

Bixby Blitzes BA, Challenges Owasso in Championship

By Ron Holt

CATOOSA – Big plays in all three phases of the game lifted Bixby's unbeaten Spartans past improved Broken Arrow, 49-17, in the Class 6A-I state semifinals last Friday afternoon at windy Frank McNabb Field and into the state championship game for the 12th straight season.

The Spartans (12-0) earned a rematch from last year's thrilling Class 6A-I state championship game with Owasso after the Rams led early before holding off Jenks, 39-36, in the other semifinal game here last Friday night.

Bixby and Owasso (10-2) collide in the Class 6A-I state title game at 7 p.m. Saturday (Dec. 6) at the University of Central Oklahoma's Chad Richison Stadium in Edmond. Bixby seeks its eighth straight state championship and 11th title in the past 12 years.

Playing four quarters for the second time this season, several Spartans turned in impressive statistics against the Tigers (9-3).

Senior quarterback Carson Kirby passed for 187 yards and three touchdowns while rushing for 60 yards and a TD. Senior Jayson Moll rushed for 123 yards and a TD while junior Jack Gill rushed for 70 yards and three TDs. Defensively, senior linebacker Trey McGlothlin was the leader of a solid, aggressive effort with an astounding 19 tackles, eight unassisted, and a sack.

"It wasn't pretty but Broken Arrow plays really good defense," Bixby head coach Loren Montgomery said. "They make you earn it. We moved the ball when we had to, and we moved the chains. It wasn't beautiful but it's usually not at this time of the year.

"I was very pleased with the defense. They've (BA) been able to push and lean on a lot of people with those good backs ... I thought our defensive line did a really nice job of holding up," he added.

The defense set up Bixby's first score when senior defensive back Emory Snyder picked off Tiger quarterback Jeramiah Ssettimba at the Spartan 34-yard line.

Bixby moved the chains to the BA 20-yard line where Kirby passed to sophomore tight end Connor Avant for a touchdown with 5:18 left in the first quarter. Senior Tyler Wright was stopped on the two-point conversion pass as BHS led 6-0.

BA, sparked by a 51-yard pass from Ssettimba to Zane Matthews, drove to Bixby's 26 where Nick Irvine kicked a 43-yard field goal making it a 6-3 game with 2:54 showing in the first quarter.

Bixby's next drive featured a 28-yard scamper by Kirby, a 23-yard run by Moll and a 14-yard pass from Kirby to senior Nate Gonzales before Gill ran four yards up the middle for the TD and senior Bradley Thao kicked the extra point for a 13-3 Spartan lead with 38 seconds left in the first stanza.

Midway through the second quarter, special teams entered the picture. Facing fourth-and-seven at BHS's 49, Kirby stayed on the field but dropped back for a quick punt, a punt which rolled out of bounds at the Tigers' two-yard line.

Broken Arrow was stymied and forced to punt from its own seven-yard line. Ssettimba got off a 14-yard punt to the Tiger 22-yard line. Three plays later, Kirby scored from five yards out and Gill ran for the two-point conversion extending Bixby's advantage to 21-3 with 2:23 left before halftime.

"It's something we practice," Spartan special teams coordinator Trevor Suffal said of Kirby's quick kick. "When he's out there the defense doesn't think we'll kick the ball. He's a good athlete ... he put the ball in a good spot."

“We’ve got some guys who take special teams seriously as well as on offense and defense,” he added.

That score held up at halftime as Broken Arrow’s next possession ended in an acrobatic pass interception by Bixby junior Nathan Hobbs.

Broken Arrow opened the third quarter with an extended drive, highlighted by a 43-yard sprint by Stanford into Spartan territory. Converting three fourth-down plays on the drive, BA narrowed the gap to 21-10 after a four-yard TD run by Stanford and conversion kick by Irvine at the 7:27 mark of the third quarter.

Two potential scoring plays by the Spartans failed when a senior Braeden Presley’s pass reception was ruled incomplete and Presley’s interception of Ssettimba, which was returned for a TD, but the Spartans were flagged for holding.

BA’s next drive ended in Bixby’s fourth pass interception of the game – this one on a toe-tap near the Tiger sideline by Wright with 3:17 left in the third quarter. It was Wright’s team-leading seventh interception this season.

“I think he was going to throw it away, but I was able to get it,” Wright said of the play. “I did a toe tap ... I knew I was in. Their sideline was saying I was out. We came out and tried to keep them from doing what they want to do ... they like to run the ball, but we shut that down.”

Bixby’s next clutch play came on the first play of the fourth quarter when Kirby pitched to Presley in motion and the Spartan standout turned the ball up field, out-running the pursuit for a 62-yard touchdown. Thao’s conversion kick gave Bixby a 28-10 lead.

“I felt like Braeden’s long run was a big play in the game and separated us a little,” Coach Montgomery said. “It was just a grinder but sometimes they are. The Mustang game was a four-quarter game and this one was ... to have you guys play a four-quarter game is a really big deal if nothing else from a conditioning standpoint.”

Bixby scored on its next possession on a drive featuring a 35-yard pass reception by Gonzales, a 19-yard run by Moll and runs of 10, 20 and three yards for a TD, all by Gill. Thao’s extra point kick gave Bixby a 35-10 lead with 9:58 left in the game.

Stanford caught a six-yard TD pass from Ssettimba for the Tigers’ final score before Moll caught a five-yard pass from Kirby and Gill ran seven yards for the final TD after the Spartans recovered the ensuing kickoff following Moll’s TD.

Because of the variety of offensive weapons Broken Arrow has in its arsenal, Bixby’s defensive effort was a key factor in the win. BA was limited to 274 total offensive yards while turning the ball over four times.

“We just did what we’ve been doing all year, fill our gaps just like we’ve been taught to do and to be more physical,” said Bixby standout senior linebacker Cord Nolan, who was credited with eight total tackles and one tackle for loss.

“There are a few things we need to fix but that’s going to happen. We just tried to limit them from having big plays and keep them from running the ball. We’ll keep working hard and see what we can get done next week,” he noted.

Besides McGlothlin’s 19-tackle performance, Bixby also received 10 tackles each by Snyder and Hobbs, seven tackles by Wright, six tackles and two tackles for loss by senior defensive lineman Hector Garcia and five tackles by senior Dawson Madden.

Madden and senior defensive lineman Joe Peters each had sacks along with McGlothlin.

NEXT GAME – For the third time in the past four years, Bixby plays Owasso in the Class 6A-I state championship game. Owasso is the home team Saturday.

In last year's state title game, Bixby's Cooper Parker scored on a two-point conversion in overtime to lift the Spartans to a 43-42 victory. Bixby also routed the Rams (69-6) in the 2022 state championship.

Since joining Class 6A-I, Bixby defeated Owasso 49-16 in the first Battle of the Burbs in 2022 before winning in the title game. In 2023, Bixby defeated OHS 42-16 in the Battle of the Burbs and won 56-14 in the state semifinals.

Owasso toppled Bixby 40-21 in the 2024 Battle of the Burbs played in Owasso before the Spartans pulled out the overtime win in the championship meeting.

This season, the Rams, led by head coach Bill Blankenship, lost to Bixby (49-21) in the Battle of the Burbs and to Jenks (31-21) opening the season before going on a 10-game winning streak. OHS defeated Sand Springs (45-17), Broken Arrow (28-14), Tulsa Union (49-15), Westmoore (52-7), Edmond Memorial (31-21), Edmond Santa Fe (42-8), Norman North (45-14) and Yukon (45-7) in the state quarterfinals and Jenks in the state semifinals.

In the meeting in the Battle of the Burbs at the University of Tulsa to open this season, Bixby built a 28-7 halftime lead en route to the 49-21 win. OHS scored 14 points after the score reached 49-7 in the fourth quarter.

Bixby's Kirby passed for 210 yards and three TDs in the season-opening win while Moll rushed for 106 yards and one TD. Presley caught five passes for 125 yards and two TDs. Defensively, BHS was led by Hobbs' nine tackles and by Maverick Nance's eight tackles.

Owasso was led by quarterback Drew Frankenfield, who passed for 170 yards and two TDs while Jayden Hall rushed for 148 yards and one TD. Julius Wilson and Tae Bethel each caught TD passes.

Defensive leaders this season for the Rams have been seniors Ryder Karn, Chris Zaferes, Kam Miller and Carter Langenderfer.

GILL'S ROLE – Handling the wildcat quarterback role this season for the Spartans is 5-11, 200-pound junior Jack Gill, who has rushed for 444 yards and 11 touchdowns. He's averaging 6.9 yards per carry.

In the semifinal win over Broken Arrow, Gill had another productive offensive outing while also seeing playing time as a linebacker. He finished with 70 yards rushing and three TDs.

"We were a lot more physical than they were and we knew the more physical team was going to win. I love it," Gill said when asked about his role this season. "I've got the best blockers on the team blocking for me, which makes my job easier. It's a lot more fun having this role.

"They were a physical group ... we knew they wouldn't give in, but we didn't either," added Gill, who is wearing the number 12 this season instead of the number 40 he wore last season.

He joins a list of former Spartans who carried the ball in wildcat formations starting with Cade Cavender in 2018 followed by Carson Chambers, Jersey Robb, Connor Kirby and Cooper Parker.

NOTES – Top-ranked Bixby has now won 97 of its last 100 games and is riding a 15-game winning streak. The Spartans continue being ranked No. 16 nationally in MaxPreps poll. ... Bixby has won six straight state championship at UCO's Chad Richison Stadium – winning Class 6A-II crowns from 2019-2021 and 6A-I titles from 2022-2024. ... Spartan senior Nate Gonzales was the leading receiver with six catches for 66 yards. Jayson Moll ended with 151 all-purpose yards – 123 rushing and 28 receiving. Senior Bradley Thao was five-for-five on extra point kicks. This season, Thao is 64-of-66 kicking extra points and four-of-five on field goal attempts. ... Bixby is averaging 62.8 points per game this season and is averaging 272.6 yards passing per game and 256.3 yards rushing per game. Defensively this season, Bixby has recorded 130 tackles for loss, 33 sacks and 22 pass interceptions. ... Owasso head coach Bill Blankenship

led the Rams to Class 6A-1 state titles in 2017 and 2019. Previously, he led Tulsa Union to three state championships and Fayetteville, Arkansas, to one state title. ... Captains for Bixby against BA were Cord Nolan, Braeden Presley, Kaden Penny and Maverick Nance. ... A victory in the state championship game would give the Spartans eight consecutive state championships, moving them past small school power Morrison's seven straight state championships from 1988-1994.

Bixby 49, Broken Arrow 17

FIRST QUARTER

BHS – Connor Avant 20 pass from Carson Kirby (pass failed)

BA – Nick Irvine 43 field goal

BHS – Jack Gill 4 run (Bradley Thao kick)

SECOND QUARTER

BHS – Kirby 5 run (Gill run)

THIRD QUARTER

BA – Samaj Stanford 4 run (Irvine kick)

FOURTH QUARTER

BHS – Braeden Presley 62 pass from Kirby (Thao kick)

BA – Stanford 6 pass from Jeramiah Ssettimba (Irvine kick)

BHS – Jayson Moll 5 pass from Kirby (Thao kick)

BHS – Gill 7 run (Thao kick)