-17 win over Scott City, they scored with 1:12 remaining when quarterback Blake Jablonski connected with Tyler Coughenour in the end zone for a 14-yard touchdown.

Collegiate, which came into the game averaging 47 points, was held to its season-low total by the Scott City defense. Collegiate rushed for only 47 yards on 15 attempts while completing 23 of 40 passes for 304 yards despite 3 interceptions.

GAME STATISTICS

Norton	Hutchinson	Trinity
14	First Downs	14
245	Yards Rushing	74
27	Yards Passing	250
272	Total Yards	324
2-10-1	Passes Compl	12-27-3
1-3	Fumbles Lost	2-4
4-32.8	Punts	3-44
5-42	Penalties	11-98



The official signals Norton touchdown as junior tailback Jeremy Sproul charges into the end zone after leaping over a Hutchinson Trinity defender in the fourth quarter of the Blue Jays' 17-7 sectional championship victory.

-Telegram photo by Dick Boyd