

Unbeaten Blue Jays are district champions

By DICK BOYD

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When push came to shove in Norton Community High School's District football game in Phillipsburg on Friday night, Blue Jay senior quarterback Spencer Shirk shoved the football over the goal line to ensure Norton's 35-22 victory and District championship!

Phillipsburg scored with 9:16 left in the game to cut what had originally been a 27-7 Norton lead to 27-22 and the Panthers forced the Blue Jays to punt on their next possession. The Norton defense was equal to the occasion and stopped Phillipsburg on fourth down on their 45-yard line.

Shirk took over and carried the ball on three of the next five downs. After passing to senior running back Brett Terrell for no gain, he ran for a first down on the 33. Next, he dodged and darted 13 more yards for another first down on the 20.

After senior tailback Terrell Lane was stopped for no gain, Shirk kept the ball again, ran down the left sideline, sprinted past a bevy of Phillipsburg defenders and dove through another Panther into the end zone!

Senior running back Jeremy Sproul scored two extra points and the victory and District championship was decided on that series of plays.

Early in the game, Norton appeared to be a sure bet to win fairly easily after building up a first half 27-7 lead on a 2-yard touchdown by Sproul, a 50-yard run by Shirk and, 22-yard touchdown pass from Shirk to junior wide receiver Dillon McConney, and 14 yard pass to senior tight end Dakota Dreher.

But, the Panthers always play hard against the Blue Jays. They came out in the second half and added a touchdown in each quarter to cut the lead to a mere five points prior to Shirk's heroics.

The yardage gained by both teams was fairly close. Norton had 205 yards rushing, 55 passing for 260 total and Phillipsburg rushed for 164 yards and passed for 66 for 230 yards.

The Blue Jays were hurt by three pass interceptions and two lost fumbles. Phillipsburg had one pass interception and also had two lost fumbles.

Shirk ended the game with 99 yards gained on 10 carries for a 9.9 yard average.

Coach's comments

"Our turnovers kept them in the game," said Norton head football coach Lucas Melvin. "They also changed their defense to a five-man front in the second half. They were slanting and being aggressive and we didn't handle that very well."

"Spencer stepped up and took control at the end and ran the ball very well."

"It's always a battle with them. We know each other so well."

"In the second half, we didn't come out complacent but they came out with a lot of fire and desire. Our defense kept battling and battling and we came out with the win. We really came together to stop their momentum."

"A game like this will help us down the road."

Starting lineup

Coach Melvin started the following players on offense: senior Ryan Blecha, 185 pounds, left tackle; senior Landon Keiswetter, 190 pounds, left guard; senior Kaid McKenna, 185 pounds, center; senior Luke Ninemire, 215 pounds, right guard; senior Justin Griffith, 190 pounds, right tackle; junior Dillon McConney, 150 pounds, wide receiver; senior Billy Broeckelman, 170 pounds, wide receiver; senior Dakota Dreher, 170 pounds, tight end; senior Spencer Shirk, 180 pounds, quarterback; senior Brett Terrell, 160 pounds, fullback; senior Terrell Lane, 220 pounds, tailback.

Starting on defense for the Blue Jays were: Ryan Blecha, Dakota Dreher, ends; Luke Ninemire, Justin Griffith, tackles; Landon Keiswetter, Kaid McKenna, Brett Terrell, linebackers; Tye Nickell, 150 pound junior; Spencer Shirk, Billy Broeckelman, Terrell Lane, defensive backs.

Statistics

In addition to Shirk's 99 yards, other Norton backs and their yard-

age were: Terrell Lane, 22 carries, 59 yards; Brett Terrell, 2 for 30; Jeremy Sproul, 7 for 18.

Shirk completed 5 of 12 passing attempts for 55 yards. His receivers were Billy Broeckelman, 1 for 9; Dillon McConney, 1 for 21; Dakota Dreher, 1 for 14; Terrell Lane 1 for 11; Brett Terrell, 1 for 0.

Senior kicker Caleb Laughlin had 6 kickoffs for a 49.8 yard average.

Leading rusher for Phillipsburg was senior running back Trevor Smith with 103 yards on 11 carries. His longest run was the Panthers' first touchdown when he got loose for 85 yards.

Tackles

Landon "Tug" Keiswetter was again the leader in Norton tackles with 10 solos, 1 assist, 11 total; followed by Luke Ninemire, 5 solos, 3 assists, 8 total; Billy Broeckelman, 3 solos, 5 assists, 8 total; Justin Griffith, 5 solos, 3 assists, 8 total; Kaid McKenna, 3 solos, 5 assists, 8 total; Jeremy Sproul, 3 solos, 3 assists, 6 total; Terrell Lane, 2 solos, 3 assists, 5 total; Trey Millan, 3 solos, 2 assists, 5 total; Spencer Shirk, 5 solos; Rylee Stanley, 2 solos, 3 assists, 5 total; Ryan Blecha, 1 solo, 3 assists, 4 total; Tye Nickell, 1 solo, 3 assists, 4 total; Brett Terrell, 3 solos, 1 assist, 4 total; Jacob Brooks, 2 solos, 1 assist, 3 total; Eli Bozarth, 1 solo; Dakota Dreher, 1 assist.

First quarter

Trevor Smith returned Laughlin's kickoff to the 15 yard line where he was tackled by Jeremy Sproul. Phillipsburg sophomore quarterback Sean Newlan fumbled on first down and Norton's Tye Nickell alertly jumped on the ball.

Terrell Lane ran for 2 yards, then made a first down on the 2-yard line. Sproul scored from there and Laughlin kicked the extra point, making it 7-0 with 10:55 left.

Newlan returned Laughlin's kickoff to the Panther 22 where Billy Broeckelman made the stop. Newlan fumbled on first down but recovered for a 6 yard loss. Smith gained 3 yards. Newlan made a good run to the Panther 45 but a block-in-the-back brought the ball back to the 5-yard line. Newlan passed to Sheldyne Brown on the 15; Phillipsburg punted.

Lane returned the ball 2 yards. Spencer Shirk gave a preview of things to come when he kept the ball around right end, eluded several tacklers and ran into the end zone for a 50-yard touchdown! Laughlin's kick split the uprights and Norton led 14-0 with 8:21 left.

Laughlin kicked off and Newlan had trouble receiving. He fumbled the ball, picked it up and was tackled on the 4-yard line by Jacob Brooks. Brown gained 9 yards and Keiswetter tackled him. Smith got 2 yards and a first down before Keiswetter made the stop.

The next down, Phillipsburg found the Norton defense out of position and Newlan pitched the ball to Smith, he turned the corner and was gone for an 85-yard touchdown run. Justin Juenemann kicked the extra point and it was 14-7 with 6:48 left.

Phillipsburg kicked off and Brooks returned the ball to the last man, setting Norton up on their 40. Lane got a first down on the Panther 48, Brett Terrell ran to the 35 for another first down. Lane got 1, then 2, then Shirk hit Broeckelman with a pass to the 24. Lane bulled to the 16, then got 1 more. Sproul ran over the right side and got a first down by inches on the 13. Norton got nothing on two tries and a holding penalty moved the ball back to the 21. From there, Shirk spotted McConney in the end zone and connected for Norton's third touchdown. Laughlin's kick was good and it was 21-7 with 1:25 left.

Smith returned Laughlin's kickoff and Brooks tackled him on the 31. Fullback Thomas Rachow gained 6 yards and then 3 before Terrell tackled him. Brown ran around left end for a first down on the 50 before Nickell downed him. Sproul hit Smith in the backfield for a 1 yard loss as the quarter ended with Norton leading 21-7.

Second quarter

Brown gained 1 before Dreher



Norton senior quarterback Spencer Shirk broke several tackles as he ran 50 yards for the Blue Jays' second touchdown in the District win over Phillipsburg on Thursday night. Shirk also scored Norton's final touchdown on a series of keeper plays to ensure the District championship win. He also passed for two touchdowns in the game. Blocking for him here was 160 pound senior fullback Brett Terrell, No.20. In pursuit unsuccessfully was the Panthers' 258 pound lineman Cody Derr.

- Telegram photo by Dick Boyd

tackled him. Newlan passed to Smith on the Norton 45; Kaid McKenna made the stop. On fourth down, McKenna and Sproul sacked Newlan back on the Panther 37!

The ball changed hands when a Shirk pass was intercepted by Ross Coomes on the 21, Phillipsburg fumbled and Justin Griffith recovered the ball on the Panther 32. Lane ran to the 25, then got a first down on the 18. Sproul carried the ball and a face mask penalty against the Panthers moved the ball to the 15. A pass in the end zone to McConney just missed, then Terrell ran to the 12. Shirk went to the air again and hit Dreher for another Norton touchdown. The extra point kick missed the mark but Norton led 27-7 with 5:47 left in the half.

Smith returned Laughlin's kickoff to the 21. A face mask penalty against Norton moved the ball to the 36. Newlan ran up the middle for a first down on the 50. Brown got the call next but Keiswetter stopped him for no gain. Smith got the ball and Ryan Blecha was there to tackle him for no gain. A flat pass to Brown gained nothing as Broeckelman made the tackle.

Phillipsburg punted and Lane returned the ball 12 yards to the 24. Lane gained 8, then 12 more to the 44 for a first down. Shirk ran for 4, Lane slammed to midfield and Terrell sprinted to the Panther 28. A Shirk pass was intercepted, however, to stop the drive and Phillipsburg had the ball on their 26. Smith gained 3 before Keiswetter and McK-

enna dropped him. Coomes was stopped for no gain by Griffith. Shirk broke up a long Newlan pass and they punted the ball out of bounds on the Norton 49.

Shirk hit Lane in the flat for 5 yards. Offsides cost Phillipsburg 5 yards and Shirk passed to Lane for 11 yards and a first down on the 35. Illegal procedure cost the Panthers 5 more yards and Lane ran to the 23. Norton lost 5 on illegal procedure and it was halftime with Norton on top 27-7.

Third quarter

Phillipsburg had a short kickoff and Norton got the ball on their 48. Lane lost a yard, then a fumble was picked up by a Phillipsburg lineman and he ran the ball into the end zone. A block-in-the-back by a Panther nullified the touchdown and brought the ball back to the 41. Smith ran to the 35, Newlan gained 2 before Ninemire dropped him.

A pass interference call against Norton moved the ball to the 24. A pass was incomplete, then Newlan ran to the 18 before Rylee Stanley made the tackle. Newlan fumbled and recovered on the 20. A fourth down pass was incomplete and Norton had held.

The Blue Jays fumbled the ball back to the Panthers on the 24. Keiswetter sacked Newlan on the 27, an unsportsmanlike penalty against Norton moved the ball to the 15 and Rachow got a first down on the 12 before Keiswetter tackled him. Brown plunged to the 4 and Keiswetter made the tackle. Griffith stopped Rachow for no gain, Smith took a pitch and was tackled by Keiswetter

and Ninemire on the 5. Newlan passed to Smith in the end zone for a Panther touchdown. Brown ran for two extra points, making it 27-15 with 6:05 left.

The kickoff went out of bounds and Norton got the ball on the 35. Lane gained nothing on 2 carries, a pass was incomplete and Lane punted to the Phillipsburg 30. Ninemire came charging in to drop Smith for a 3 yard loss! Stanley, Ninemire and Millan then sacked Newlan on the 24! Terrell broke up a flat pass and the Panthers punted. The ball rolled dead on the Norton 44.

Norton was unable to move the ball and Lane punted to the Panther 31. Brown gained 1 and Newlan gained 4 as Stanley dropped him, ending the quarter with Norton leading 27-15.

Fourth quarter

Newlan passed to Smith on the Norton 45. Rachow plowed for 5 before Keiswetter tackled him. Rachow got a first down on the Norton 26 and Nickell made the tackle. Ninemire sacked Newlan for a 3 yard loss. Rachow ran to the 24 where Shirk made the tackle. Keiswetter rushed Newlan and he threw an incomplete pass but, the next down, Smith connected with Coomes on the Norton 1-yard line. Brown ran for the touchdown, Juenemann kicked the extra point and it was 27-22 with 9:16 left in the game.

The Panther kickoff was recovered by Nickell on the Norton 35. The Blue Jays were unable to move the ball and Lane punted to the Panther 40. Nickell broke up a long pass by Newlan. Shirk tack-

led Brown after 4. Ninemire and Keiswetter stopped Brown after 2. On fourth down, Coomes carried the ball, was stopped short by Ninemire, Keiswetter and Griffith and Norton took over possession on the Phillipsburg 45.

This is where Shirk took charge. After passing to Terrell for no gain, he made a great run to the 33, then another Shirk keeper got another first down on the 20. After Lane got nothing, a determined Shirk ran through the entire Panther defense and dove through a Phillipsburg player into the end zone!

An encroachment penalty against the Panthers on the extra point try moved the ball half the distance to the goal line from the 3 and Sproul ran up the middle for 2 extra points, making the score 35-22 with 3:06 left in the game.

Brown returned Laughlin's kickoff to the 30. Newlan passed to Brown on the 35 and Broeckelman made the hit of the game. He hit Brown so hard that it knocked his helmet off!

Newlan was sacked on the next down and, on the next, Brooks intercepted his pass and ran for an apparent Blue Jay touchdown. It was called back, however, due to an illegal Norton block. The ball was brought back to the 26. Shirk ran to the 23, Sproul to the 14 and Sproul to the 9 as time expired with the Blue Jays winning 35-22.

As the District champion, the 8-0 Blue Jays received an attractive plaque during a post-game presentation.

Next action

The champion of Norton's District will play the runner-up of a District in southwest Kansas. Cimarron lost their District championship game to Scott City by a 54-6 score.

Norton will play Cimarron in the Bi-District game at 7 p.m. today at Travis Field.

Goodland placed runner-up in Norton's District so they will play at Scott City this evening.

In addition to the Scott City loss, the 6-3 Cimarron squad has losses this season to Elkhart and Meade.

"They run the Power I formation and have two backs who have gained over 700 yards each this season," said coach Melvin. "Their linemen are big. They run a 4-4 defense."

"This is a one game season now so we must continue to focus and play hard again."

GAME STATISTICS

Norton	Phillipsburg
11	First Downs 8
205	Yards Rushing 164
55	Yards Passing 66
260	Total Yards 230
5-12-3	Passes Compl. 7-14-1
2-3	Fumbles Lost 2-5
3-34.3	Punts 4-28.8
8-77	Penalties 6-40

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