

Blue Jays drop season opener 30-14

By DICK BOYD

Coach Bruce Graber's Norton Community High School football team showed a lot of potential in Friday's season opener in Oakley, but lost 30-14 to the veteran Oakley eleven.

Norton lost 18 seniors and 16 starters from last year's team, which compiled an 11-1 record with the lone loss to state champion Conway Springs. In comparison, Oakley returned 14 starters and 23 lettermen from last year's playoff team.

With a long list of Norton players receiving their baptism under fire, the first half was a real struggle but the Jays trailed just 6-0 after one quarter and 14-0 at intermission.

After the mistake-prone first half, Coach Graber convinced the Blue Jays at half-time that they could play with the seasoned Plainsmen and they came charging out of the dressing room ready to make amends.

In the third quarter and start of the fourth, the large contingent of Norton fans witnessed a real turnaround. The Blue Jays looked like veterans as they scored once in the third period and again early in the fourth to knot the score at 14-all with 11:24 remaining in the contest.

An intercepted Norton pass returned for a touchdown by

Oakley's Northwest Kansas League all-League defensive back Matt Smith, and a two-point conversion gave the homestanding Plainsmen a 22-14 edge.

The Blue Jays were unable to score and Oakley added another with time running out that made the final score look much worse than it actually was.

"I was as proud of what we did in the third quarter as I've ever been of a football team," said Coach Graber. "We have players who have the ability to get the job done. We just need more consistency and to eliminate errors that stop ourselves. We had lots of new players in the lineup. It's a whole different game when you're a starter and you know the pressure is on you to play every play."

"I'm so proud of our players that they battled back in the second half. They passed the gut check. The third quarter was a signal that we can be a decent team. We're young and inexperienced at a lot of positions. Maybe we're a little overwhelmed at times. We had a lot of backup people getting their first taste of getting the job done."

"Defensively, we weren't too bad and we had more yards on offense than they did."

"We've got a lot of work to do. We must put this one behind us and learn from the negatives and grow from the good things we did. We'll

go to work and fix one thing at a time."

Sophomore back Blake VanEaton suffered a concussion during the game and was taken to the hospital.

"Losing Blake was tough for us," said Coach Graber. "I'll be very surprised if he plays this week. We won't take any chances on his overall health."

Coach Graber said he felt the rest of the team made it through the game without any major injuries. It was a warm night but he said he felt that his players were in good physical condition.

The Blue Jays had 69 yards rushing and 140 passing for 209 yards of total offense compared to just 137 yards rushing and 38 passing for 174 yards of total offense for Oakley.

Senior quarterback Seth Mills completed 11 of 21 passes for over 50 percent accuracy. Mills connected with senior tight end Justin Shirk for a 44-yard touchdown with 11:24 left in the game.

Junior William Wilhite kicked both extra points.

"This was Wilhite's first experience kicking as a Blue Jay and he did a good job under fire," said Coach Graber.

Senior running back Kyle Kats was Norton's leading ground gainer. He carried the ball 11 times and gained 67 yards for a six yards

per carry average. Other ball carriers were Aaron Overlease, nine carries for 24 yards; Mills, 10 for minus nine; Chris Davis, one for minus 17; and Clay Madden, one for four.

Shirk was Norton's leading pass receiver. He caught four passes for 76 yards. Senior tight end Ryan Maddy grabbed three for 44 yards. Overlease caught three for four yards and Madden had one for 16 yards.

Kats also had a kickoff return for 22 yards and two punt returns for nine yards. Overlease had one kickoff return for 19 yards and Lance Roe had one for 16 yards.

Senior Michael Sprigg had three kickoffs for a 42-yard average.

Senior defensive tackle Blake Hillebrand was leading tackler for Norton with 11 solo tackles, 5 assists for 16 total tackles. He was followed by: Ryan Maddy, 7 solos, 4 assists, 11 total; Justin Shirk, 5 solos, 2 assists, 7 total; Michael Sprigg, 4 solos, 2 assists, 6 total; Lance Roe, 4 solos, 1 assist, 5 total; Kyle Kats, 4 solos, 1 assist, 5 total; Nathan Broeckelman, 3 solos; Heath Vincent, 2 solos, 1 assist, 3 total; Seth Mills, 1 solo, 1 assist, 2 total; Lucas Wiseman, 2 assists; Paul Juenemann, 1 solo; Blake Van Eaton, Davvid Stanley and Luke Pfannenstiel, 1 assist each.



Norton's senior quarterback Seth Mills, making his first start for the Blue Jays, gains 13 yards on a keeper late in the third quarter against Oakley on Friday. Six plays later, Mills scored on a sneak and Wilhite's extra point kick tied the score at 14-all.

— Telegram photo by Dick Boyd

Norton's play by play football action Friday night at Oakley

The Oakley Plainsmen beat the Norton Community High School Blue Jays 30-14 in the first football game of the season on Friday.

FIRST QUARTER

Oakley kicked off to Norton to start the game.

Aaron Overlease returned the kickoff to the 24-yard line. Seth Mills passed complete to Ryan Maddy on the Norton 49. Norton fumbled on the next play but recovered. Kyle Kats ran for three yards and Mills hit Overlease for a five-yard gain. Overlease lost a yard on a fourth down run and Oakley took over on their 44.

Calder Keller, a second team all-league running back for Oakley, gained three on first down. On second down, however, Norton's 210-pound senior interior defensive lineman, Blake Hillebrand, dropped an Oakley back for a five-yard loss. After an incomplete pass, Oakley punted and Kats returned the ball to the Norton 31.

Overlease ran for four but Mills couldn't find a receiver on second down and was sacked. Kats ran for three but Norton was forced to punt. Chris Davis had trouble with the center snap and had to punt hurriedly. The ball went out-of-bounds on the Norton 37.

Senior quarterback Shawn Kuhlman, who is also a returning second-team all-league selection, completed a six-yard pass to Levi Younkin. After a five-yard offsides penalty against Oakley, Keller tried the Norton line but to no avail as Michael Sprigg and senior line-backer Lucas Wiseman stopped him for no gain. Keller carried again, this time on a counter play, but Hillebrand limited him to two yards. On fourth and six, Kuhlman fired a pass down field and Keller made a diving catch at the Norton five.

Keller ran for the touchdown on the next play but Norton blocked the extra point kick and the Jays trailed 6-0 with 4:07 left in the first. Oakley kicked off into the end zone so the Jays took over on their 20-yard line.

Kats ran for four but an illegal procedure penalty cost Norton five yards. Mills passed to Overlease in the flat but he was tackled for a three-yard loss. Norton was offsides on the next play and penalized five more. A pass over the middle to Maddy reached only the 17 and Davis punted. The ball was downed on the Norton 34, giving Oakley good field position.

The Plainsmen's Smith gained 12 yards around the right end. Oakley's Adam Martin, a senior second team all-league running back, was dropped for a one-yard loss by Hillebrand and Blake VanEaton.

Martin ended the game as Oakley's leading rusher with 56 yards on 15 carries.

On second down, Oakley went to the air but Kats knocked the ball away from the receiver. Martin

gained three and Oakley went to the air again on fourth down. This time Roe knocked the ball away and the Blue Jays took over. Overlease lost two as the first quarter came to a close with Norton trailing 6-0.

SECOND QUARTER

Mills dropped back to pass but was hit hard by an Oakley defender and fumbled. Hillebrand recovered on the Norton six-yard line.

Adding insult to injury, Norton was whistled for offsides on the next play and the penalty was half the distance to the goal. Overlease made a nice run to the 11 but Norton was forced to punt again.

Smith returned Davis' punt to the Oakley 47. The Norton defense was strong as Martin gained just eight on three carries and Oakley punted out of bounds on the Norton seven-yard line.

The Blue Jays tried to surprise the Oakley defense with a pass but the aerial by Mills was intercepted by Martin and returned for a touchdown. Smith ran for two extra points and the Plainsmen led 14-0 with 8:13 left in the first half.

The kickoff went into the end zone. Kats gained eight on two carries but Overlease was stopped for no gain on third down. Davis had trouble with the punt snap and decided to run. He fumbled and Oakley recovered on the Norton nine-yard line. With some help by two Oakley offsides penalties, the Norton defense held and regained the ball on the 15.

Mills ran for five, then completed a 12-yard pass to Justin Shirk who made a diving catch. The Blue Jays went to the shotgun formation but the center's snap went over Mills' head and he was downed on the 10. Overlease ran for two and Clay Madden gained four. Norton punted into Oakley territory, but on

first down, Keller ran to the Norton 34. After an incomplete pass, it was half-time and, despite Oakley's field advantage, Norton trailed by just 14-0.

THIRD QUARTER

Norton kicked off and Lance Roe tackled Martin on the 18. Smith gained nothing, then Keller was limited to three as Mills made the tackle. After no gain on third down, Oakley punted to the Norton 38.

Mills completed a 12-yard pass to Maddy, then connected with Shirk, and he ran to the Oakley 29. Overlease lost a yard but Mills ran the keeper to the 31. Norton lost five for offsides but Mills passed to Shirk for a first down on the 25. Kats ran for another first down on the 15. Oakley's defense stiffened and four straight Norton passes went incomplete.

Kuhlman gained five and Smith three, then Martin ran for a first down on the 25. Smith was stopped for no gain by Hillebrand and Lucas Wiseman. On second down, Oakley fumbled and Kats recovered on the Oakley 44.

Mills spotted Shirk running down the Oakley sideline and hit him with a perfect pass for a 44-yard touchdown. William Wilhite split the uprights and Norton trailed 14-7 with 4:37 left in the third.

Oakley returned Sprigg's kickoff to the 25. The Blue Jay defense forced Oakley to punt after three downs. Kats returned the punt to the Norton 40. Kats turned the right corner for nine but a delay of game penalty cost Norton five. Mills ran the keeper to the Oakley 42 for a first down. Kats gained two, then Mills hit Madden for a first down on the 23. Kats broke several tackles before he was stopped at the Oakley 11 as the third quarter ended.

FOURTH QUARTER

Overlease ran to the one, then Mills sneaked into the end zone for Norton's second touchdown. Wilhite kicked the extra point and it was a 14-all game with 11:24 left.

The Norton crowd was becoming more noisy by the second.

Kuhlman returned Sprigg's kickoff to the Oakley 37. On a quick hitter, Martin gained eight before Hillebrand downed him. Martin ran to the Oakley 49 for a first down as Hillebrand made the tackle. Keller got the call but Hillebrand stopped him for no gain. Martin ran for six, then got a first down on the Norton 40. Oakley lost one on a fumble and a pass fell incomplete. Keller tried the Norton line and Hillebrand tackled him for no gain. Oakley punted into the end zone and the Blue Jays received the ball

on their own 20 with plenty of time.

After a holding penalty moved Norton back to the 10, Overlease took advantage of a great crack back block by Shirk to gain a quick eight. Norton went to the pass surprise again but Oakley's defense was ready and Smith intercepted Mills' aerial and returned it 35 yards for a go-ahead touchdown. A pass to Chad Baalman was good for two and Norton trailed 22-14 with 7:11 left in the game.

Kats returned the kickoff to the 27. A flat pass to Overlease gained nothing. Kats sprinted through a big hole on the left side for a first down on the 45. After two incomplete passes, Keller intercepted a Mills aerial.

Keller returned the ball to the Norton 43 and the Plainsmen drove on the ground for another touch-

down. Smith scored from 22 yards out and Kuhlman ran for two to give Oakley a 30-14 advantage with 1:05 remaining.

Roe returned the kickoff to the 34-yard line but time ran out for the Jays.

NEXT ACTION

The Norton Blue Jays will host Plainville in Mid-Continent League action at Travis Field this Friday night, beginning at 7 p.m.

GAME STATISTICS

N	O
10	9
32-69	43-137
140	38
209	175
11-21-3	3-9-0
6-37	4-20
4-26	5-38

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