

Blue Jays win season opener against Ellis

By Dick Boyd

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Coach Lucas Melvin's Norton Community High School football team surprised a visiting Ellis eleven and possibly some of their own fans on Friday night when they defeated the Railroaders 38-7 to open the 2011 season.

Norton lost all but a few starters from a senior-dominated team which finished 9-1 last season but the underdogs proved that they learned their lessons well from practicing against some of the better players Norton has seen in a number of years.

As graduates from the school of hard knocks, they delivered plenty of blows themselves in knocking out the visitors.

Finally on center stage in front of the Blue Jay fans, the "new" varsity got a surprise themselves when Ellis had a long return on the opening kickoff and scored on a pass play to take a 7-0 lead.

But, they settled their nerves and played a tremendous first game with a hard-driving, opportunistic offense and a swarming defense and Ellis never threatened after that.

The Blue Jay offense rolled up 316 yards, almost three times as many as the 123 yards gained by the Railroaders. Norton runners averaged 5.7 yards per carry and Ellis ball carriers averaged just 3.5 yards per tote.

Helping the Blue Jays along the way were three fumble recoveries, four pass interceptions and a touchdown on a kickoff!

After Ellis scored on an 8 yard pass from quarterback Riley Hunsicker to fullback Jared Herl and Meny Rodriguez kicked the extra point with 10:43 left in the first quarter, Norton used a combination of running and passing to move down the field to score. Junior wide receiver Carson McKenna caught a pass from senior quarterback Jordan Wahlmeier from 8 yards out. The extra point kick was unsuccessful but the Blue Jays had answered the quick score by the visitors and trailed by just 7-6 with still 6:02 left in the first period.

The period ended, however, without Norton taking the lead.

Following a fumble recovery by McKenna, Norton drove downfield and scored on an 11-yard run by senior fullback Trey Millan. Sophomore kicker Austin Hager split the uprights this time to give the Blue Jays a 13-7 lead with 7:42 left in the first half.

After the ensuing kickoff, Norton forced Ellis to punt but the Blue Jays lost the ball for the first and only time on a fumble and the Railroaders moved to the Norton 19 where senior free safety Tye Nickell intercepted a pass with 1:43 left in the half.

Norton moved downfield but could not score before halftime and held a 13-7 advantage at intermission.

Junior back Jacob Brooks shocked the visitors on the opening kickoff after halftime when he followed a wall of blockers up the middle of the field and outran the defenders for an 86 yard touchdown!

The extra point kick failed but the Jays were suddenly leading 19-7 with 11:49 remaining in the third quarter.

After the kickoff, McKenna intercepted an Ellis pass and Norton drove downfield. The Ellis defense had their best showing of the game, however, and stopped Norton on their 1-yard-line. After making 1 yard, they fumbled in the end zone and Millan fell on the ball for another Blue Jay touchdown!

Again, the extra point kick failed, but Norton had extended their lead to 25-7 with 4:19 left in the third period.

After the kickoff, Ellis moved the ball some but turned the pigskin over when Nickell made his second interception of the night with 1:23 left in the period.

When the final period started, Norton moved downfield to score again, this time on a 26-yard pass from Wahlmeier to Brooks. Hager split the uprights and Norton led 32-7 with 10:13 left in the game.

On the kickoff, senior tackle

Tyler Lewis recovered a Railroader fumble on their 27-yard line! Three plays later, Brooks sprinted through a big hole for a 9-yard touchdown! A pass for two extra points failed but the Jays had extended their advantage to make the final score 38-7!

Coach's comments

"Our players exceeded my expectations for the first game of the season," said coach Melvin. "Everyone did a good job for us.

"We prepared well for the game and played well. Even the guys who didn't play helped us get ready in practice.

"We fell behind early but didn't let it bother us. They had a new line as well as us but they had two returning outstanding players in the backfield, Riley Hunsicker and Jared Herl.

"We had just two returning starters, Tye Nickell on defense and Dillon McConney on offense.

"A lot of our guys stepped up and did good things and that was fun!"

Starting lineup

Coach Melvin started the following players on the offensive line: senior Casey Temmel, 190 pounds, left tackle; junior Treven Rossi, 165 pounds, left guard; junior Lane Bigge, 200 pounds, center; senior Kurt Douglas, 175 pounds, right guard; junior Alex Riggins, 275 pounds, right tackle; senior Dillon McConney, 150 pounds, wide receiver; junior Jacob Brooks, 175 pounds, wide receiver; senior Robert Blecha, 180 pounds, tight end; senior Jordan Wahlmeier, 180 pounds, quarterback; senior Trey Millan, 165 pounds, fullback; senior Tye Nickell, 150 pounds, tailback.

On defense for the Blue Jays were: junior Eli Bozarth, 160 pounds; Lane Bigge, ends; junior Lucas Engel, 180 pounds; senior Damien Davis, 165 pounds, tackles; Trey Millan; junior Dalton Miller, 185 pounds; senior Taylor Meder, 145 pounds, senior Cayleb Campbell, 195 pounds, linebackers; Jacob Brooks; junior Carson McKenna, 155 pounds, cornerbacks; Tye Nickell, safety..

Individual statistics

Norton's two senior backs had great opening games. Trey Millan gained 97 yards on 9 carries for a 10.8 yards per carry average and Tye Nickell ran for 94 yards on 21 carries for 4.5 yards per carry.

Other ball carriers for Norton and their yardage were: Jordan Wahlmeier, 4 for 12, Dalton Miller, 3 for 2; Austin Hager, 3 for 16; Jacob Brooks, 2 for 25; Tanner Furbush, 1 for 1; Caysean Campbell, 1 for 1.

Wahlmeier completed 6 of 8 passes for 75 percent and 67 yards.

Receivers were: Dillon McConney, 1 for 19 yards; Robert Blecha, 1 for 1; Carson McKenna, 2 for 15; Trey Millan, 1 for 6; Jacob Brooks, 1 for 26.

McKenna had 2 pass interceptions for 15 yards and Nickell had 2 for 19 yards.

McKenna, Millan and Tyler Lewis each had 1 fumble recovery.

Brooks had 1 kickoff return for 86 yards and Nickell had 1 for 29 yards.

Leading rusher for Ellis was Gage Younger with 73 yards on 11 carries. Riley Hunsicker had 28 yards on 16 carries and Jared Herl gained 15 yards on 5 carries.

Leading tacklers for Norton were Eli Bozarth with 4 solos, 2 assists, 6 total and Jared Bohl, 5 solos, 1 assist, 6 total, followed by Jacob Brooks, 3 solos, 2 assists, 5 total; Trey Millan, 1 solo, 4 assists, 5 total; John Risewick, 4 solos, 1 assist, 5 total; Ty Nickell, 5 assists; Cayleb Campbell, 2 solos, 2 assists, 4 total; Justin Waggoner, 4 solos; Damien Davis, 2 solos, 1 assists, 3 total; Lucas Engel, 1 solos, 2 assists, 3 total; Carson McKenna, 3 solos; Lane Bigge, 1 solo, 1 assist, 2 total; Kolton Harting, 2 assists; Tyler Lewis, 1 solo, 1 assist, 2 total; Dalton Miller, 2 solos; Dylan Sprigg, 1 solos, 1 assist, 2 total; Stewart Whitney, 2 assists; Tanner Furbush, 1 solo, 1 assist, 2 total;

Robert Blecha, 1 assist; Andrew Ellis, 1 assist; Austin Hager, 1 solo; Treven Rossi, 1 assist.

First quarter

Austin Lopez returned the opening kickoff for Ellis to the Norton 4-yard line where Jared Bohl made the tackle. They made 1 yard on first down but received a 5-yard penalty on second down. Then, quarterback Hunsicker threw a flat pass to Jared Herl and he scored. Meny Rodriguez kicked the extra point and the Railroaders had a 7-0 lead with 10:43 remaining.

Trey Millan returned the kickoff to the 40 and a late hit by Ellis moved the ball to the Ellis 48. Tye Nickell gained 1 yard, then Millan found a hole over left tackle and picked up a first down on the 34, then Nickell ran to the 23 for another first down.

Norton was penalized 15 yards for holding. Nickell ran for 6 yards, then Wahlmeier passed complete to Dillon McConney on the 11-yard line. Millan plunged for 2 yards and a first down on the 9-yard line. Ellis was penalized 5 yards for encroachment. Wahlmeier passed to Robert Blecha for a 1-yard gain, then found Carson McKenna open and passed to him for the Jays' first touchdown!

Austin Hager's kick for the extra point was unsuccessful and Norton trailed 7-6 with 6:02 left in the quarter.

Lopez returned Austin Hager's kickoff to the Ellis 39. On first down, Damien Davis came roaring through the line to tackle quarterback Riley Hunsicker for a 4-yard loss!

Gage Younger gained 1 yard before Justin Waggoner and Millan tackled him. A pass was incomplete and Ellis punted. Millan made a fair catch on the Norton 31.

Nickell lost 7 yards, a lateral from Wahlmeier to Jacob Brooks picked up no yards, a pass was incomplete and Wahlmeier punted out of bounds on the Norton 40.

Younger was gang tackled by Brooks, Davis and Nickell for a 1 yard loss, then Lucas Engel came roaring into the Ellis backfield to throw the Railroader back for a 4 yard loss. A double penalty was called, a pass was incomplete due to Norton's hard rush and Ellis had to punt. Millan made a good return but a block in the back penalty against the Blue Jays dropped the ball back to the Norton 10-yard line.

Dalton Miller came in at quarterback and picked up 3 yards. Norton fumbled and recovered for a 1 yard loss as the first quarter came to a close.

Second quarter

Miller was sacked and Wahlmeier punted. Hunsicker made a good return to the Norton 24. Herl lost 1 yard and, on the next play, Ellis fumbled and McKenna recovered for the Blue Jays on the 22-yard line!

A pass appeared to be intercepted by Ellis but the Railroaders were flagged for pass interference and Norton had the ball with a first down on their 35. Nickell ran for 2 yards, then McKenna caught a pass from Wahlmeier for a first down on the Norton 45.

Nickell broke several tackles as he charged 25 yards to the Ellis 30. The Norton momentum was unstoppable as Millan found a hole and rambled to the 17 for another first down. Nickell plunged to the 11 and Millan got the call again. This time he encountered several Ellis defenders and dived through them into the end zone!

Hager split the uprights for an extra point and Norton led 13-7 with 7:42 remaining in the second quarter.

Hager's squib kickoff was recovered by a Railroader on the Ellis 31-yard line. Hunsicker gained 6 yards before Campbell tackled him, then ran for a first down on the Ellis 41 before Bozarth and Campbell stopped him. Bozarth and Risewick limited Hunsicker to just 1 yard, then Herl gained 6 before Brooks and Risewick tackled him. Bozarth and Bigge dropped Hunsicker for a 4 yard loss and Ellis punted.

The punt was fumbled on the reception and Ellis recovered on



The gang tackling Norton defense is shown here during the Blue Jays' season opening 38-7 win over Ellis on Friday night at Travis Field as three defenders throw the Railroaders' Gage Younger to the turf. Making the tackle for Norton were junior Jacob Brooks, No. 6; senior Cayleb Campbell, No.58, and senior Damien Davis, No. 50.

- Telegram photo by Dick Boyd

the Norton 30. Gage Younger

13-7.

Third quarter

Norton shocked Ellis to start the second half when Jacob Brooks received the kickoff and followed a solid wall of Norton blockers, then outran the rest of the opposition for an 86 yard touchdown!

The extra point kick was wide but Norton suddenly led 19-7 with 11:49 still remaining in the third quarter.

Hager squib kicked the ball to the Ellis 35. Davis and Campbell tackled Hunsicker for no gain but Younger ran for a first down on the Ellis 45. Ellis lost 5 yards for offsidess, then made just 1 yard against the stubborn Blue Jay defense. Two straight delay-of-game penalties cost the Railroaders 10 yards, then Engel and Campbell tackled Hunsicker for a 1 yard loss. Hunsicker went to the air and completed

the pass but to the wrong colored jersey! McKenna was the recipient on the Norton 46. Millan found lots of holes opened in the Ellis line and ran

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Football (Continued on page 10)



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FOOTBALL:
 Norton Blue Jays vs. St. Francis Indians 7 p.m. Friday in St. Francis
 Norton Junior Varsity vs. St. Francis 5:30 p.m. Monday in Norton
 Northern Valley Huskies vs. Stockton 7 p.m. Friday in Stockton
 Logan Trojans vs. Lakeside 7 p.m. Friday in Logan
 Northern Valley Junior Varsity vs. Stockton 6 p.m. Monday in Almena

VOLLEYBALL:
 Northern Valley Lady Huskies vs. Natoma/Logan 4 p.m. Tuesday in Natoma
 Logan Lady Trojans in Sylvan Invitational 8 a.m. Saturday in Sylvan Grove
 Logan Lady Trojans vs. Northern Valley/Natoma 4 p.m. Tuesday in Natoma

CROSS COUNTRY:
 Norton Cross Country in Wamego Invitational 11 a.m. Saturday in Wamego
 Northern Valley Cross Country in Rock Hills Invitational 4:30 p.m. Thursday in Mankato

TENNIS:
 Norton Lady Jays in Phillipsburg Quad 3 p.m. Tuesday in Phillipsburg
 Norton Junior Varsity Quad w/Colby, Hays, Phillipsburg 9 a.m. Saturday in Norton
 Norton Junior Varsity vs. Russell 3 p.m. Tuesday in Russell