

Top-Ranked Bixby Faces Union in 6A-I Quarterfinals

By Ron Holt

Union's RedHawks, an opponent Bixby hasn't played since 2020, presents numerous challenges for the Spartans who enter the Class 6A-I state playoffs Friday (Nov. 21).

After a bye week, Bixby (10-0) begins its journey toward an eighth straight state championship and 11th overall by hosting the improved RedHawks (5-6) in the state quarterfinals at Lee Snider Stadium, starting at 7 p.m. Friday.

Union, winners in four of its last six games, advanced to the quarterfinals after outscoring visiting Norman, 49-42, in a first-round playoff game at Union-Tuttle Stadium last week. The No. 7 RedHawks are led by first-year head coach Antonio Graham, who was Owasso's head coach last season.

Bixby and Union have seldom played in recent seasons. In the Covid-plagued 2020 season, Union visited Bixby in an added game to the revised schedule. The Spartans rolled to a 34-0 victory.

Since moving to Class 6A, Bixby and Union played twice prior to the addition of Class 6A-II. The RedHawks downed visiting Bixby, 28-3, in 2010 and rolled to a 67-17 home win over the Spartans in 2011.

After struggling at the start of this season – losing three non-league games to Bentonville, Arkansas (28-14), Stillwater (41-15) and at Jenks (48-30) - the RedHawks won four of the next seven games in qualifying for the playoffs.

In Class 6A-I, District 2 play, Union defeated Edmond Santa Fe (16-6), lost at Owasso (49-15), defeated Norman North (51-30), defeated Yukon (49-2), lost at Broken Arrow (29-10), defeated Westmoore (44-7) and lost at Edmond Memorial (16-10).

UHS and Norman engaged in an offensive battle last week with the RedHawks leading most of the game but never able to distance themselves from the pesky Tigers. Union had a trio of impressive offensive performances in the win.

Stone Turner, a 6-1, 165-pound senior wide receiver, was reportedly credited with 14 pass receptions for 224 yards and touchdown catches of 47 and 55 yards. He also ran 20 yards for a TD. Turner is the younger brother of former Spartan standout running back Jett Turner. He played for Bixby as a sophomore.

Tayveon Parry, a 5-10, 180-pound senior running back, scored on TD runs of seven and 57 yards while going over 1,000 yards rushing for the second year in a row. Dylan Taylor, a 6-0, 175-pound junior quarterback, has settled into the position after sharing the position earlier in the season. He threw for 322 yards and four TDs against Norman.

"Union is extremely talented," Bixby head coach Loren Montgomery said. "They have two of the most explosive players we've seen this season on offense – Parry and Turner. "The quarterback is playing really well ... they are playing with a ton of confidence.

"Defensively they are aggressive and run to the football extremely well," Montgomery added.

Union's defensive effort this season is led by senior linebacker Tucker Koch, junior linebacker Cain Brackney, junior linebacker Reyon Williams and sophomore cornerback Dallas Maxey.

Bixby capitalized on the bye week, practicing on game plans and fundamentals while getting needed rest. "The bye week was good. Our kids practiced hard and seemed to freshen up for the playoffs. I think it allowed a few of our guys to get healthy too," Coach Montgomery said.

CLASS 6A-I PLAYOFFS – In other Class 6A-I first round games last week, Mustang defeated Norman North (42-17), Yukon upended Deer Creek (24-7) and Edmond Memorial blanked Edmond North (20-0).

The Union-Bixby quarterfinal winner plays the Mustang (8-3) at No. 4 Broken Arrow (8-2) winner in the state semifinals scheduled Friday, Nov. 28. The Yukon (6-5) at third-ranked Owasso (8-2) winner plays the Edmond Memorial (8-3) at second-ranked Jenks (9-1) winner in the other semifinal game.

Class 6A-I's state championship game is scheduled at 7 p.m. Friday, Dec. 6, at the University of Central Oklahoma's Chad Richison Stadium in Edmond.

NOTES – Bixby has moved up to the No. 16 ranking nationally by MaxPreps. ... The Spartans have won 95 of their last 98 games and enter the quarterfinals riding a 13-game winning streak. ... Through the regular season, Bixby is averaging 65.4 points per game while limiting opponents to an average of 12.3 points per game. The 654 points scored this season are reportedly a Bixby record for regular season scoring. ... Through 10 games, Bixby senior kicker Bradley Thao is having another productive season. He's 54-of-56 on extra point kicks and 4-of-5 on field goal attempt. His season-long field goal kick was 35 yards. He's also kicked off 82 times with 59 kicks resulting in touchbacks. His average kickoff is 53.8 yards per kick. ... Twenty-four Spartans have scored touchdowns this season. ... Union was hampered in its first-round playoff win over Norman by 12 penalties for 112 yards. ... With the exception of Yukon and Edmond North, the other teams in this year's Class 6A-I playoffs were part of the 2024 playoff bracket.

'O' PRODUCTION – Though the regular season, Bixby's offensive production, devised by offensive coordinator Tyler Schneider, has been a problem for opposing defenses. The 10-game statistics are more impressive since the starters seldom played after halftime in several games. Senior quarterback Carson Kirby, a three-year starter, is 144-of-205 passing for 2,287 yards and 31 touchdowns. His completion percentage is .702 and he's been intercepted five times. Senior running back Jayson Moll leads a balanced rushing attack with 1,065 yards and 13 TDs on 98 carries.

Junior Jack Gill, who is involved in the wildcat package, has 47 carries for 330 yards and eight TDs; senior Gabe Blankenship has 42 carries for 281 yards and six TDs while Kirby has rushed 25 times for 228 yards and three scores.

Twenty-six Spartans have caught passes this season, led by senior Braeden Presley's 19 catches for 435 yards and four TDs. Senior Nathan Gonzales has 27 receptions for 408 yards and seven TDs; senior Catcher DeHart has 23 catches for 348 yards and four TDs, and senior Emory Snyder has caught 16 passes for 293 yards and three TDs.

'D' EFFORT – The Spartans' veteran and youthful defenders have effectively executed game plans compiled by defensive coordinator Rodney Flowers during the unbeaten stretch and made adjustments when needed.

Senior linebacker Cord Nolan leads the crowded tackle chart with 56 total tackles, including 35 unassisted stops, 15 tackles for loss and two sacks. Senior linebacker Trey McGlothlin has 44 tackles, nine tackles for loss, one sack and one pass interception; junior linebacker Ben Puckett has 44 total tackles, two tackles for loss, one sack and one interception.

Senior defensive back Emory Snyder has 42 total tackles and four tackles for loss; senior Maverick Nance has 42 tackles and three tackles for loss; junior Nathan Hobbs has 36 total tackles, four tackles for loss and one sack, while senior Dawson Madden has 36 total tackles, a team-leading 21 tackles for loss and a team-leading eight sacks. Senior defensive lineman Joe Peters has 27 total tackles, 10 tackles for loss and three sacks.

Senior Vincent Incremona has nine tackles for loss and four sacks while senior Tyler Wright leads with five pass interceptions, which he returned 137 yards, including two returns for touchdowns. In his three-year career, Wright has recorded 10 pass interceptions, returning six interceptions for TDs.

As a team, Bixby has 114 tackles for loss, 27 sacks and 13 pass interceptions.