

# Talented Norman Topples Bixby on Rainy Senior Night

**By Ron Holt**

Consistent rains, at times resembling a downpour, made for a dreary atmosphere as Bixby's second-ranked Spartans closed the regular season by hosting Norman's Tigers here last Friday night. Even when the rain subsided late in the game, the atmosphere remained dreary as the Spartans turned in an uncharacteristic performance with talented, surging Norman capitalizing for a 31-20 victory in front of a small, wet Senior Night crowd at Lee Snider Stadium.

The bad news is that the Spartans fell to 8-2 on the season while ending Class 6A-1 District 1 play with a 6-1 record, tying Bixby with Jenks (7-3, 6-1) and Norman (9-1, 6-1) atop the league. The good news: Bixby remains the district champion and earned a bye, along with Jenks, Owasso and Edmond Memorial in the Class 6A-1 state playoffs, which begin this weekend (Nov. 15-16).

Bixby likely spends the week recovering from the disappointing setback while working to correct mistakes and regain its focus. In years past, Bixby raised its level of play when the playoffs arrived. Statistically, Bixby finished with disappointing numbers. The Spartans were 1-of-15 on third down attempts, punted nine times after punting only 19 times through the previous nine games and finished with 268 total offensive yards.

In Bixby's five offensive drives in the opening half, the drives were victimized by a bad snap in driving rain for a loss of eight yards, a procedure penalty, a sack for a nine-yard loss, a fumble which BHS recovered for a three-yard loss and a three and out.

Defensively, Bixby gave up 409 total offensive yards while three of the Tigers' five scoring drives took only three plays, two plays and two plays.

"I knew they were good," Bixby head coach Loren Montgomery said afterward. "That quarterback (Phoenix Murphy) keeps plays alive and defensively they put good pressure on us ... we couldn't get anything going in the running game. They basically came out and kicked our butts in all three phases. "They played a really good game. We couldn't get anything going after halftime," he added.

Norman, winners of five games in a row, made its intentions known on its opening drive as Tigers senior running back Kamron Donald broke through the Spartan defensive line and rambled 53 yards for a touchdown and stunning 7-0 lead at the 9:01 mark after Ian McKee kicked the conversion. It took three plays and only 1:09 off the clock to travel the 62 yards.

The Tigers next drive ended when Spartan junior cornerback Braeden Presley intercepted Murphy's deflected pass at the Tiger 38-yard line, but Bixby was unable to capitalize.

Bixby used a 31-yard field goal by senior kicker Bradley Tao to trim the deficit to 7-3 with 11:57 left before halftime but the Tigers took only two plays on the following possession to score on a 66-yard outburst by Donald for a 14-3 lead with 11:18 remaining in the half.

"He's been successful, but I don't know if he's been that explosive," Montgomery said of Donald, who had 130 rushing yards at halftime and ended with 182 yards rushing on 22 carries. "That's what happens when you're bringing pressure, and one guy doesn't go where he needs to go, or somebody gets blocked."

On its next possession, Norman drove 59 yards in seven plays with Murphy hitting junior Crew Noles with a 10-yard touchdown pass for a 21-3 lead with 8:13 left in the opening half.

Bixby, sparked by a 32-yard pass from junior quarterback Carson Kirby to Blake Hogshooter moved the Spartans into the red zone where senior Cooper Parker ended the drive with a one-yard run and Tao kicked the conversion making it a 21-10 game at the 6:08 mark.

A short Tiger punt gave BHS good field possession at the NHS 47-yard line on its next possession. In nine plays, Bixby senior running back Bode Cairl scored from two yards out and Tao kicked the extra point as the Spartans narrowed the deficit to 21-17 with 2:21 left before intermission.

"They pretty much ran the stuff that we watched on film with the linebacker's running the same kind of blitzes ... I could have been better in order for us to win," said Cairl, who was the Spartans' rushing leader with 88 hard-earned yards on 18 carries and one TD. He averaged 4.9 yards per carry.

Bixby scrambled to get downfield after taking over at the NHS 43 with 1:01 left in the first half. The Spartans drove to the 28 before Tao booted a 39-yard field goal as time expired narrowing the Tigers' advantage to 21-20 at halftime. It was the first field goal attempt this season for Tao.

The Spartans added to the momentum early in the third quarter as Presley intercepted Murphy again, giving Bixby possession at its own 23-yard line. BHS went three-and-out and Norman, behind a 36-yard run by Donald, used a 27-yard field goal by McKee for a 24-20 lead with 9:03 showing in the third stanza.

On its ensuing possession, the Tigers again struck quickly as Murphy ran around before launching a pass down the Norman sideline. Teammate BJ Randle, a senior wide receiver, made a spectacular one-handed grab while being closely defended by Bixby's Emory Snyder and outran the hosts for a 91-yard touchdown and 31-20 lead with 4:35 left in the third frame.

Spartan linebacker Trey McGlothlin later made a leaping interception of a Murphy pass in Spartan territory to thwart another Tiger drive. It was McGlothlin's third pass theft of the season and Bixby's third of the game.

Neither team was able to sustain scoring drives through the final quarter, giving Norman reason to celebrate at game's end after the Tigers suffered a 59-20 loss in a 2023 Class 6A-1 state quarterfinal game at Bixby.

A bright spot for the Spartans was the play of Presley, the 6-0, 187-pound threat in all phases of the game. He intercepted two passes, giving him three for the season. He also was credited with five tackles, two unassisted and two pass defenses. He caught one pass for 11 yards and returned a punt 35 yards.

"We knew their route concepts and knew what they were going to run going into the game," said Presley, who has returned nine kickoffs this season for 171 yards and returned 18 punts for 203 yards. "On some plays I knew when he was going to run and then he threw the pick to me."

On the lengthy punt return, Presley said, "Once I broke through, I saw two of my guys and two of their guys and I knew my guys could beat them, so I picked it up ... I just got tripped up."

Bixby's ability to put this performance in the rearview mirror will be a key going forward as will making needed improvements in preparation for the playoffs.

"We've got to correct everything we're doing wrong," said a disappointed Cairl, who has rushed for 470 yards and five TDs this season. "We've just got to get the energy going for the next game."

Presley added, "We know we didn't play our best ball ... we know we're better than that. We've just got to fight through the adversity since we haven't had much this season. We know what we need to do better going into the playoffs, so this doesn't happen again."

**NEXT GAME** -While Bixby is idle this week the Spartans will pay attention to Saturday afternoon's first round game featuring Norman North at Moore. Bixby hosts the winner in the state quarterfinals at 7 p.m. Friday, Nov. 22.

Norman North (3-7 and 3-4 in District 2) has won two of its last three games including a 55-28 win at Edmond Santa Fe in the regular season finale. The Timberwolves lost at Moore (33-28) in the third game of the season.

Moore (6-4 and 3-4 in District 1) won its last two games of the season at Edmond North and home against Enid. The Lions lost to Bixby (49-7) at home in the second district game this season.

"We still have the top seed ... they (Norman) had to beat us by I think 14 points. We've got a lot of work to do ... we've got to stick our plows back in the ground and go to work," coach Montgomery said.

"We've been trying to grow up all season.

"It'll be a normal week for us. We'll probably back off a little but Friday we'll condition so we're not dead-legged when we come back out," he added. "It looks like we would get the Edmond Memorial-Norman winner in the semifinals if we can win our first game."

**NOTABLES** - The 20 points Bixby scored were the fewest since the Spartans scored 17 in a 17-14 win over Choctaw in the Class 6A-II state championship game in 2020 ... BHS quarterback Carson Kirby didn't throw a touchdown pass against Norman. The last time he didn't throw a TD pass was in the Spartans' 21-7 win over Jenks in the district opener this season. ... Defensively, Bixby was led by junior linebacker Cord Nolan and senior linebacker Cooper Parker. Nolan ended with 10 total tackles, eight

unassisted stops, two tackles for loss and one sack. Parker had 10 tackles, five unassisted, and one tackle for loss. Junior Trey McGlothlin ended with eight tackles, three solo, and a pass interception while sophomore Nathan Hobbs had eight tackles, three unassisted. Senior Brooks Dixon had six tackles, five unassisted, while junior Braeden Presley and junior Hector Garcia each were credited with five tackles. Senior lineman Peyton Chronister ended with four tackles, two solo, and one sack. ... The final Tulsa World regular season rankings of Class 6A-1 teams, in order: Owasso, Jenks, Norman, Bixby, Edmond Memorial, Tulsa Union, Deer Creek-Edmond, Moore, Norman North and Mustang. The Daily Oklahoman's final 6A-1 regular season ranking is the same except it has Mustang ninth and Norman North 10<sup>th</sup>. ... Bixby has won 82 of its last 85 games. ... Captains for the Norman game were Cooper Parker, Cord Nolan, Braeden Presley and Brooks Dixon.

**DISTRICT** – In the final District 1 games last week, Jenks won 21-0 in a weather-shortened game at Edmond North, Mustang fell 27-20 at Deer Creek-Edmond and Moore blanked Enid 38-0.

Here's District 1's final standings: Bixby (8-2, 6-1), Jenks (7-3, 6-1), Norman (9-1, 6-1), Deer Creek (7-3, 4-3), Moore (6-4, 3-4), Mustang (5-5, 2-5), Edmond North (2-6, 1-6) and Enid (2-8, 0-7).

District 2 final standings: Owasso (10-0), 7-0), Edmond Memorial (8-2, 6-1), Union (7-3, 5-2), Norman North (3-7, 3-4), Broken Arrow (4-6, 3-4), Westmoore (2-8, 2-5), Edmond Santa Fe (1-9, 1-6) and Yukon (3-7, 1-6).

**PLAYOFFS** – Class 6A-1 first round state playoff games Friday feature Westmoore at Norman, Broken Arrow at Deer Creek and Mustang at Tulsa Union. On Saturday, Moore visits Norman North. The state quarterfinals will be Nov. 22. The Norman North-Moore winner plays at Bixby, Edmond Memorial hosts the Norman-Westmoore winner, Owasso entertains the Deer Creek-Broken Arrow winner and Jenks hosts the Union-Mustang winner.

### **Norman 31, Bixby 20**

#### **FIRST QUARTER**

NHS – Kamron Donald 53 run (Ian McKee kick), 9:01

#### **SECOND QUARTER**

BHS – Bradley Tao 31 field goal, 11:57

NHS – Donald 66 run (McKee kick), 11:18

NHS – Crew Noles 10 pass from Phoenix Murphy (McKee kick), 8:13

BHS – Cooper Parker 1 run (Tao kick), 6:08

BHS – Bode Cairl 2 run (Tao kick), 2:21

BHS – Tao 39 field goal, 0:00

#### **THIRD QUARTER**

NHS – McKee 25 field goal, 9:03

NHS – BJ Randle 91 pass from Murphy (McKee kick), 4:35