

Great season for first year head coach Melvin

By DICK BOYD

The Lucas Melvin era of Norton Community High School football got off to a great start this season as the first year head coach led his "fighting Blue Jays" to a 7-3 record, second place tie in the tough Mid-Continent League and District and Bi-District runnerup finish.

With the departure of coach Bruce Graber at the end of last season, coach Melvin moved up from an assistant coach position and it was evident in the first game that the Blue Jays would play hard for their new head mentor.

Norton faced the toughest foe they would play all season when they hosted two-time Class 2A defending state champion Smith Center at Travis Field. Last season, Smith Center outscored opponents an average of 50-9 and the year before the average point spread was 52-5. But, the Redmen's 27-game winning streak didn't intimidate the Blue Jays.

Norton held the mighty Redmen to just one touchdown in the first half but could not get a touchdown of their own. The Blue Jays had to settle for a field goal by senior fullback and kicker Chris Davis, making it an 8-3 ballgame at halftime.

The Norton defense held up against the Redmen's constant offensive pounding in the second half, allowing only one final touchdown by the visitors. The Blue Jays were unable to dent the end zone, however and Smith Center won 14-3. It was the fewest points scored by the Redmen in any game the past two seasons!

After that first game, the Norton players and coaches knew the Blue Jays could play with anyone on their schedule. And, winning the next six games proved it.

In their second game of the season, Norton traveled to WaKeeney to play Trego Community. In an impressive 27-6 victory, the Blue Jays gained 251 yards of offense while holding the Golden Eagles to 90 yards and an average of less than one yard per carry rushing.

Next, Norton traveled to Plainville for another league contest. The results were even better in the lightning-shortened game as the Blue Jays prevailed 44-6.

Norton rolled up 371 yards of offense in scoring seven touchdowns. Norton did not have to punt in the game, which was called with 4:30 left in the third quarter. Senior tailback Blake VanEaton ran for 155 yards and a 12.9 yards per carry average and was leading tackler from his linebacker position with 11.

Homecoming was next for the Blue Jays and Norton hit the half-century mark with a 50-20 league win over the visiting Hill City Ringnecks. VanEaton went over 100 yards again, rushing for 114 yards.

The next Friday, Norton entertained league foe Ellis and rolled to a 27-6 victory. Special teams played a big part in the win as the Blue Jays averaged 23 yards per punt and kickoff return, blocked a Railroader punt and turned a fake punt into a touchdown. VanEaton rushed for 104 yards as Norton compiled 368 yards of total offense.

Then, Norton journeyed to Stockton for another MCL contest and shutout the Tigers 48-0. Racking up 330 yards of offense, the Blue Jays averaged six yards per rushing attempt. VanEaton himself totaled 132 yards on eight carries for a 16.5 yard average every time he touched the pigskin. The gang-tackling Norton defense limited Stockton to two first downs and 20 yards of offense.

The Blue Jays took a 5-1 record into their first District game versus a visiting Beloit Trojan eleven. Norton amassed 330 yards of offense, averaging 5.2 yards per rushing attempt, en route to an impressive 28-8 win. VanEaton went over 100 yards rushing for the fifth straight contest as he gained 142 yards and averaged 7.5 yards per carry.

The Phillipsburg Panthers visited Norton for the second District contest. They are also a member of the Mid-Continent League but only the regular season games count in the league race. Norton and Phillipsburg lost only to Smith Center in league play. Since the Redmen had easily

handled the Panthers, the Blue Jays felt they would be competitive against Phillipsburg. But, the visitors ruined Senior Night for the Jays as they prevailed 51-13. Total offense by the two teams was not that different with the Panthers totaling 355 yards and the Blue Jays 218 but two kickoff returns and an intercepted pass for Panther touchdowns were backbreakers for Norton.

Coach Melvin didn't have much explanation for the below normal showing, other than saying his team didn't have a good week of practice. However, the Norton players showed their true blue colors by finishing District play with a dominating 36-6 win at Oberlin.

Norton totaled 462 yards of offense against the Red Devils and three Blue Jay backs rushed for over 100 yards. VanEaton averaged 14.9 yards per carry in gaining 179 yards, junior tailback Todd Bolt averaged 9.7 yards on 136 yards gained and senior fullback Davis ran for 105 yards and a 9.5 yards per carry average.

The Blue Jay defense was again equal to the occasion, limiting Oberlin to 169 yards of total offense, 75 of which came on the Red Devils' only touchdown run.

With one district loss, Norton took their 7-2 record to play an eastern district champion Southeast of Saline. The Trojans, who are coached by former Norton star player Pat Haxton, were unbeaten and defending Class 3A state champions.

Facing a second defending state champion, the Blue Jays did not back down and, as coach Melvin said afterwards, "left it all on the field."

The Trojans, led by senior quarterback Nick Hardesty, were as good as advertised but, after they took a 14-0 lead, Norton battled back to tie the score at 14-all by intermission. Davis burst for 41 yards up the middle for Norton's first touchdown, junior quarterback Logan Kats sneaked into the end zone for the Jays' second touchdown with four seconds left in the half and Davis split the up-rights after both scores.

Norton was unable to stop Hardesty's passing and running in the second half, however, and the Trojans scored touchdowns twice in the third quarter and once early in the fourth quarter to win 36-14 and end the Blue Jays' season with a 7-3 record.

Seniors on this year's Norton eleven were: Nathan Broeckelman, wide receiver, defensive back; Blake VanEaton, tailback, linebacker; Chris Davis, fullback, linebacker; Brian Juenemann, wide receiver, defensive back; Nic Lewis, center, defensive line; Lucas Bailey, offensive and defensive line; Shane Mapes, offensive and defensive line; Brett Thomson, offensive and defensive line; Matt Engel, offensive and defensive line; Pat Burton, offensive and defensive line; Mark Scheetz, offensive and defensive line.

"I'm happy with what our players did this season," coach Melvin told the Blue Jay Booster Club on Wednesday evening. "Our three losses were to two defending state champions and a team with some of the best athletes in the state.

"We had great senior leadership but will have a number of junior and sophomore athletes returning next season to help us. Our expectations are not low. Many of our

players grew mentally and in physical aggressiveness on the field as the season progressed.

"I appreciate this school and the support we get. Seeing the pep club, pep band and all the fans supporting us in a more than 300 miles roundtrip game at Southeast of Saline meant a lot. Norton is a special place; I just want to keep building and make it more special.

"Having that extra practice after the regular season helped our team for the future. I've encouraged our players to compete in other sports and to get in the weight room. We will keep evaluating our players in preparation for next season. We want to make it past the first game of the playoffs next year."

Assistant coaches this season were Kevin Jilka, Todd Fulton, David Stover and Jason Jones.

Team season statistics

For the season, Norton outscored opponents by totaling 289 points while limiting opponents to 153 for an average victory of 28.9 to 15.3.

The Blue Jays rushed for 2,096 yards and passed for 759 yards for total offense of 2,855 yards. This is an average of 209.6 rushing yards, 75.9 passing yards and 285.5 total yards of offense per game.

Norton fielded another fierce, hard hitting defense which allowed opponents 1,563 yards rushing, 573 yards passing and 2,136 total yards. This is an average of just 156.3 yards rushing, 57.3 yards passing and 213.6 yards of total offense per game.

The Blue Jay defense limited teams to just 3.9 yards per rushing attempt throughout the season while the Norton offense averaged 5.2 yards per rush.

The 2006 squad averaged 12.9 first downs per game while limiting opponents to 9.2 first downs.

Norton lost only eight fumbles in the 10 games for an average of less than one per game. The Blue Jays punted only 33 times for 3.3 per contest.

Individual statistics

Leading tackler for the Norton defense this season was sophomore linebacker Zac Dreher with 51 solos, 29 assists for 80 total tackles. He had five sacks.

Second high tackler was senior linebacker Blake VanEaton with 57 solos, 18 assists, 75 total. Third high was junior defensive back Travis Ray with 37 solos, 28 assists, 65 total.

They were followed by senior defensive back Brian Juenemann, 27 solos, 11 assists, 48 total; junior linebacker Jared Cox, 30 solos, 17 assists, 47 total; senior linebacker Chris Davis, 23 solos, 13 assists, 36 total; junior defensive back Todd Bolt, 20 solos, 16 assists, 36 total; senior defensive back Nathan Broeckelman, 21 solos, 13 assists, 34 total; senior defensive lineman Brett Thomson, 20 solos, 13 assists, 33 total; senior defensive lineman Nic Lewis, 21 solos, 8 assists, 29 total; junior defensive lineman Zach Mannel,



Norton senior tailback Blake VanEaton gained yardage as he was chased by Phillipsburg players during the Blue Jays' District game in Norton on October 20. VanEaton was Norton's top all-purpose offensive producer with a total of 1,267 yards this season. He was also second high tackler from his linebacker position with 75 total tackles. - Telegram photo by Dick Boyd

15 solos, 10 assists, 25 total; senior defensive lineman Mark Scheetz, 13 solos, 10 assists, 23 total; junior defensive back Logan Kats, 15 solos, 5 assists, 20 total; sophomore defensive lineman Brock Lauer, 12 solos, 7 assists, 19 total; senior defensive lineman Matt Engel, 10 solos, 8 assists, 18 total; junior defensive back Aaron Husted, 10 solos, 7 assists, 17 total; sophomore linebacker Matt Stanley, 3 solos, 9 assists, 12 total; junior defensive lineman Preston Herman, 4 solos, 5 assists, 9 total; freshman defensive back Landon Hamel, 4 solos, 3 assists, 7 total; senior defensive lineman Lucas Bailey, 3 solos, 3 assists, 6 total; freshman linebacker J.D. Gall, 3 solos, 2 assists, 5 total; senior defensive lineman Pat Burton, 3 solos, 1 assist, 4 total; freshman linebacker Zane Perez, 3 solos; sophomore linebacker Brad Nuzum, 2 solos, 2 assists, 4 total; freshman defensive back Connor Pfannenstiel, 3 solos; sophomore defensive lineman John Van Dorn, 1 solo, 3 assists, 4 total; freshman defensive back Ashton Draper, 1 solo, 1 assist, 2 total; senior defensive lineman Shane Mapes, 1 solo; freshman defensive lineman Robert Derauf, 1 solo; sophomore defensive lineman Nish Millan, 1

solo; junior defensive lineman Wes Georgeson, 1 assist.

Hamel led the defense with two pass interceptions, followed by Ray and Kats with one each. Stanley had four fumble recoveries, followed by Cox, two; Lewis, two; Ray, Dreher, Engel, Kats, one each.

Cox blocked three kicks, Thomson two and Stanley one.

VanEaton was the leader in all-purpose offensive yards for the second straight season. He gained 973 yards rushing on 137 attempts for 7.1 yards per carry and 11 touchdowns. He caught three passes for 52 yards and one touchdown and averaged 17.3 yards per reception. He also returned 13 kickoffs for 242 yards and an 18.6 yards average. VanEaton totaled 1,267 yards of offense.

Junior tailback Bolt was second leading rusher with 452 yards on 76 attempts for a 5.9 yard average and six touchdowns. Bolt had six kickoff returns for 131 yards and a 21.8 yard average and six punt returns for 77 yards and a 12.8 yard average. Bolt was second in all-purpose yards with 667.

Third in rushing and all-purpose yards was senior fullback Davis. He carried the ball 59 times for 389 yards and a 6.6 yard average and

four touchdowns. He caught six passes for 66 yards and an 11 yard average. He had three kickoff returns for 28 yards. Davis had 483 total all-purpose yards.

Despite not finishing the season due to injury, senior defensive back Nathan Broeckelman was fourth in all-purpose yards with 475 in the eight games in which he played. He had 10 punt returns for 226 yards and a 22.6 yard average and one touchdown. He also had three kickoff returns for 66 yards. Broeckelman had seven pass receptions for 166 yards and a 23.7 yard average.

Junior wide receiver Georgeson had 11 pass receptions for 198 yards and an 18 yard average and junior tight end Cox had 12 catches for 188 yards and a 15.7 yard average.

Junior quarterback Kats completed 47 of 104 passes for 724 yards and 12 touchdowns.

Davis kicked 20 of 33 extra points and 1 of 3 field goal attempts. Davis also kicked off and was the Blue Jay punter for the third straight season. He had 30 punts for 929 yards and a 31 yard average and kicked off 40 times for 1,537 yards and a 38.4 yard average.

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