

Bixby Overcomes Norman, Awaits Playoffs

By Ron Holt

NORMAN – Overcoming an early three-point deficit and an uncharacteristic five turnovers, Bixby's top-ranked Spartans toppled Norman's Tigers, 72-3, at Harve Collins Stadium here last Friday night, securing another district championship in the process.

Bixby, ranked No. 18 nationally by MaxPreps, carries a 10-0 regular season record and a 7-0 Class 6A-I, District 1 mark into a bye week in the upcoming state playoffs. Norman fell to 6-4 and 3-4.

There's a chance the two teams might collide again in two weeks in the Class 6A-I state quarterfinals if Norman survives a first-round playoff game at Tulsa Union this Friday.

Norman, which upended the Spartans in last season's regular season finale at Bixby, gained the early momentum as Spartan senior quarterback Carson Kirby was tackled while scrambling looking for an open receiver, causing a fumble, on the game's opening possession.

The Tigers' Jaydon Spencer caused the fumble while teammate Ashton Byrd returned the fumble 60-plus yards to the Spartan nine-yard line, exciting a Senior Night crowd.

Bixby's defense answered the early challenge as the Tigers lost eight yards before settling for a 34-yard field goal by Ian McKee and a 3-0 lead at the 9:23 mark of the first quarter.

It took Bixby two plays to take the lead for good as senior running back Jayson Moll erupted for 51 yards to the Tigers' five-yard line where teammate Tyler Wright scored on a five-yard touchdown run.

The two-point conversion pass by Wright failed, leaving the visitors holding a 6-3 lead with 8:49 showing in the first stanza.

Bixby scored on its next three possessions - a 17-yard TD pass from Kirby to Wright and TD passes of 16 and 13 yards from Kirby to sophomore tight end Connor Arant for a 28-3 Spartan lead with three seconds left in the first quarter.

It was a productive evening for Arant, a 6-3, 225-pound tight end/defensive end. He finished with three catches for 50 yards and two TDs. "The first play I kind of messed up but I scored and the last play it was designed for the tight end so that was good," Arant said of the scoring plays. "Personally, I'm doing a lot better blocking, doing better with the basics. We had a few turnovers tonight, but we'll get that fixed. I think we've improved on both sides of the ball," added Arant, who has six receptions for 110 yards and five TDs this season along with 19 tackles.

After Bixby extended its lead to 34-3 on a five-yard TD toss from Kirby to senior Cord Nolan, the Spartans had back-to-back turnovers – an interception and lost fumble – before closing out the first half with a 34-yard field goal by senior Bradley Thao for a 37-3 lead at intermission.

Bixby's defense got into the scoring act early in the third quarter when senior Braeden Presley stepped in front of a pass by Norman's Crew Noles and returned it 27 yards for a touchdown.

Thao's conversion kick gave BHS a 44-3 lead with 11:24 left in the third frame.

"It felt good ... that's a play we worked on all week and to be able to see it pay off in a game shows you how dedicated our coaches are. There was a lot of excitement and joy playing alongside my guys," said Presley, who has three pass interceptions this season.

"After that happened (Norman's fumble return) we knew we couldn't give them anymore momentum in the game. Holding them to three points was a win on our part and then the rest of the night we did our job.

"It feels great going 10-0 but we know it's 'lose one and go home' so we can't take any team lightly, every team makes the playoffs for a reason. We've got a lot to clean up but we'll be

okay,” added Presley, who also contributed to the season’s offensive success by catching 19 passes for 435 yards and four touchdowns.

Later in the third period, Bixby and Norman traded turnovers with Spartan junior Jack Gill returning a Tiger fumble 11 yards to the hosts’ one-yard line. Gill scored on the next play and Thao kicked the conversion for a 51-3 BHS lead. It was Gill’s eighth rushing TD this season. A 48-yard TD sprint by senior Gabe Blankenship and Thao’s conversion kick gave Bixby a 58-3 lead midway through the third quarter as reserves played the remainder of the game. Bixby’s backup sophomore quarterback Caleb Morgan had a hand in the final two TDs as he combined with Landon Thienhardt on an 80-yard pass play and then ran eight yards for the final TD as the Spartans recorded an unbeaten regular season for the fifth time (2019, 2020, 2021, 2023 and 2025).

“We had too many turnovers, but I thought our defense was physical all night long,” said Spartan head coach Loren Montgomery afterward. “The thing I’ve been pleased with those guys all year long is that they play hard and they’ve been physical even when we’ve given up points. I like their tempo.

“Arant had a big night, he’s still trying to figure things out,” coach Montgomery added. “He’s gotten a lot better when he’s had an opportunity to get on the field. Every time we give him something to work on, he’s been doing a good job.

“We could see these guys again in two weeks,” Montgomery noted of the Tigers. “They’ll play Union, so we’ll see what happens.”

SPARTAN D – Bixby’s defense was dominating, limiting the Tigers to 124 yards of total offense, an average of two yards per play and seven first downs. Spartan defenders turned the Tigers over four times with two lost fumbles and pass interceptions by Presley and Dylan Jones. “We always like to stop the offense and not let them score a touchdown,” Bixby’s 5-10, 200-pound junior linebacker Nathan Hobbs said of the early stand. “But we played pretty sloppy ... we have to pick that up before the playoffs. We always want to be playing uphill before the playoffs.

“We had some mistakes, but they are fixable mistakes. We’ll be good. and we’ll get locked in. We’ve got a bye week to get our thoughts together going into the playoffs. There are no weeks off. We’ll be scheming for our next two opponents,” he added.

Bixby’s defense showed a new wrinkle with the front seven moving around continuously behind the line prior to the snap on a few occasions Friday. The players point to defensive coordinator Rodney Flowers for the different look.

“That’s something coach Flowers installed this week ... it kinda gets the offense confused. I like it a lot,” said Arant.

Hobbs added with a smile, “That’s just coach Flowers thinking of things like that at two in the morning, seeing what might work. That’s all on him.”

Nolan, a 6-0, 214-pound linebacker, led the Spartans with seven total tackles, including three tackles for loss. Senior Wyatt Campbell was credited with six total tackles while senior Trey McGlothlin, junior Ben Puckett, junior Logan Haddon and senior Dawson Madden each had five total stops.

Bixby recorded four sacks, led by Madden’s two sacks. Nolan and senior Joe Peters also were credited with sacks.

NOTABLES – Bixby, Broken Arrow (8-2), Owasso (8-2) and Jenks (9-1) all earned first round byes in the Class 6A-I state playoffs, starting Friday (Nov. 14). Norman (6-4) visits Union (4-6) in Friday’s first round game while Norman North (5-5) visits Mustang (7-3) in a first round

contest. On the other side of the bracket, Yukon (5-5) visits Deer Creek (3-7) and Edmond North (3-7) visits Edmond Memorial (7-3). ... Bixby has now won 95 of its last 98 games and is riding a 13-game winning streak. ... Through 10 games this season, Bixby has scored a reportedly school record of 654 regular season points, an average of 65.4 points per game. The Spartans scored 60 or more points six times this season with a school record 92 points in a home win over Enid. ... Spartan captains at Norman were Cord Nolan, Kaden Penny, Braeden Presley and Asher Jolly. ... Bixby compiled 623 yards of total offense at Norman. Quarterback Carson Kirby was 17-of-27 passing for 212 yards, four touchdowns and two interceptions. Jayson Moll rushed four times for 100 yards while Gabe Blankenship had 79 yards rushing on five carries and a TD and Jack Gill had five carries for 56 yards and one TD. Landon Thienhardt had three catches for 87 yards and one TD while Cetcher DeHart had four grabs for 67 yards. ... Final regular season scores involving Bixby opponents included: Owasso (8-2) 47, Yukon 27; Sand Springs (8-2) 35, Sapulpa 17; Choctaw (6-4) 72, OC Northwest Classen 0; Jenks 69, Edmond North 8; Moore 49, Enid 7, and Mustang 59, Deer Creek 45. ... In the Tulsa World's final Class 6A-I regular season rankings, Bixby is No.1 followed by Jenks, Owasso, Broken Arrow, Mustang, Edmond Memorial, Tulsa Union, Norman, Yukon and Norman North.

Bixby 72, Norman 3

FIRST QUARTER

NHS – Ian McKee 34 field goal

BHS – Tyler Wright 5 run (pass failed)

BHS - Wright 17 pass from Carson Kirby (Bradley Thao kick)

BHS – Connor Arant 16 pass from Kirby (Jack Gill run)

BHS – Arant 13 pass from Kirby (Tao kick)

SECOND QUARTER

BHS – Cord Nolan 7 pass from Kirby (Tao kick)

BHS – Tao 35 field goal

THIRD QUARTER

BHS – Braeden Presley 27 pass interception return (Tao kick)

BHS – Gill 1 run (Tao kick)

BHS – Gabe Blankenship 48 run (Tao kick)

FOURTH QUARTER

BHS – Landon Thienhardt 80 pass from Caleb Morgan (Tao kick)

BHS – Morgan 8 run (Tao kick)