Rested Spartans Hosting Tulsa Union in State Quarterfinals

By Ron Holt

A bye week usually offers a football team an opportunity to correct mistakes, work on conditioning, prepare for upcoming opponents, allow ailing players to heal and become revitalized.

That's what Bixby's coaching staff hoped to accomplish last week after the regular season ended.

This week it's full steam ahead as the Spartans focus on hosting a Class 6A-I state quarterfinal battle with the Union RedHawks on Friday (Nov. 20) at Lee Snider Stadium. Kickoff is set for 7 p.m.

Second-ranked Bixby (9-1) was idle last week while fifth-ranked Union (6-5) turned back visiting Edmond Memorial, 27-17, in a first-round home playoff game. Both teams accomplished goals last week.

"Practices were good last week. The bye weeks are a little strange because you don't know 100 percent who you're going against, but we can take some educated guesses at what both teams might do," Bixby's 17th-year head coach Loren Montgomery said last Friday.

"We didn't have any before school meetings when we're typically watching film of the upcoming opponent. We cut back on a few things and a little on practice time just to keep them fresh and their interest level high.

"The kids were focused, which is always a challenge during a bye week. They stayed clean during practice, and we got a lot of guys reps, so I was kinda pleased overall with how it went. We'll do some conditioning today and then cut them loose.

"They'll have a long weekend and then we'll come back ready to get after it," coach Montgomery added.

Spartan junior quarterback Isaiah Butcher IV sat out the Spartans' Week 10 win at Southmoore but should return to the field during the playoffs.

"Our health is good, I feel like he (Butcher) will play. We've got one guy who had a muscle pull in the Southmoore game. It looks like we'll probably have him back healthy by next Friday … that's the goal," Montgomery noted.

Union struggled at the start of this season - the RedHawks second under head coach Antonio Graham – as it lost four straight games opening the season. Since then, Union has won six of its last seven games, including the Edmond Memorial win last week.

A two-yard touchdown run by Jeremy Foster, a 66-yard pass from quarterback Dylan Taylor to AJ Moton and Foster's blocked punt and recovery in the end zone lifted Union to a 20-9 first half lead, which great to 27-9 entering the fourth quarter.

"They are playing really good ball right now," coach Montgomery said of the RedHawks.

"They're offensive and defensive lines are playing really well. Oliver Pate, one of our former players, is their offensive line coach and he's doing a really good job over there.

"The biggest thing I've seen in their improvement is continuity in everything they do with their offensive and defensive schemes."

After the regular season, Taylor had passed for 1,838 yards and 22 touchdowns while being intercepted nine times. Junior Grayson Betts has 510 yards rushing and two TDs and Foster has 292 rushing yards and five TDs while senior Rayon Williams has 251 yards rushing and four TDs.

Senior Patrick Thompson is the receiving leader with 33 catches for 548 yards and six TDs while senior Tristan Birmingham, who moved from Sand Springs, has 47 receptions for 502 yards and seven TDs.

Defensively, senior strong safety Ian Castellanos leads the RedHawks' defense with 78 total tackles, 53 unassisted stops and one interception. Williams, a linebacker, has recorded 74 tackles, 49 solo stops, 11 tackles for loss, four sacks and one interception.

SERIES SCORES – Bixby and Union met in last year's state quarterfinals with the Spartans rolling to a 51-14 win. Bixby also defeated the RedHawks, 34-0, in the season opener in 2020. After moving to Class 6A in 2010, Bixby lost 67-17 at Union in 2011 and lost to UHS 28-3 at home in 2011.

Union's results this season include: loss at Bentonville, Arkansas (24-7), home loss to Broken Arrow (41-14), home loss to Choctaw (36-14), loss at home to Jenks (49-31), win at Tulsa Washington (31-16), home win over Yukon (49-44), win at Moore (45-15), home win over Deer Creek (45-20), win at Edmond Santa Fe (42-19), loss at Owasso (39-22) and win over Edmond Memorial.

NOTABLES – Bixby was ranked No. 74 nationally last week by MaxPreps. … Entering Friday's quarterfinals, Bixby is scoring at an average of 42.2 points a game and is giving up an average of 12.6 points a game while Union is scoring an average of 29.7 points per game while allowing an average of 29 points per outing. … This season, five Bixby players have completed passes, led by junior Reece Madden's 977 passing yards and 12 touchdowns while being intercepted four times. Junior quarterback Isaiah Butcher IV, who missed two games this season, is Bixby's rushing leader with 115 carries for 817 yards and 12 touchdowns in eight games. Sophomore Hilkyah Sampson is the receiving leader with 33 catches for 282 yards and one touchdown. … Defensively, Bixby is led in total tackles by senior linebacker Ben Puckett and senior free safety Kaiden Flowers. Puckett has 82 tackles while Flowers is credited with 68. Connor Arant and senior Cain Brackney pace BHS with four sacks each while seniors Flowers, Lincoln Fugate and sophomore Maverick Owens are the pass interceptions leader with four interceptions each. …Union's offensive line coach Oliver Pate played in the line for Bixby during the Spartans' first two state championship seasons in 2014 and 2015. … Union has won nine football state championships in its history with the last state title captured in 2016.

CLASS 6A-1 PLAYOFFS – In other first round playoff games last Friday, Yukon won 35-21 at Norman North, Deer Creek lost 28-14 at Mustang and Moore downed visiting Edmond North, 40-19.

In other state quarterfinal games this week, Moore (7-4) visits Broken Arrow (10-0), Owasso (7-3) hosts Mustang (8-3) and Jenks (7-2) hosts Yukon (7-4).

Class 6A-1 state semifinals are scheduled Nov. 27 with the Bixby-Union winner playing the Jenks-Yukon winner in one semifinal while the Mustang-Owasso winner meets the Broken Arrow-Moore winner. The state championship game is set for Friday, Dec. 4, at the University of Central Oklahoma's Richison Stadium.