

# Blue Jays win Regional title

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Coach Lucas Melvin's Norton Community High School football team is at that point in the 2009 season where they must play well to continue playing and they did just that on Saturday evening with an outstanding 42-20 Regional championship win over Beloit at Travis Field in Norton!

The Blue Jays never trailed in the contest although the Trojans were just a touchdown behind at halftime and again after three quarters. Norton shutout the visitors in the fourth quarter while scoring two more touchdowns to extend the final margin of victory to 22 points.

It was an especially satisfying win since Beloit had ended Norton's 2008 season with a 34-17 regional loss at Beloit.

Norton is now one of just eight Class 3A teams remaining in competition for the state championship. The Blue Jays will host an unbeaten Hutchinson Trinity eleven for the Sectional championship at 2 p.m. this Saturday at Travis Field in Norton.

Norton junior tailback Jeremy Sproul scored Norton's first touchdown on a 3 yard run with 5:03 left in the first quarter, senior wide receiver Landon Hamel went 80 yards on a pass from Connor Pfannenstiel for the Blue Jays' second score with 2:23 left and junior kicker Caleb Laughlin split the uprights both times to give the Jays a 14-0 lead after one quarter.

Beloit's senior running back Logan Eck capped a Trojan drive with a 1 yard touchdown run with 9:47 left in the second quarter to cut the lead to 14-6 but senior wide receiver Ashton Draper caught a 16 yard touchdown pass from Pfannenstiel with 7:52 left in the second quarter. Eck got loose on a 74 yard run to paydirt less than a minute later and threw a pass for two extra points to cut the Norton advantage to 21-14 with 6:58 left.

Junior tailback Terrell Lane put Norton up by two touchdowns again when he electrified the crowd with an 86 yard kickoff return for a touchdown to open the second half. Laughlin's kick put Norton ahead 28-14 with 11:47 left.

Another apparent touchdown by Lane in the third period was called back by a holding penalty. Beloit came close again on one big play when Eck passed to junior tight end Slade Krone, who had sneaked behind the Norton secondary, and he outran Blue Jay defenders for an 87 yard touchdown to make it 28-20 as the third period ended.

It was the Trojans' last hurrah

as the Blue Jays closed out the victory with a 10 yard pass from Pfannenstiel to Perez with 8:59 left and on a 40 yard touchdown run by Lane with 3:58 showing. Laughlin, who continued to boom kickoffs and extra points, split the uprights two more times to make the final 42-20.

"We are playing better every game," said coach Melvin. "We kept after them the whole game and played well together.

"We also did a good job of taking care of the ball.

"Our offensive line did a tremendous job and just keeps getting better and better. Our offense kept us in the game the first half and the defense finished it for us in the second half.

"One negative was that we had too many penalties.

"We feel blessed to be where we are in the playoffs. It's been six years since we were in this situation in the final eight teams. We will continue to work hard so we can stay in the race for the state championship."

Coach Melvin started the following players on the offensive line: junior Ryan Blecha, 185 pounds, left tackle; senior Marcus Herman, 175 pounds, left guard; junior Kaid McKenna, 175 pounds, center; junior Luke Ninemire, 190 pounds, right guard; junior Landon Keiswetter, 175 pounds, right tackle; senior J.D. Gall, 180 pounds, tight end; senior Ashton Draper, 180 pounds, wide receiver and senior Landon Hamel, 160 pounds, wide receiver.

Starting in the backfield for the Blue Jays were: senior Connor Pfannenstiel, 155 pounds, quarterback; senior Zane Perez, 180 pounds, fullback; junior Terrell Lane, 210 pounds, tailback.

Starting on defense were: junior Jeremy Sproul, 200 pounds, left end; junior Justin Griffith, 180 pounds, left tackle; Herman, nose guard; senior Tyler Cook, 215 pounds, right tackle; junior Rylee Stanley, 150 pounds, right end; Lane, McKenna, Gall, linebackers; Draper, Hamel, Perez, defensive backs.

Leading rusher for Norton was Terrell Lane with a grand total of 181 yards on 22 carries for an average of 8.4 yards per carry! He was followed by Zane Perez with 6 for 23, Connor Pfannenstiel with 8 for 41, Jeremy Sproul with 7 for 13 and Landon Hamel with 1 for 11.

Connor Pfannenstiel didn't pass much but when he did he was perfect. He was 9 of 9 for the night for 182 yards and 3 touchdowns.

Hamel had 3 catches for 94 yards, followed by Perez, 3 for 39; Draper, 2 for 36 and J.D. Gall,



Norton football players anxiously crowded around Norton Community High School Principal Rudy Perez for the presentation of the Class 3A Regional plaque following the Blue Jays' 42-20 win over Beloit on Saturday night at Travis

1 for 13.

Lane had 2 kickoff returns for 105 yards. Draper had 2 pass interceptions.

Laughlin had 6 kickoffs for a 45.5 yard average. Gall had 4 punts for a 37.8 yard average.

Leading rusher for Beloit was Logan Eck with 206 yards on 32 carries. Take away his one 74 yard run, and he averaged just 4.3 yards per carry.

J.D. Gall was leading tackler for Norton with 9 solos, 3 assists, 12 total; followed by Landon Keiswetter, 8 solos, 2 assists, 10 total; Zane Perez, 6 solos, 4 assists, 10 total; Terrell Lane, 6 solos, 3 assists, 9 total; Kaid McKenna, 3 solos, 5 assists, 8 total; Landon Hamel, 5 solos, 1 assist, 6 total; Justin Griffith, 2 solos, 2 assists, 4 total; Ashton Draper, Spencer Shirk, Jeremy Sproul, Rylee Stanley, 2 solos, 1 assist, 3 total each; Tyler Cook, 2 solos; Tye Nickell, Luke Ninemire, Connor Pfannenstiel, 1 solo each.

## Senior band members honored

At halftime, the Norton Community High School marching band presented another outstanding musical performance under direction of David Will. Senior members of the band honored during the halftime show were Kendra Engelbert, Marissa Baker, Allie Corbin, Matt Pollock, Bethany Winkel, Anna Cummings and Justin Bainter.

## First quarter

Laughlin kicked off for Norton to begin the game and Eck returned it to the 24. After two first downs, the Trojans fumbled and Perez recovered the ball on the Norton 42. After two carries by Lane, Pfannenstiel rolled out and connected with Perez for a first down on the Beloit 41. Pfannenstiel ran for 4, then Lane picked up a first down on the Beloit 30. Norton lost 5 yards on a penalty but Lane gained 7. Pfannenstiel passed to Gall for another Norton first down on the 25.

Pfannenstiel ran a keeper to the 3-yard line and Sproul bulled into the end zone for Norton's first touchdown. Laughlin split the uprights and Norton led 7-0 with 5:03 remaining.

After Laughlin's kickoff, Beloit got one first down before punting to the Norton 20. On first down, Pfannenstiel went to the air again and hit a wide-open Hamel who sprinted 80 yards for Norton's second score! After Laughlin's extra point kick, the Blue Jays led 14-0 with 2:23 left.

Eck returned Laughlin's kickoff 40 yards to the Beloit 40. Helped by a late hit penalty against Norton, Beloit moved to the Norton 27 as the first quarter ended with Norton leading 14-0.

## Second quarter

With 9:47 left in the second period, Beloit completed their only touchdown drive of the night when Eck leaped 1 yard over a pile of players for a score. A run for a possible two extra points was stuffed by the Norton defense and the Jays were on top 14-6.

Then, Norton put together a touchdown drive of their own.

Starting on their own 7-yard line after the ensuing kickoff, they drove 93 yards to paydirt. With Lane carrying the ball most of the time, Norton moved downfield. Pfannenstiel passed to Draper for the final 16 yards, Laughlin split the uprights and Norton led 21-6 with 7:52 left in the half.

To Beloit's credit, they answered immediately to still remain in contention. On the second play after Laughlin's kickoff, Eck got loose and scampered 74 yards for a touchdown. Eck passed to Robert Ludwig for 2 extra points, cutting the Blue Jay lead to 21-14 with 6:58 remaining.

With Lane again carrying the mail, Norton moved downfield after the kickoff but Lane's only pass of the night was intercepted on the Beloit 7-yard line. After the Norton defense forced Beloit to a three-and-out, Beloit punted out of bounds on the Norton 45. Lane had two good carries but, on his third, he fumbled the ball on the Beloit 17 with 1:10 left in the half.

## Third quarter

The Blue Jays got the second half started with a bang!

Lane received the kickoff, followed good blocking, broke into the open and outran the Trojan defenders 86 yards for a touchdown!

Adding the extra point kick by Laughlin, Norton was suddenly back ahead by two touchdowns with a 28-14 advantage with only 13 seconds gone in the period.

After Laughlin's kickoff, Norton held Beloit on fourth down on the Blue Jay 49 and regained possession. Perez ran for 4 and Lane gained 3 more to the Beloit 44. Sproul drove for a first down on the 40 and Pfannenstiel gained 5 more. Lane ran into the end zone on the next play but the apparent touchdown was called back due to a holding penalty against Norton.

Norton's drive was stopped and Gall punted for the first time in the game. The "Blue Swarm" defense forced another three-and-out by the Trojans. They punted to mid-field but Norton was unable to move the ball and Gall punted back to the Beloit 13.

On first down, the Trojans got another one-play touchdown when tight end Slade Krone sneaked behind the Norton secondary, caught a pass from Eck and outran the Blue Jay defenders for an 87-yard touchdown. A pass for two extra points failed and Norton's lead was suddenly cut to 28-20 with no more time left in the third quarter.

## Fourth quarter

After an onside kickoff, Norton had the ball on their 46 but could not move and punted to Beloit. Hamel downed Gall's kick on the 3-yard line! On third down, Beloit fumbled and Landon Keiswetter covered the pigskin for the Blue Jays on the 5!

Norton was offsidess on first down and the ball was moved back to the 10 but Pfannenstiel passed to Perez and he ran into the end zone untouched. The extra point kick by Laughlin extended the Norton

lead to 35-20 with 8:59 left.

After Laughlin's kickoff, Beloit earned one first down before Draper intercepted a pass on the Norton 15. Pfannenstiel went to the air himself and with great success. He passed complete to Hamel for a first down, then to Draper for a first down and then to Perez for a first down on the Beloit 40.

Lane got the call and churned his legs through the Trojan defense for a 40 yard touchdown. The extra point kick by Laughlin made it 42-20 with 3:58.

Beloit did not give up and came right back with a good drive after Gall's kickoff. They didn't get in the end zone, however, as the gutsy Norton defense stopped them on their 2-yard line!

Norton took over and punted one last time. Beloit took over on their 45 and, after two incomplete passes, threw again but Draper got his second interception of the game in the end zone with 23 seconds left. The Trojans' season had come to a close with a 42-20

give the Celtics a special lift on offense.

Engweiler and Racette received honorable mention all-state recognition last season.

At the start of the season, the big hurdle was working new linemen into the varsity atmosphere with just Anthony Mendoza, 6'2", 225 pound senior offensive lineman and linebacker and Chase Jones, 6'5", 225 pound senior offensive and defensive lineman, returning.

"They are an outstanding football team," said coach Melvin. "They run a flex bone offense and have an attack which is balanced between running and passing.

"I have noticed that their offensive line averages 240 pounds so they will be a challenge."

Scott City defeated Hoisington 41-7 on Saturday and will play at Wichita Collegiate.

In other games of interest in Class 2A last Saturday, Smith Center defeated Minneapolis, 63-17; Meade defeated St. Francis



Norton junior tailback Terrell Lane got the second half against Beloit off to a great start for the Blue Jays as he received the kickoff, followed his blockers and broke into the open for an 86 yard touchdown to put Norton ahead by two touchdowns. Beloit's Logan Eck, No. 3, gave chase but could not catch Lane.

–Telegram photo by Dick Boyd



As the scoreboard clock ticked down to zero Saturday night, these two Norton Players, Jake Romey, No. 70, and Jeremy Sproul, No. 44, responded enthusiastically to the big regional win by the Blue Jays.

–Telegram photo by Dick Boyd