

# Spartans Dominate Timberwolves, Face Bulldogs in Semis

**By Ron Holt**

The arrival of the state football playoffs and the memory of a regular season ending disappointment apparently captured Bixby High's attention during practice sessions the past two weeks.

Bixby was explosive on offense while turning in a gutty defensive effort as the Spartans turned an expected close encounter into a 59-14 romp over Norman North in a Class 6A-1 state quarterfinal game at Lee Snider Stadium last Friday night.

The Spartans, 9-2, move on to the state semifinals and a first ever meeting with the surging Edmond Memorial Bulldogs, 9-2, on Friday (Nov. 29). Surprisingly, the semifinal game will be part of a Class 6A-1 doubleheader at Claremore's Lantow Field starting at 7 p.m.

Top-ranked Owasso plays Jenks in the other semifinal game at 1 p.m. The two semifinal survivors advance to the Class 6A-1 state championship game at 7 p.m. Friday, Dec. 6, at the University of Central Oklahoma's Chad Richison Stadium.

After struggling in all phases in the regular season finale, Bixby fell at home to once-beaten Norman 31-20. Despite the loss, Bixby finished atop District 1 and received a first-round bye in the state playoffs.

During the bye week and the week of preparation for the Norman North game, the Spartans' focus was on correcting mistakes and elevating the energy.

The Spartans were solid from the outset against Norman North, finishing with 549 yards of total offense while going four-of-five on fourth down conversion attempts. Bixby scored 24 first quarter points and 28 in the second stanza for a 52-7 halftime edge.

Defensively, Bixby limited the Timberwolves to 280 offensive yards while recording five sacks, recovering two fumbles and intercepting two passes. This was a Norman North team that was averaging 45.6 points per game while winning four of its five regular season games down the stretch.

"Today during walk through and during pregame I felt like our guys had an edge about them ... it was that way all week long," Spartan head coach Loren Montgomery said after Friday's win. "Everybody was as nervous as we could be, and I think it's a good thing for this bunch because if they're not they tend to not be as focused."

Players who contributed to the Spartans' dominating effort agreed with their head coach.

"The difference was we knew what we did wrong against Norman. We took the bye week seriously. We didn't look at it as a week off. We looked at it as a week of preparation. We knew we're in the win or go home situation and we didn't want to have that feeling," said junior two-way player Braeden Presley, who rushed five times for 78 yards, caught two passes for 29 yards and intercepted a pass on defense.

"We had two weeks of practice to prepare for Norman North and we just took it as a chance to get better and that's what we did ... we came out and executed," said junior Spartan quarterback Carson Kirby, who was 19-of-28 passing for 279 yards and five touchdowns.

Junior tight end-linebacker Cord Nolan, who had two pass receptions for 77 yards, said: "We knew what we messed up on two weeks ago, what we needed to fix, and we needed to play better. This has been one of our better weeks of practice. We were doing what needed to be done ... that's what we've got to do from here on out."

And 6-2, 275-pound senior offensive lineman Jacob Hamlin said when asked the difference in play against Norman North: "It's just being prepared to play every week especially during playoff time ... that's the Bixby standard. After the last game when things didn't go the way we wanted, we got it going. We just need to keep it going.

"Every week coach (Tyler) Schneider always comes up with something different, so it didn't surprise me that we had a good night passing," he added.

Norman North won the coin toss but deferred to the second half. Bixby wasted little time in driving 78 yards in 12 plays to take a 7-0 lead after a clutch pass from Kirby to junior Tyler Wright for a 28-yard touchdown. Bradley Tao kicked the extra point.

The drive featured a 19-yard pass from Kirby to Presley, an 11-yard pass from Kirby to Nolan and a five-yard offside penalty against the Timberwolves on fourth-and-three for a Spartan first down.

On the second play of Norman North's opening drive sophomore Mason James fumbled with Nolan recovering at the Timberwolves' nine-yard line with 8:37 left in the first quarter.

Bixby's drive bogged down before Tao kicked a 32-yard field goal for a 10-0 Spartan lead at the 7:02 mark.

On North's ensuing drive, a pass from quarterback Owen Eshelman deflected off a receiver's hands with Nolan intercepting at the Timberwolves' 30. Two plays later, Kirby completed a 32-yard TD pass to senior Blake Hogshooter for a 17-0 Spartan lead.

After forcing the Timberwolves into a three-and-out, Bixby took three plays to increase its lead to 24-0 as senior Cooper Parker scored on a six-yard run and Tao kicked the conversion with 2:52 left in the first quarter.

That drive featured a 43-yard pass from a pressured Kirby to Hogshooter, taking the ball to the NHS six-yard line.

Norman North's next drive ended when Eshelman was tackled by junior Dawson Madden causing a fumble which was recovered by the Spartans' Nathan Hobbs at the NHS nine.

On Bixby's first possession of the second quarter the Spartans drove 63 yards to increase the lead to 31-0 with 8:20 showing as Kirby passed to Hogshooter for a seven-yard TD. Tao kicked the extra point.

The drive was highlighted by a trick play. Facing fourth-and-nine, Bixby opted to punt but faked the punt. Instead of snapping the ball to the punter, it was instead snapped to the up-man Parker who passed to junior Trey McGlothlin for a first down at the visitors' 22-yard line. "That's something we've been working on," coach Montgomery said.

Bixby was flagged for a personal foul after the TD, forcing the Spartans to kick off from the 20-yard line, The Timberwolves' Braylan Lassiter returned the kick 45 yards to the Spartan 45-yard line. A missed tackle of Norman North's pass from Eshelman to Aidan Williams resulted in a 28-yard pass play to Bixby's six. Four plays later, Eshelman hit James with a 15-yard TD making it a 31-7 game.

The Spartans responded with a 28-yard kickoff return by Presley followed by a 65-yard Presley scamper taking the ball to the Norman North two where Parker scored on a short burst. Tao kicked the extra point for a 38-7 Spartan lead with 5:42 left before halftime.

The Spartans weren't finished. Kirby, who faked a run into the line, passed to Nolan for a 66-yard touchdown at the 2:48 mark while a pass interception by Presley set up a 13-yard TD pass from Kirby to Nathan Gonzales for a 52-7 lead with 1:13 left before halftime.

Bixby ended its scoring after a nine-play, 49-yard drive resulting in a 16-yard touchdown dash by senior Bode Cairl for a 59-7 Spartan lead with 7:12 left in the third frame.

Norman North's final score came on a 60-yard TD pass from Eshelman to James with 4:22 remaining in the game.

"The defense played really well," coach Montgomery said. "Getting those turnovers were big. I know we only got 10 points off three turnovers, but it was still really big. We had a lot in the game plan, some things we'd been practicing for two weeks.

"Some of the passes we hit were RPO's (run-pass option). I felt we did a good job spreading the ball around. Carson had a really good game ... he had a couple of good runs and distributed the ball well," he added.

Bixby's offense was hitting on all cylinders and benefited from the early turnover gifts provided by the defense. Besides Kirby's passing efforts, the offense featured 10 players combining to rush for 246 yards and Hogshooter finishing with three catches for 82 yards and two TDs.

"The defense played lights out for sure and that helped us on offense and helped us get momentum," Kirby said. "I just felt really comfortable tonight and Hog (Hogshooter) did a great job getting open. Coach Schneider had a good game plan for us ... we have a lot of options on offense."

The defense's game plan was obviously solid against an opponent which scored 54 points in a loss at Owasso late in the regular season.

“The defense played a lot better than we had been, this was definitely one of our better games defensively, offensively and special teams. If we keep playing like this, we’ll be fine,” Nolan said. “Turnovers won the game. You get those and it gives you momentum. Both of the turnovers also gave us good field position. “This has been one of our better weeks of practice. We were doing what we needed to do, that’s what we’ve got to do from here on out.”

Once again, Bixby will be practicing on Thanksgiving morning, which has become a playoff tradition. **NEXT GAME** – Bixby faces an Edmond Memorial squad which is having an outstanding season. The Bulldogs of head coach Justin Merideth finished the regular season 8-2, went 6-1 in District 2 play and earned a first-round bye.

It’s Memorial’s first winning record since posting a 7-4 record in 2013. The Bulldogs were 5-5 in 2016. The Bulldogs overcame an early deficit to stun visiting Norman 49-20 in a Class 6A-1 state quarterfinal game last week.

This season, Edmond Memorial won at Del City (35-0), lost at home to Deer Creek (38-24), won at home against Edmond North (22-13), won at Norman North (21-6), won at home against Edmond Santa Fe (35-7), won at Yukon (38-0), lost at home to Owasso (46-14), defeated Westmoore (16-), won at Broken Arrow (61-28) and won at Tulsa Union (32-29) to earn the first round bye.

Senior quarterback David McComb, a four-year starter and Kansas commitment, is the ringleader of the Bulldog offense. He’s a dual threat. In the playoff win over Norman, he passed for one TD and ran for three other scores as the Bulldogs overcame a 14-7 second quarter deficit by scoring 35 unanswered points.

Billy McDown, a 6-2, 156-pound senior wide receiver, caught a 43-yard TD pass from McComb off a flea flicker against the Tigers while Nick Booker, a 6-0, 200-pound junior running back-linebacker, ran for three TDs.

Booker and Colton McComb, a 6-2, 195-pound linebacker, have been tackle leaders for the Bulldog defense this season.

“We haven’t played them so this will be a good test for us,” Bixby’s Nolan said of meeting Edmond Memorial.

**NOTABLES** – Bixby has won 83 of its last 86 games and the Spartans have a 30-1 playoff record since 2014. ... Captains for the Norman North game were Cooper Parker, Braeden Presley, Cord Nolan and Kaeden Penny. ... Presley, a 6-0, 187-pound junior, is contributing more to Bixby’s offense while continuing playing in the Spartan secondary. In addition, he returned two punts for 23 yards and returned one kickoff for 28 yards against Norman North. “I wasn’t really pushing to get more involved, but it makes it easier for everyone else ... they can’t just worry about Hogshooter, Carson or Bode Cairl. It gives us a lot more weapons to work with,” Presley said. Kirby has passed for 2,548 yards and 30 touchdowns this season. ... Defensively, senior Brooks Dixon led the balanced Spartan effort with nine tackles, six unassisted. He also had three tackles for loss. Linebacker Cooper Parker ended with eight tackles, seven solos, and two tackles for loss. Junior Trey McGlothlin ended with five tackles, two solos, and Tyler Wright had four tackles, three unassisted. Cord Nolan, Nathan Hobbs and Peyton Chronister each had three total tackles with Chronister having one tackle for loss. Parker, Hector Garcia, Dawson Madden, Chronister and Dixon were credited with sacks while Madden had one hurry, giving him a team leading 13 hurries this season. ... After Norman North’s 45-yard kickoff return by Braylon Lassiter, he was smacked out of bounds by Spartan kicker Bradley Tao. ... Presley recorded his fourth pass interception this season. ... Running back Bode Cairl, who has rushed for 501 yards on 82 carries this season, scored his sixth rushing TD of the season, second on the team behind Cooper Parker’s 15 rushing TDs.

### **Bixby 59, Norman North 14**

#### **First Quarter**

BHS – Tyler Wright 28 pass from Carson Kirby (Bradley Tao kick), 9:16

BHS – Tao 32 field goal, 7:02

BHS – Blake Hogshooter 32 pass from Kirby (Tao kick), 5:11

BHS – Cooper Parker 2 run (Tao kick), 2:52

**Second Quarter**

BHS – Hogshooter 7 pass from Kirby (Tao kick), 8:20

NNHS – Mason James 15 pass from Owen Eshelman (Ben Kolar kick), 6:38

BHS – Cord Nolan 66 pass from Kirby (Tao kick), 2:48

BHS – Nathan Gonzales 13 pass from Kirby (Tao kick), 1:13

**Third Quarter**

BHS – Bode Cairl 16 run (Tao kick), 7:12

**Fourth Quarter**

NNHS – James 60 pass from Eshelman (Kolar kick),