

Another good year for football program

By **DICK BOYD**

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In the third season under head coach Lucas Melvin, the Norton Community High School football team continued to improve in 2008 as the Blue Jays defeated two state-ranked, unbeaten elevens and came within two points of ending Smith Center's record-setting winning streak!

En route to an 8-3 record, Norton placed third in the tough Mid-Continent League, won the District championship, won the Bi-District championship and placed runner up in the Regional.

The Blue Jays outscored opponents an average of 28.1 points to 14.8 points per game. They rushed for a total of 2,098 yards and passed for 1,164 yards for a total of 3,262 yards, an average of 297 yards per game. They averaged 5.5 offensive yards per play. Norton lost just 9 fumbles.

The effectiveness of the Blue Jays' punting game is evidenced by the fact that opponents averaged just 1.4 yards per return. Norton also had 9 pass interceptions.

The Blue Jays' season ended with a 34-17 loss to Beloit in one of eight Class 3A Regional games on Saturday, Nov. 8.

"We hit really hard just like we did all season," said coach Melvin after the game. "We have a lot to be proud of. We expected to win and could have if we had made a couple of more plays."

"We had a good season and probably exceeded a lot of people's expectations."

"I especially thank our senior players for their leadership and hard play. I hope our younger players will step up and start working hard for next season. I encourage them to compete in other sports and work in the weight room."

"One of the best things about being in Norton is that we get support from some of the greatest fans in the state. I'm blessed to be able to work with these fine young men, blessed to be in a community with wonderful support and blessed to be able to work with such outstanding coaches."

Eight seniors will graduate from this year's Norton football squad. They are: Brad Nuzum, Matt Stanley, Nish Millan, Kyle Mindrup, John Van Doren, Donny Hildebrand, Brock Lauer and Zac Dreher.

Phillipsburg

In the season opener in Norton on Friday, Nov. 5, the Blue Jays established themselves as a never-say-die squad by continuing to come from behind to defeat longtime rival Phillipsburg 29-22 in double overtime.

The fighting Blue Jays trailed the entire Mid-Continent League game until tying the contest at 22-all with 10:48 left in regulation and winning with a touchdown in the second overtime!

Fumbles, penalties and a few letdowns on defense caused them problems but they made up for it by continuing to gang tackle on defense and use imagination on offense.

Norton trailed 2-0 after one quarter, 16-14 at halftime and 22-14 after three quarters. Zac Dreher picked up a Norton fumble and ran it into the end zone and junior quarterback Connor Pfannenstiel ran in untouched for 2 extra points to tie the score at 22-all with 10:48 left in regulation.

Neither team scored in the first extra period. Norton got the ball first in the second overtime. Sophomore tailback Terrell Lane scored from the 3-yard line and junior J.D. Gall kicked the extra point to put Norton ahead 29-22.

That left Phillipsburg with four tries from the 10 but the fired up Blue Jay defense drove them back to the 24 on their first three plays. On fourth down, Panther quarterback Weston Coomes passed complete to 222 pound senior tight end Zach Wood over the middle and he headed for the end zone. But, he didn't make it, thanks to a vicious tackle by 145 pound Pfannenstiel!

Pfannenstiel completed 7 of 11 passes for 64 percent, 113 yards and 2 touchdowns in the game.

"The key to the game was that we never quit; we played really hard," said coach Melvin.

Oberlin

Norton ventured into the Northwest Kansas League to play Oberlin on the Red Devils' home field

on Friday, Sept. 12.

Oberlin scored first but Norton retaliated by scoring in two plays. Junior running back Zane Perez returned the kickoff to the Oberlin 21 and Lane scored. The extra point kick missed and Oberlin led 7-6. On Norton's second possession, a Pfannenstiel pass to junior wide receiver Ashton Draper was good for a 27-yard touchdown. Lane ran for two points and it was 14-7.

Four minutes later and the Blue Jays were back in the end zone after Dreher blocked an Oberlin punt and Perez scored from 1 yard out. Gall kicked the extra point and it was 21-7 with 2:17 left in the first quarter.

Next, Draper intercepted Oberlin quarterback Logan Fortin's pass and returned it for a touchdown! Gall split the uprights and Norton led 28-7 with 1:46 left in the initial quarter.

Oberlin fought back and scored twice in the second quarter to make it a 28-21 game at halftime. The Red Devils failed to score in the second half, however, and Norton tallied three times to win 47-21. Sophomore Spencer Shirk played quarterback in the second half and threw two touchdowns passes in the third quarter, both to Gall. Norton's final touchdown came with 5:38 left in the game when Perez ran 4 yards to paydirt.

The Red Devils couldn't run the ball against the "Blue Swarm" defense so had to go to their passing game. They finished with zero rushing yards on 16 carries.

Lane ended the game with 205 yards on 24 carries for 8.6 yards per attempt.

Smith Center

Norton returned to Travis Field to battle Smith Center, No. 1 ranked in Class 2A with a 57 game winning streak and four-time defending state champion.

The Blue Jays were up to the task and battled the Redmen down to the wire before losing 22-20.

The Redmen had the ball three times in the first quarter and the Blue Jays twice but neither threatened to score. Both teams had the ball once in the second quarter before the Redmen took over on their 14 after a Norton punt. Blue Jay sophomore Dakota Dreher, who had already recovered a Redman fumble in the first quarter, fell on another one on the Smith Center 5-yard line. Lane ran for the first touchdown of the night and Gall kicked the extra point to put Norton ahead 7-0 with 8:20 left in the half.

The Redmen answered with 75-yard and 76-yard scoring drives to take a 14-7 lead at halftime. After two possessions by both sides in the third quarter, Lane made the run of the game for the Blue Jays when he broke at least four tackles en route to a 51 yard touchdown! Gall kicked the extra point, tying the score at 14-all with 2:04 left in the period.

Smith Center scored on their next possession to take a 22-14 lead with 48 seconds left in the third quarter.

In the fourth quarter, Norton's junior defensive back Ashton Draper recovered a Smith Center fumble on the Redman 45 and the Blue jays drove for their final touchdown. Lane dented the end zone from 2 yards out but a running play for two points to tie the score was stopped short, leaving the score at 22-20 with 6:18 remaining.

After the kickoff, Smith Center moved to their 45-yard line before the "Blue Swarm" defense held them on downs and took possession of the pigskin with 3:11 left on the scoreboard. Norton fumbled the ball back to the Redmen, however, and had another scoring opportunity end with a pass interception before the final seconds of one of the most exciting games at Travis Field in a long time ticked off and the Redmen survived 22-20.

Norton tailback Lane gained 102 yards on 20 carries for a 5.1 yards per carry average. Lane also scored all three of Norton's touchdowns in the game.

Before Smith Center began their win streak, which is now 67 with the state championship game on Saturday versus Olpe, Norton was the last team to beat them in regular season. Norton's two-point loss to Smith Center this season was also the closest

any team has come during those 67 Redman wins.

Osborne

Norton extended their season record to 3-1 with an impressive 40-0 shutout of Osborne in league action on the Bulldogs' home field on Friday, Sept. 26.

The Blue Jays gained 348 yards of total offense while limiting Osborne to 54. Norton scored two touchdowns in the first quarter, three in the second and their final one in the fourth quarter.

Lane was leading rusher again for Norton with 140 yards on 23 carries for a 6.1 yard average. He also scored two touchdowns. Pfannenstiel completed 8 of 14 passes for 116 yards and 57 percent accuracy.

St. Francis

Coach Melvin's Blue Jay griders scored through the air and on the ground in defeating previously unbeaten St. Francis 36-16 in Norton's Homecoming game on Friday, Oct. 3 at Travis Field.

The hard-hitting physical Norton defense allowed the No. 2 Class 2-1A state ranked Indians, who are known to some as the "Smith Center of the West", one touchdown on their first possession of the game and another on their first possession of the second half.

Coached by Tim Lambert, a former Smith Center player, St. Francis mirrors the Redmen with their deceiving wishbone offense. The "Blue Swarm" defense limited them to 238 yards on 64 attempts for only a 3.7 yard average. The Blue Jay rushing game produced 141 yards on 31 carries for a 4.5 yard average. Norton's passing game was the best of the season. The Blue Jays completed 7 of 12 passes for 58 percent and 169 yards.

Norton totaled 310 yards of offense compared to 289 yards for the Indians. Senior fullback Matt Stanley was leading ground gainer for Norton with 65 yards on 7 carries for a 9.3 yard average.

Blue Jay quarterback Pfannenstiel had his best passing night, completing 6 of 10 aeriels for 131 yards. His top receiver was junior Landon Hamel, who caught 3 passes for 104 yards and 1 touchdown. Junior Ashton Draper also had a big night catching the pigskin. He caught 3 passes for 61 yards and 1 touchdown.

St. Francis scored first on a 71 yard drive but Stanley recovered an Indian fumble on their 38 and Lane passed to Draper who made a great catch in the end zone for Norton's first touchdown. Gall split the uprights and Norton trailed 8-7 with 59 seconds left in the first quarter.

Stanley ran 39 yards for the Blue Jays' second touchdown, Gall kicked the extra point and Norton led 14-8 at halftime. The Blue Jays scored on their first possession of the second half when Pfannenstiel sneaked 2 yards after completing a 57-yard pass to Hamel. Gall's extra point kick put the Jays ahead 21-8 with 11:34 left in the third quarter.

St. Francis answered with an 80 yard drive for their final touchdown, cutting the Blue Jay lead to 21-16, but Lane's 13-yard touchdown run with 40 seconds left in the third made it 27-16 with 40 seconds left.

Pfannenstiel connected with Hamel again, this time for 36 yards and a touchdown. Sophomore Caleb Laughlin kicked the extra point, extending the Norton lead to 34-16 with 10:49 left in the game.

The Blue Jay defense kept the Indians from threatening the rest of the game and even picked up an extra two points when a St. Francis center snap on a punt attempt went over the punter's head and out of the end zone, making the final 36-16.

Ellis

After gaining statewide recognition for handing St. Francis their first defeat the previous week, Norton took a step backward when the Blue Jays were shutout 20-0 by a quality Ellis eleven on Friday, Oct. 10.

Defense was the name of the game. Neither team had many offensive yards but both teams had scoring opportunities. Ellis capitalized on theirs and Norton did not.

Norton gained just 111 yards on the ground and Ellis had a

total of just 112 yards. Overall, key passes helped Ellis on a night when Norton's passing game was not up to par. The Blue Jays had 72 yards passing on 6 of 22 for just 27 percent and the Railroaders had 101 yards on 5 of 11.

As they always do, a fumble, two pass interceptions and penalties came at inopportune times for Norton.

Lane had another 100 plus yard rushing game, gaining 102 yards on 29 carries for a 3.5 yard average.

The contest completed the regular season for both teams. Norton was 4-2 at this point and Ellis was 5-1. The Railroaders made it deep into the Class 2A playoffs before their season ended.

Ness City-Dighton

The Norton Blue Jays got the playoff season started Friday, Oct. 17 with a 53-14 thrashing of the Ness City-Dighton Titans.

For all practical purposes, the game was over after the first four carries by tailback Lane, all of which went for touchdowns and were in the first quarter!

For the game, Lane scored five touchdowns on just eight carries for 223 total yards and a per carry average of 28 yards.

The Blue Jays led 26-0 after one period and 53-0 at halftime. The Norton junior varsity played the entire second half against the Ness City varsity and gave up two touchdowns.

In addition to Lane, Norton's Hamel also had a big night. He caught two passes for 87 yards and two touchdowns, had one pass interception, returned one kickoff 82 yards and returned one punt for 27 yards.

Passing to him was sophomore quarterback Spencer Shirk, who replaced injured starter Pfannenstiel. Shirk completed 3 of 5 passes for 60 percent accuracy and 111 total yards.

The "Blue Swarm" defense also had a big night. They limited the Titans to one first down each of the first two quarters and allowed them 50 total yards of offense in the first half, which included a minus five yards rushing!

Scott City

On Friday, Oct. 24, Norton spoiled an unbeaten season for another opponent when they defeated No. 5 state ranked Scott City 26-14 in front of another large crowd of local fans on "Senior Night"!

The outstanding Scott City eleven started the game moving the ball at will but, as the game wore on, the hard hitting "Blue Swarm" defense eventually took its toll on the Beavers.

Scott City took an early 6-0 lead but Norton's senior tackle John Van Doren was in the right place at the right time for a lineman's dream, a pass interception! With 27 seconds left in the first quarter, Lane scored from 17 yards out, Laughlin split the uprights and Norton led 7-6.

The Beavers took a 14-7 lead on a 41-yard touchdown pass but the Blue Jays cut the advantage to 14-13 before halftime on a diving catch in the end zone of a Pfannenstiel pass by sophomore tight end Dakota Dreher.

Seventeen seconds into the second half, the Blue Jays took the lead for good. Hamel returned the kickoff to the 30 and Lane outran the Beaver defense for a 70 yard touchdown! Laughlin's extra point kick made it 20-14.

The "Blue Swarm" defense was equal to the occasion the rest of the game, allowing the Beavers only three first downs in the third quarter and one in the fourth period. Norton's final touchdown came early in the fourth quarter when Lane got loose on a 68 yard touchdown run.

Lane was leading rusher again for Norton, picking up 184 yards on 24 carries for a 7.7 yard average. Pfannenstiel completed 8 of 14 passes for 90 yards and 57 percent.

Goodland

Norton won the District 15 championship with a 3-0 record on Thursday, Nov. 30 by outscoring Goodland 28-14 on the Cowboys' home field.

Quarterback Connor Pfannenstiel had a career best game, running the keeper to near perfection and passing for two touchdowns. Pfannenstiel ended the game with 94 yards rushing for an average of 6.3 yards per carry and 97 yards

passing for 191 yards of offense. Pfannenstiel also tied for top tackler from his defensive back position with 9.

Lane continued to gain over 100 yards per contest and ended with 120 yards on 20 carries for a 6 yard average.

The Cowboys gave the Blue Jays problems in the first half. After a safety gave Norton 2 points, Goodland scored to make it 7-2. A 73 yard touchdown pass from Pfannenstiel to Lane made it 8-7 at halftime.

Goodland scored in the third quarter when a lineman picked up a Norton fumble and raced 60 yards to put the Cowboys ahead 14-8. Hamel returned the ensuing kickoff 85 yards for a touchdown! Lane ran for 2 extra points and Norton led 16-14.

Pfannenstiel passed 24 yards to Draper for a third quarter score and Lane ran 30 yards for a Blue Jay tally with 4:55 left in the game to make the final 28-14.

Lakin

Coach Melvin's Blue Jay griders scored five touchdowns, three of which counted, and the "Blue Swarm" defense did their job in a 21-0 win over Lakin at Travis Field on Tuesday, Nov. 4 to win their Class 3A Bi-District championship!

For the third straight game, penalties hampered Norton's offensive production. The Blue Jays had 90 yards in penalties. One touchdown was called back for holding and another for an illegal block, both in the scoreless second half.

Meanwhile, the Norton defense limited Lakin to 3.1 yards per carry and 43 percent pass completion. Lakin had just seven first downs in the game. The Bronc offense was also frustrated by one pass interception and one fumble recovery by the aggressive Blue Jay defense.

After a scoreless first quarter, Norton scored on three occasions in the second quarter. Senior fullback Matt Stanley plunged 1 yard for the first score with 6:31 left in the first half. With 3:15 remaining, Lane ran 45 yards to paydirt and, with 44 seconds on the clock, Lane got loose for a 14 yard touchdown. Laughlin split the uprights on all three extra point kicks and the Jays led 21-0 at intermission.

Lane had another great rushing game, carrying the ball 30 times for 203 yards and a 6.8 yard average.

The 8-2 Blue Jays advanced to Regional competition versus 9-1 Beloit.

Beloit

In the Regional game at Beloit on Saturday, Nov. 8, Norton surprised the Trojans by taking a 14-0 lead before Beloit had a single first down. Unfortunately, the Trojans rallied, the cold adversely affected Norton quarterback Pfannenstiel's throwing accuracy and the Jays lost leading rusher Lane with a knee injury late in the first half. Still, the Trojans led by just 20-17 after three quarters but three pass interceptions by Beloit in the second half, two of which led to touchdowns, allowed the Trojans to pull away for a 34-17 win.

Norton drove 84 yards for their first touchdown on a 1 yard plunge by Stanley.

Lane, who gained 60 yards in the first half, scored the Blue Jays' second touchdown from 25 yards out with 11:38 left in the second quarter. Pfannenstiel passed to Gall for 2 extra points and the fired up Blue Jays were on top 14-0.

The Trojans answered with a 22-yard touchdown run by their leading rusher Cas Spangler. Arun for the 2 extra points made it 14-8. A 27-yard field goal by Laughlin extended the Norton lead to 17-8 with 6:25 left. Spangler scored from 30 yards out with 2:10 left to cut the Blue Jay lead to 17-14 with 2:10 left in the first half. Lane received a knee injury and did not play again.

A 90-yard touchdown run by Spangler put the Trojans ahead 20-17 with 1:24 left in the third quarter. Senior running back Jordan File ran 65 yards for another Beloit touchdown with 11:50 left. Junior running back Logan Eck ran 28 yards for the final Trojan touchdown and added 2 extra points to make it 34-17 with 7:27 left.

Individual statistics

Leading tackler for Norton for the third straight season was se-

nior linebacker Zac Dreher with 87 solos and 27 assists. The team counts each assist as one-half a tackle, giving him a total of 100.5 stops for the 11-game season or an average of 9.1 per game.

Second high on the tackle list for the season was senior linebacker Matt Stanley with 66 solos, 18 assists for 75 total. Third high was junior defensive back Landon Hamel with 50 solos, 16 assists for 58 total. Sophomore linebacker Terrell Lane was fourth high tackler with 44 solos, 7 assists for 47.5 total. Senior defensive end Brock Lauer was fifth high with 38 solos, 12 assists for 44 total. Sixth high on the tackles list was junior defensive back Zane Perez with 35 solos, 11 assists, 40.5 total stops.

They were followed by: Ashton Draper, 33 solos, 9 assists, 37.5 total; Brad Nuzum, 31 solos, 6 assists, 34 total; J.D. Gall, 25 solos, 14 assists, 32 total; Connor Pfannenstiel, 25 solos, 8 assists, 29 total; Dakota Dreher, 26 solos, 5 assists, 28.5 total; Tyler Cook, 19 solos, 7 assists, 22.5 total; John Van Doren, 15 solos, 8 assists, 19 total; Rylee Stanley, 10 solos, 3 assists, 11.5 total; Billy Broeckelman, 7 solos, 3 assists, 8.5 total; Nish Millan, 5 solos, 5 assists, 7.5 total; Kaid McKenna, 5 solos, 3 assists, 6.5 total; Spencer Shirk, 5 solos, 1 assist, 5.5 total; Landon Keiswetter, 5 solos; Donny Hildebrand, Marcus Herman, 4 solos each; Trey Millan, 3 solos; Justin Griffith, Dillon McConney, 2 solos each; Robert Derauf, 1 solo, 1 assist, 1.5 total; Tye Nickell, Caleb Laughlin, Luke Ninemire, Ryan Blecha, 1 solo each; Justin Waggoner, 1 assist, .5 total.

Draper led Norton's pass defense with 3 interceptions for 53 yards, followed by Hamel, 2 for 24; Lane, 2; Van Doren, 1; Stanley, 1.

Dakota Dreher led Norton in fumble recoveries with 4, followed by Brock Lauer, 3; Matt Stanley, 2; Zane Perez, 2; Terrell Lane, 1; Ashton Draper, 1; Zac Dreher, 1; Tyler Cook, 1.

Lane was the leader in all-purpose offensive yards. He gained 1,430 yards rushing on 220 attempts for 6.5 yards per carry. He caught 6 passes for 136 yards and a 22.7 yard average and completed 4 of 17 passes for 83 yards. He returned 12 kickoffs for 476 yards and a 39.7 yard average.

Lane's total offensive production for the season was 2,125 yards and he scored 23 touchdowns for 138 points.

Lane also punted 46 times for 1,579 yards and a 34.3 yard average.

Hamel was second in all-purpose offensive yards. He had 16 pass receptions for 399 yards and 4 touchdowns and a 24.9 yard average, 11 punt returns for 171 yards and a 15.5 yard average, 8 kickoff returns for 295 yards and a 36.9 yard average, 42 yards rushing on 8 attempts for a 5.3 yard average and 24 yards on 2 interceptions for 931 total yards.

Matt Stanley was second high rusher with 313 yards on 70 carries for a 4.5 yard average.

Connor Pfannenstiel completed 54 of 125 passes for 878 yards and 43.2 percent and 9 touchdowns. He also rushed for 147 yards on 56 carries for a 2.6 yard average and a total of 1,025 yards passing and rushing.

Leading pass receiver for the Blue Jays was Hamel but Ashton Draper was right behind him with 333 yards on 18 receptions for an 18.5 yard average and 4 touchdowns. Stanley had 11 catches for 113 yards and a 10.3 yard average. Gall had 6 receptions for 74 yards and a 12.3 yard average.

Caleb Laughlin kicked off 33 times for 1,381 yards and a 41.8 yard average. Gall kicked off 16 times for 638 yards and a 39.9 yard average.

Laughlin made 12 of 18 extra point kicks and 1 of 3 field goal tries. Gall made 14 of 18 extra point kicks.

Have a
good,
enjoyable
weekend!