

Norton Blue Jays football season wrap up

By **DICK BOYD**

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The 2011 Norton Community High School football team was honored by parents and fans for their very competitive season during the annual banquet sponsored by the Blue Jay Booster Club on Sunday, Dec. 11 in the high school cafeteria.

Under the guidance of sixth year head coach Lucas Melvin, this year's Blue Jays had a learning year. Most of the players moved up from the junior varsity to play varsity for the first time.

Wholesale graduation from the veteran 2010 squad left lots of positions to be filled by first timers.

Despite their lack of experience, the Norton players had lots of enthusiasm and made many good plays throughout the season.

Ellis

Norton opened the 2011 season on Friday, Sept. 2 at Travis Field hosting an Ellis team who traditionally gives the Blue Jays a strong test. The start of the game looked as if this would be the case again as the Railroaders got a long return on the opening kickoff and scored on a pass play to take a 7-0 lead.

The young Norton players settled their nerves and played a tremendous game the rest of the way. The Blue Jays' hard-driving, opportunistic offense ran up 316 yards of offense and the swarming defense limited Ellis to 123 total yards in a 38-7 victory!

Norton runners averaged 5.7 yards per carry; the defense had three fumble recoveries and four pass interceptions. Junior wide receiver Jacob Brooks opened the second half by returning the kickoff for a touchdown.

The Blue Jays had only two returning starters, seniors Tye Nickell, running back and defensive back and Dillon McConney, wide receiver and defensive back. Senior fullback Trey Millan made the most of his first start by rushing for 97 yards on 9 carries, an average of 10.8 yards per carry. Tailback Nickell gained 94 yards on 21 carries for a 4.5 yard average.

"Our players exceeded my expectations for the first game," said coach Melvin.

"Everyone did a good job for us. We prepared well and played well."

St. Francis

Norton kept the momentum going in their second game of the season when they traveled to St. Francis on Friday, Sept. 9 and returned with an impressive 53-8 victory.

St. Francis' only touchdown came on a 94-yard run; without that run their average per rush was 1.3 yards. Meanwhile, Norton rolled up 208 yards on the ground and 157 through the air for 365 total yards of offense.

Nickell gained 69 yards on 14 carries for a 4.9 yard average. Millan rushed for 58 yards on 7 tries for an 8.3 yard average and scored three touchdowns before coming out of the game early in the third quarter due to a leg injury.

"It was a hard-hitting game and we got banged up a little," said coach Melvin.

Plainville

With two solid wins under their belts, the Blue Jays may have been a little overconfident traveling to play also unbeaten Plainville the next Friday night, Sept. 16.

The veteran Cardinals were as good as advertised and handed Norton their first defeat, by a convincing 53-13 score. Norton gained 220 yards but Plainville totaled 404 yards of offense. The Blue Jays averaged 5 yards per carry but the Cardinals gained 9.3 yards per tote.

With Millan's injury, Brooks moved from wide receiver to

tailback and Nickell moved from tailback to fullback. It as a good move for Brooks, who ran for 100 yards on 15 carries for a 6.7 yard average.

"Early on we did okay on defense, then had some defensive breakdowns," said coach Melvin. "We ran the ball decent and had 133 yards rushing in the first half. Our young men played hard."

Oberlin

Norton's Homecoming game was played on Friday, Sept. 23 and the Blue Jays hosted long-time rival Oberlin. Norton celebrated Homecoming with a 27-14 victory to run their record to 3-1. The margin of victory would have been higher had Oberlin not recovered four of five Norton fumbles.

The Blue Jays gained 247 yards on the ground and averaged 5.7 yards per rush. The Red Devils could manage only 69 yards rushing for a 1.8 yard average. Norton had 432 total yards of offense compared to 163 yards for Oberlin.

"Our defense played a good game," said coach Melvin. "We only punted twice but had way too many turnovers."

Brooks led Norton in rushing with 107 yards on 14 carries for a 7.6 yard average. Nickell gained 70 yards on 17 tries for a 4.1 yard average.

Smith Center

On Friday, Sept. 30, Norton traveled to Smith Center to face the always tough Smith Center Redmen. Norton slowed but couldn't stop Smith Center's efficient wishbone offense and the result was a 58-20 loss.

The first half was close and ended with Smith Center leading by just 24-14 but the Redmen outscored the Blue Jays 34-6 in the second half.

Perryton, Tex.

The Norton Blue Jays hosted Perryton, Tex. on Friday, Oct. 7 in a once-in-a-lifetime encounter. Perryton is the equivalent of a large class 4A school in Kansas with three times the enrollment of Norton. They played because both teams were having trouble with scheduling.

The game was played in light rain until a steady downpour arrived in the fourth quarter. The third quarter belonged to Norton as the Blue Jays scored twice to take a 19-7 lead into the final period but the Rangers scored three touchdowns to win 28-19.

Both teams had lots of yardage in the contest. Norton had 134 yards rushing, 186 passing for 320 total yards of offense. Perryton gained 216 yards on the ground, 115 through the air for a total of 331 yards. Norton punted only twice and Perryton punted three times.

Wahlmeier carried the ball 15 times for 81 yards and a 5.4 yard average in addition to passing for 186 yards.

"Our young men played hard and did a lot of things very well," said coach Melvin. "We played hard enough to win but just made too many mistakes."

Goodland

Norton opened District play on Friday, Oct. 14 by hosting Goodland and suffering a disappointing 17-0 loss to the Cowboys. Other than points scored, statistics were fairly even but Goodland took advantage of big plays to score.

Millan was able to rejoin the team after recovering from his early season injury and performed well at fullback. He gained 79 yards on 14 carries for a 5.6 yard average.

"We just made too many mistakes," said coach Melvin. "We were flat mentally and not focused."

Thomas More Prep-Hays

Norton's second District contest came on Friday, Oct. 21 in Hays versus Thomas More Prep, a high-powered passing team. The Monarchs' senior



Norton senior tailback Tye Nickell, No. 5, dodges a Phillipsburg defender and moves up field for more yardage during the Jays' District game with the Panthers. Tye was leading rusher for Norton this season, averaging 3.5 yards per carry. He was also a leading defensive player, tying for runner-up in tackles and leading the team in pass interceptions for the season from his defensive back position.

- Telegram photo by Dick Boyd

quarterback Nick Hammeke entered the game having passed for 1700 yards in the season and averaging 243 yards passing per game.

The Blue Jay defense limited Hammeke to 134 yards passing and the Monarchs to just 94 yards rushing. Meanwhile, Norton gained 222 yards rushing and 78 passing for 300 total yards of offense.

The Blue Jays were leading 19-14 with time running out and the Monarchs threatening to score. A third down fumble ended up in a Monarch's arms and a fourth down pass ended in wide receiver Taylor Pfeifer's hands in the corner of the end zone for a touchdown with one minute left!

Nickell ran for 99 yards on 23 carries for a 4.3 yard average and Millan gained 86 yards on 25 totes for a 3.4 yard average.

Unfortunately, Norton won the statistics but lost the game 20-19.

"We had five turnovers compared to two for them," said a disappointed coach Melvin. "We played hard. I feel bad for our players."

Phillipsburg

On Thursday, Norton hosted a strong Phillipsburg eleven in the Jays' final District game and final contest of the season. The Panthers had already beaten both Goodland and Thomas More Prep so the Blue Jays knew they had their work cut out for them.

Norton's offense responded with 30 points, which would be enough to win many games, but the defense was unable to contain the strong Panther offense, which tallied 57 points.

Even with Phillipsburg's obvious superiority, the game was close for one half. Wahlmeier's 44 yard touchdown run to start the second half cut the Panther lead to 30-20 but it was as close as Norton got.

Millan was leading rusher for Norton with 93 yards on 14 carries for a 6.6 yard average. Wahlmeier gained 58 yards on 5 tries for an 11.6 yard average and Nickell picked up 46 yards on 14 carries for a 3.3 yard average.

"Phillipsburg was one of the better teams we played this year," said coach Melvin. "They were quick and their line was tough and more physical than us. We were out of place at times on defense."

"Offensively, we did okay; we played hard but obviously didn't score enough."

Coach's comments

"We started our season with a game against Ellis, who we had only beaten once in the last four

Thanks, supporters

For all their support during the season, coach Melvin thanked his wife and family; all the players, assistant coaches Todd Fulton, Tony Fiscus, Jeremy Hawks and Ben Gordon; managers Anthony Wente and Dustan Daniels; filmers Quinton Porter and Brendon Frack, school faculty and administration; the cheerleaders; the grounds keepers and chain gang; Rick Green, statistics; Dorla Jones, coordinating; David Will and the NCHS marching band; Blue Jay Booster Club, field painters Brian McKenna, Jerry Darling, Jon Rowh, Nancy Hager, Steven Whitney, Mike Terrell, Lamont Shirk, Dale Carlson and David Davis and others who helped paint the Blue Jay on the field; parents and families of the players; news media, Dick Boyd of the Norton Telegram and the KQNK Radio Station and the entire community for contributing to the successful season.

"For those 'graduating parents', you are still part of this family and always will be," coach Melvin said. "Working with all of your sons this season was such a blessing!"

Coach Melvin presented a miniature Norton football helmet to each of the senior players.

The senior players presented to each coach a colorful keepsake clipboard.

Seniors on this year's team were: Tye Nickell, Trey Millan, Jordan Wahlmeier, Dillon McConney, Taylor Meder, Robert Blecha, Justin Waggoner, Damien Davis, Casey Temmel, Kurt Douglas, Tyler Lewis and Cayleb Campbell

State of the program

"The state of the football program at Norton Community High School is that it is in a growing period," coach Melvin

told the large crowd following the delicious carry-in meal.

"We had more players out for football this season than ever but we need to grow and mature to prepare for the future. We will need to work harder in this off-season than ever to prepare. We need our young men to compete harder and push each other more for spots on the team."

"While reading their winter goals, I noticed that almost every one of them said they want more and are willing to work for it. We do have a good number of underclassmen who were in football who are out for winter sports. Hard work, dedication, sacrifice and a selfless attitude are the things they need to continue working on in the sports they are in and will be."

"We have some very good football players and we have young men who have the potential to be great football players. All of them say they want that. Now is the time to do it!"

"We must work hard in the weight room and other sports now. There is no waiting; it is now."

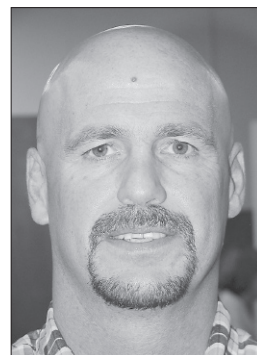
"I believe academics for our student athletes have improved some, which is great. But, we want even more improvement. It is vital that these young men understand the importance of an education and the blessing it is. Also, these young men need to be leaders in the classroom and school."

"The summer weight room is vital. I know weight lifting helps prevent injuries but it also prepares athletes mentally as well as physically."

"I am excited about our future. If we will learn to be more physical and aggressive and limit mistakes, good things will happen."

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High School Sports This Week



Norton Blue Jays



Northern Valley Huskies



Logan Trojans

WRESTLING:

Norton Blue Jays vs. Silver Lake in Wilmeth Kirk Memorial Gym 6 p.m. Friday
J.R. Durham Invitational Wrestling Tournament in Stull Gym 9:30 a.m. Saturday

BASKETBALL:

Norton vs. Osborne (JV Girls, JV Boys, Varsity Girls, Varsity Boys) 4 p.m. in Stull Gym Friday
Mid-Continent League Tournament Feather Bracket Games TBA Saturday
Norton Girls Varsity in First Round Mid-Continent League Tournament TBA Monday
Norton Boys Varsity in First Round Mid-Continent League Tournament TBA Tuesday
Northern Valley Girls and Boys vs. Stockton in Almena 6 p.m. Today
Northern Valley Girls and Boys vs. Atwood in Atwood 5:30 p.m. Saturday
Logan Girls and Boys vs. Golden Plains in Logan 4 p.m. Friday

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