

Blue Jays will take on 10-0 Southeast of Saline

By DICK BOYD

Coach Bruce Graber's Norton Community High School football team will travel to Southeast of Saline for their Class 3A Regional game on Saturday.

Kickoff will be at 5 p.m.

Southeast of Saline is located 10 miles southeast of Salina on Kansas Highway 4.

Norton will take a seven game winning streak and 8-2 overall record into the game against the No. 3 state ranked and unbeaten Trojans, who are 10-0.

With only two returning starters and eight lettermen, the Blue Jays opened the season 1-2 with losses to Oakley and Smith Center, both state-ranked teams who are also in the Class 2A playoffs. Norton has progressed throughout the season and is now playing like a veteran team.

Southeast of Saline returned nine offensive and seven defensive starters and 18 total lettermen. The Trojans had to come from behind on Tuesday evening to defeat an upset-minded Hoisington 20-19. Matt Myers, a 5'10", 215 pound senior running back and linebacker, is Southeast's gamebreaker. With Hoisington leading 13-7 and driving toward another possible touchdown, Myers broke through the line and stopped the drive by throwing the Hoisington running back for a two-yard loss.

Southeast then drove for a touchdown and extra point to make the score 14-13 and take their first lead of the game. Then Southeast recovered a Hoisington fumble and scored another touchdown. Their point-after-touchdown kick was blocked, however, so their lead was just 20-13. Hoisington drove for another touchdown to cut the Southeast of Saline lead to 20-19 and Myers broke through the line once again to block the extra point kick attempt and preserve the win and guarantee Southeast a spot in the regional game.

A four year starter, Myers is definitely the ringleader from his linebacker position. A sprained ankle limited him to five games last season but he still recorded 95 tackles and he had over 100 his

freshman and sophomore seasons. He also ran for 160 yards in the first two games last season before suffering the injury.

"They will run the shot gun offense and have a diversified running game in addition to their passing attack," Coach Graber told the Blue Jay Booster Club on Wednesday evening. "They give you a lot to prepare for. They get you thinking pass and then they run. They spread out your defense and that makes it hard to cover the run.

Directions for fans going to the game

The Norton fans traveling to Southeast of Saline on Saturday for the regional playoff game can reach the stadium by going to Salina, driving south of Salina on I-135, turning off at Exit 86 to old U.S. 81 and driving south to K-4 and turning east to the school and stadium.

"Their quarterback is very elusive. He's a good runner and scrambler."

Coach Graber was referring to 5'10", 170-pound junior Justin Schropp who was one of the state's passing leaders with 888 yards of completed passes prior to Tuesday's game. His primary receiver, 5'10", 190-pound senior wide receiver Joe Rollins, is one of the leading receivers in the state and had caught 27 passes for 393 yards prior to Tuesday's game with Hoisington.

The "big hit" defense has been a highlight of this season's Norton team. The Blue Jays have been limiting opposing offenses to less than three yards per carry. Blake Hillebrand, a 5'7", 210-pound senior defensive tackle, who is also a starting guard on offense, was leading the team with 74 total tackles prior to Tuesday's win over Riley County. Ryan Maddy, a

6'2", 195-pound senior linebacker and tight end, had recorded 63 total tackles. Michael Sprigg, 6'1", 285-pound senior offensive and defensive tackle; Lance Roe, sophomore linebacker; Luke Pfannenstiel, junior defensive back and Blake VanEaton, sophomore linebacker, are also among Norton's defensive leaders.

On offense, Norton's 5'10", 165-pound senior quarterback Seth Mills is also a state leader in passing. He has completed 65 of 116 passes for 56 percent accuracy and 809 yards. His top receiver has been 6'1", 195-pound senior tight end Justin Shirk who has caught 20 passes for 284 yards and a 14.2 yards per catch average. Kyle Kats, 5'8", 176-pound senior fullback, has caught nine passes for 119 yards and Maddy has 12 catches for 115 yards.

Leading rusher for Norton is 5'9", 155-pound senior tailback Aaron Overlease who has carried the ball 140 times for 628 yards. Kats has gained 483 yards on 79 carries and 150-pound sophomore tailback Blake VanEaton has rushed for 349 yards on 48 carries.

"Offensively, we killed ourselves with penalties in the first half against Riley County," said Coach Graber. "We were more efficient in the second half. After we made adjustments, our defense didn't allow much yardage."

Mills scored on a nine yard run for Norton's only first half touchdown and he scored a second time on a 12-yard run early in the fourth quarter to give the Blue Jays a 21-0 lead. Kats passed to Maddy for a five yard touchdown in the third quarter and Overlease ran 16 yards for the Blue Jays' final touchdown to extend Norton's lead to 28-0.

Head coach of the Southeast of Saline football team is Pat Haxton, a Norton Community High School graduate and former outstanding Blue Jay lineman. "Pat is a good guy and outstanding coach," said Coach Graber. "We will have to play well to beat them."

A large contingent of Norton fans is expected to make the trip to Southeast of Saline for the game on Saturday afternoon to cheer for the Blue Jays as they challenge the unbeaten Trojans.



Norton's senior quarterback Seth Mills gains yardage during the Blue Jays' 28-7 Regional championship victory over Riley County on Tuesday in Norton. Mills is both a running and passing threat. He rushed for 32 yards and passed for 95 yards for 127 yards of total offense and scored two touchdowns in the playoff win.

— Telegram photo by Dick Boyd

Play by play of Norton's defeat of Riley County on Tuesday

By DICK BOYD

Coach Bruce Graber's Norton Community High School football team won the Class 3A Bi-District Championship by defeating Riley County 28-7 on Tuesday evening at Travis Field in Norton.

Michael Sprigg kicked off for Norton. Velder Booth returned the kick to the 27 yard line. Riley County was penalized five yards for having 12 players on the field. Booth carried the ball but an inadvertent face mask penalty cost Norton five yards. Quarterback Zack Sullivan ran a keeper but linebacker Blake VanEaton tackled him after a two yard gain. Booth ran for a first down on the 39 but J.J. Cosh ran a reverse and was dropped by linebacker Lance Roe after picking up just one yard.

Sullivan completed a pass to end Justin Glenn and linebacker Kyle Kats tackled him on the Riley County 45. Booth earned a first down by inches near the midfield VanEaton tackled Sullivan after a three yard keeper, then Sullivan threw a flat pass to Booth but defensive end Paul Juenemann tackled him after just a two yard gain. A third down pass was incomplete and Riley County punted to the Norton 22 yard line. Norton started their first possession of the game with a pass from quarterback Seth Mills to tight end Ryan Maddy for a first down on the 34. Mills handed the ball to fullback Kats for a seven yard gain. Tailback Aaron Overlease lost two yards on his first carry, which kept him from gaining 100 yards rushing in the game. Mills ran the keeper to midfield for an apparent first down but Norton was penalized back to the 31 for an illegal block. Mills went back to

pass but couldn't find a receiver and was sacked on the 27. Chris Davis punted but the ball went out of bounds on the Norton 36.

The Blue Jay defense was equal to the occasion. Juenemann tackled Cosh after a two yard gain and Cody Bitterlin gained just two yards. Two passes were incomplete but Norton was flagged for pass interference on the second one and Riley County had a first down on the Blue Jay 16. Bitterlin carried the ball but Roe threw him for a one yard loss. A Sullivan pass to Glenn in the flat netted zero yards as VanEaton made the tackle. Riley County lost five yards for delay of game, then VanEaton sacked Sullivan on the 25 and Norton took over the pigskin.

Overlease carried the ball four straight times. He took a pitch from Mills for an eight yard gain, ran for a first down on the 38, gained five more yards and earned a first down on the Norton 48 as the first quarter ended in a scoreless tie.

Second quarter

Overlease got a rest as Kats plunged for three yards and VanEaton carried from the tailback position but was stopped for no gain. Norton lost five yards on an illegal motion penalty, a Mills pass was incomplete and Davis punted. The pigskin rolled dead on the Riley County 20 yard line. Sullivan passed to Glenn for seven yards but Riley County gained just one yard on the next two carries and punted back to Norton.

This time the Blue Jays were not to be denied. Luke Pfannenstiel returned the punt eight yards to the Norton 38. After Overlease was

stopped after just a one yard gain, Mills went upstairs and connected with wide receiver Nathan Broeckelman on a beautiful pass play that carried all the way to the Riley County 10 yard line. Kats plunged for one yard, then Mills ran the keeper around right end, got a good block from tight end Justin Shirk and sprinted untouched into the end zone for Norton's first touchdown of the game. William Wilhite kicked the extra point and the Blue Jays led 7-0 with 6:31 remaining in the half.

Robby Flack returned Sprigg's kickoff to the 32 where Kats tackled him. Cosh picked up three yards, then Shirk tackled Sullivan after a two yard gain. Sullivan passed to Jordan Strom for a first down on the 42. Sullivan gained three yards but Cosh gained nothing as Overlease made the tackle. Glenn responded with a big play for Riley County as he made an over-the-head, diving catch of a Sullivan pass on the Norton 33. Sullivan passed to Cosh for a first down on the 20, then hit Glenn again for a first down on the 10. Sullivan ran a keeper to the 2. Cosh tried the middle of the line but the Norton defenders stuffed him for no gain. Next, Cosh tried to skirt the left end for a touchdown but was stopped on the 1 yard line. With just three seconds left in the first half, Sullivan ran a keeper to the left but was smothered by the gang-tackling Norton defense and the Blue Jays' tremendous goalline stand sent them to the locker room with a 7-0 lead

Third quarter

Riley County kicked off to Norton to start the second half and Kats returned the ball to the



Norton 37. Kats got nothing up the middle on first down but Overlease ran for 10 yards around right end for a first down, then reeled off a 23 yard run around left end for a first down on the Riley County 30. Mills ran a keeper for three yards but an illegal motion penalty cost Norton five yards. VanEaton carried but lost yardage, a Mills pass was incomplete and Davis punted out of bounds on the 16.

Booth tried to run around right end but Pfannenstiel came up hard to tackle him for a four yard loss. Following an incomplete pass, Sullivan tried the air routes again but with even less success. Kats made a leaping interception on the 34.

Mills was more successful than his Riley County counterpart as he passed to Overlease for a first down on the 21, then ran the keeper for six yards to the 15. Kats plunged ahead to the 10 for another Blue Jay first down. Kats drove for three yards but Norton lost five yards for being offside. Overlease ran to the 5 yard line, then the Blue Jays used some rare razzle-dazzle when Kats received the ball and passed to Maddy in the end zone. Wilhite kicked the extra point and Norton had extended their lead to 14-0 with 4:39 left in the quarter.

Booth returned Sprigg's kickoff to the 35 where Broeckelman tackled him. Cosh gained eight yards, then ran for a first down on the

Riley County 45. He got the call again and responded with a first down on the Norton 45. A hard hit by a Norton defender on the next play caused a fumble and Maddy pounced on the pigskin on the Norton 41.

VanEaton picked up some good yardage on first down but Norton was flagged for holding and the play came back. The Blue Jays were not discouraged by the penalty. Overlease ran for five yards, then Mills passed to Kats for a first down on the Riley County 40. Kats powered to the 30 and a face mask penalty against Riley County moved the ball to the 25 for another Norton first down. Overlease gained seven yards on two plays to the 18 yard line as the third quarter came to a close with Norton leading 14-0 and driving for another score.

Fourth quarter

After Overlease started the final period with a six-yard run to the 12, Mills repeated his earlier scoring play as he ran around right end, got another good block from Shirk and sprinted untouched into the end zone. Wilhite kicked the extra point and Norton led 21-0 with 11:38 left in the game.

Booth returned Sprigg's kickoff to the 30 where he came to a sudden stop due to hard tackle by Maddy and Broeckelman. Maddy continued to stand out as he tackled Cosh after a one yard gain, then intercepted a Sullivan pass and rambled all the way to the Riley County 9 yard line before being tackled. Maddy's 31 yard interception return was followed by a three yard run by Kats but Norton was penalized back to the 16 for holding. Overlease got the call and broke several tackles as he ran

over the right side and into the end zone. Wilhite kicked the extra point to extend Norton's lead to 28-0 with 10:20 remaining in the contest.

Booth returned Sprigg's kickoff and Andrew Ables put him on the turf with a hard tackle on the 32. Cosh lost two yards but Sullivan passed to Bitterlin for four yards, then passed to him again for a first down on the Norton 48. Cosh tried to skirt left end but Kats hit him so hard he lost his helmet in addition to losing five yards! Sullivan ran to mid-field but a pass fell incomplete and Riley County punted to the Norton 15.

Overlease gained nothing. Kats ran for two and VanEaton picked up three yards to the 20. Davis punted and the ball rolled dead on the Riley County 45. Bitterlin gained two yards, then a pass interference penalty against Norton moved the ball to the Norton 38. A pass to Cosh gained three yards, then Sullivan ran for two. Booth found one of the few holes in the Norton line, which allowed just 2.4 yards per carry for the game, and ran to the Norton 4 yard line before Mills knocked him out of bounds. Booth got the call again and ran up the middle for Riley County's only touchdown of the night. Brandon Crubel kicked the extra point and Norton led 28-7 with 2:49 remaining in the game.

Kats returned the kickoff to the 41. The Norton reserves entered the game but gave up the ball after four downs. They held Riley County to just four downs and took over the ball for one more play before the final whistle as the Blue Jays won the Bi-District championship by a 28-7 score.