

# **Bixby Hosting Choctaw in Battle of State Champions**

**By Ron Holt**

In recent years, Class 6A-I defending state champion Bixby and Class 6A-II defending state champion Choctaw have developed a competitive football rivalry.

That rivalry continues Friday (Sept. 19) when Choctaw visits Bixby's Lee Snider Field at Spartan Stadium in a battle of road-weary teams. The annual Military Appreciation Night game starts at 7 p.m.

Top-ranked Bixby, 2-0, was idle last week while Choctaw (1-1) suffered its first loss of the season, losing at Hays, Kansas, 21-19 last Friday.

Bixby played both of its games this season on the road, defeating Owasso (49-21) in the Battle of the Burbs at Tulsa's H. A. Chapman Field at Skelley Stadium and winning at Sand Springs (56-7) prior to the Bye Week.

Choctaw, ranked third in Class 6A-II this week, plays all of its non-district games away from home as the Yellowjackets won at Lubbock (Texas) Monterey, 44-23, before rallying late in the loss to Hays, the defending Class 5A state runner up in Kansas.

In the recent series between the two squads, Bixby holds a 4-0 record but there were challenges along the way.

In 2020, Bixby fell behind early before rallying for a 24-13 regular season win over the Yellowjackets and later edged Choctaw, 17-14, in a dramatic Class 6A-II State Championship game in Edmond. In 2021, Bixby rolled 70-7 at Choctaw while the Spartans captured a 55-27 win over CHS, also on the road last season.

"In 2020, we had a couple of close games with them ... we had a knock-down, drag-out game with them in the finals that year," Bixby head coach Loren Montgomery said. "We've had good matchups with them.

"Without a doubt, they've been steadily on the rise ... they won Class 6A-II last year."

Choctaw, led by head coach Jake Corbin, had an opportunity to open the season with two wins as the Yellowjackets rallied from a 21-6 deficit at Hays to get within 21-19 and put pressure on the hosts after recovering a fumble at the Hays' 22-yard-line late in the game

The Yellowjackets, however, were victimized by penalties and the Hays' defense stiffened and forced the visitors to turn the ball over with seconds remaining.

Choctaw scored on a 13-yard TD pass from senior quarterback Landon Gatson to Zayun Matlock; a five-yard TD toss from Gatson to Aiden Denton and a 32-yard TD pass from Gatson to Braylen Taylor.

In last year's loss to Bixby, Gatson, the backup to veteran starting quarterback Cash Williams, entered the game late in the second half and displayed his running ability, scoring on an 84-yard sprint while finishing with nine rushes for 120 yards. He also went three-for-four passing for 35 yards.

Talented running back Mayor Morgan scored on an 80-yard TD pass from Williams and a two-yard run last year against BHS. He ended with 45 yards rushing and one TD along with five pass receptions for 95 yards and a TD.

Choctaw ended with an 11-2 record last season, winning the school's second state championship with a 26-25 comeback victory over the Muskogee Roughers.

In 2024, returnees Mayor recorded 1,216 yards rushing and 18 TDs while catching 24 passes for 359 yards and three TDs. Junior Titus Hawk, the leading pass receiver returning, had 20 catches for 394 yards and three TDs.

Defensively, CHS was led by senior linebacker Rocco Tartaglione, who had 89 total tackles and nine tackles for a loss, while junior Izzy Hammonds recorded 62 total tackles and 10 tackles for loss.

“We’ve looked at the Lubbock film and they look good ... they look talented as usual. The guy (Gatson) they had as the running quarterback ... he’s the guy this year. He runs the ball well and is pretty physical,” coach Montgomery noted. “Mayor, the running back is super quick. He’s not real big but he’s fast ... he’s a dandy.

“Brad Clark is now their defensive coordinator, and he was our D-line coach for a time ... he’s a heckuva coach,” Montgomery said. “He also knows our defense inside and out and he can help their offense give us some problems which we noticed last year.”

While dominating during their two wins this season, the coaches used the Bye Week to continue making improvements while giving the players time to recover.

“We try to keep practice as close to as usual as possible. We’ve shortened our periods a little and cut some of the meeting times and cut some of the early morning meetings out to refresh them a little and I think it’s worked,” coach Montgomery added.

“We’ve done some leadership work with them. Going into the Sand Springs game, Thane Crawford, our left guard, was nicked up in practice but he’s progressing. We’ve got a few other guys with nicks and bruises ... this has been a good week to get them healthy.”

In last year’s Spartan win at Choctaw, Bixby highlights included 99 yards rushing and two touchdowns by senior Bode Cairl, a 183-yard passing effort and three TDs by quarterback Carson Kirby and a 99-yard fumble return for a score by Braeden Presley in the third quarter.

**NOTEBOOK** – Military Appreciation Night ceremonies being prior to kickoff, with several military veterans being recognized, followed by a fly-over of vintage airplanes. ... Bixby is ranked No. 30 in MaxPreps Top 100 national football rankings. ... The Spartans have won 87 of their last 90 games and are currently riding a five-game winning streak. ... Bixby has scored 105 points in its first two games, an average of 52.5 points per outing. The Spartans are allowing 14.0 points per game. ... Through two games this season, Bixby is averaging 238 yards per game passing and 209.5 yards per game rushing. ... Senior quarterback Carson Kirby is off to another productive start, throwing for 456 yards and four touchdowns while being intercepted once. He has a completion percentage of .723. Senior Jayson Moll leads a balanced ground game, carrying the ball 15 times for 122 yards and two TDs. Presley is the receiving leader with five catches for 125 yards and two touchdowns while senior Nate Gonzales has six receptions for 74 yards and one TD. ... Defensively, Bixby’s balanced effort is led by senior linebacker Maverick Nance’s 14 tackles. He’s followed by Emory Snyder (11), Nathan Hobbs (11) and Joe Peters (10). Peters also has three tackles for loss and one sack. Vincent Incremona leads in sacks with two while he and Trey McGlothlin each have two tackles for loss. Senior Tyler Wright is the pass interception leader with three while Presley has the other interception.

**STEAK EATERS** – Bixby held its annual Steak Eaters dinner last Wednesday at the stadium. Spartans attending every morning workout during the summer are treated to a steak dinner. It’s an event that’s grown.

“We had 64 players who were steak eaters,” coach Montgomery said. “It’s up a little, every year it goes up a little. The first year we had it, Jessie (his wife) and I had steak eaters over at our house and we had around seven or eight.

“After we did it a few years we got to a point where we knew we couldn’t sit all these people here, so we moved it to the stadium. It was great. Hasty Bake brought their big trailer to help us cook the steaks.”

**OPPONENTS** – Other results last week involving Bixby season opponents included: Owasso 45, Sand Springs 17; Jenks 48, Tulsa Union 30; Broken Arrow 21, Mustang 14; Moore 28, Southmoore 20; Edmond Memorial 35, Edmond North 18; Norman 44, Edmond Santa Fe 21; Norman North 27, Deer Creek 14, and Stillwater 69, Enid 0.

Games this week involving Spartan opponents – Moore (2-0) at Norman North, Mustang (1-1) at Westmoore, Piedmont at Norman (2-0) and Tulsa Kelley at Sand Springs (0-2). Owasso (1-2), Jenks (3-0), Edmond North (1-2), Deer Creek (0-3) and Enid (0-3) are idle.

**TRAINING STAFF** - Like every season, Bixby Spartans' football program depends on behind-the-scenes contributions from its athletic training staff during practices and on game day.

Led by 14<sup>th</sup>-year head trainer Stephen Moss, Bixby's training staff has been on the job starting this summer. Moss is assisted by certified trainers Christa Montgomery and Savannah Kautz.

"Our athletic training staff includes three certified athletic trainers and 24 high school student aides – four seniors, eight juniors, eight sophomores and four freshmen," Moss said.

"Many of our seniors started in the program in eighth grade and are wanting to pursue degrees in the medical field including anesthesiology, nursing and athletic training. We have one senior who recently visited the LSU and Alabama athletic training programs and is hoping to make her decision soon.

"Our aides help year-round including summer events such as 7v7, passing leagues and team camps as well as assisting in other sports," he added. "They often arrive before the team and leave after.

"Some of their daily duties include hydration, wound care and sideline setup. Our students often practice different taping techniques including wrist, thumb, hand and wound coverage. They train in hands-on CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) and AED (automated external defibrillators) annually.

"They do so much work behind the scenes, and we are grateful for their continued dedication to our teams and program," Moss noted.

Student athletic trainers include Jordan Flores, Olivia Yandell, Ella Dennis, Tylar Lane, Piper LeGrange, Maci Mauldin-Kelly, Ronni Brown, Grace Aguilar, Isabella Tobin, Allison Ryan, Ella McLemore, Laila Venema, Katie McBride, KayLynn Arsee, Kennedy Small, Brooklyn Herrera, Maggie McConnell, Ainsley Rose, Milani Jackson, Ashlynn Shook, Rose Lawrence, Kaitlyn Lewallen, Kayde Kaiser and Taylin Hausler.