

High-Powered Madison Offense Puts Four On 11A First Team



P&D FILE PHOTO

Madison's Mason Leighton, 4, scampers into the end zone in front of West Central defender Jonah Rechtenbaugh during the Class 11A state championship game at the DakotaDome in Vermillion. Both were selected to the Class 11A All-State football team, announced today (Wednesday).

BY RICHARD ANDERSON
Rapid City Journal

It was a season of firsts for the Madison Bulldogs: capturing their first-ever Class 11A state football title and winning 12 games, the most in team history.

With that said, it's no surprise that the Bulldogs led the way in all-state selections with four on the first team offense, one on defense and two more honorable mention.

The Bulldog offense put up nearly 400 yards per game and 40 points and was paced by its skill position cornerstone —quarterback Mitch Hansen, running back Brodie Frederiksen and wide receiver Mason Leighton.

Offensive tackle Austin Lohsandt led the way on the offensive line.

Madison held off West Central 28-21 in the title game, capping a 12-0 season.

Lennox also had five first-team selections, with state runner-up West Central adding four. Tea Area and St. Thomas More both had three first-team picks.

Here is a capsule look at the all-state team:

Offense

Quarterback — Mitch Hansen, Madison. Hansen, a 6-foot, 210-pound senior, was a dual-threat at quarterback for the Bulldogs, combining for 28 touchdowns on the season. He ran for 537 yards on 94 carries and completed 107 of 191 passes for 2,073 yards and 23 touchdowns. He finished with 4,880 yards of total offense in his career for 58 touchdowns.

Mitch is a fierce competitor, a student of the game. He is a leader of our team," Madison head coach Max Hodgen said. "Offensively he is our catalyst; as Mitch goes, we go. He has the drive to be the best and he expects that from all of his teammates. He refuses to lose."

Fullback — Collin McEntee, Lennox.The 5-10, 195 pound McEntee, a senior, finished with 371 yards rushing on 91 carries, scoring five times. He had no fumbles and averaged 4.0 yards per carry. As a blocker, he led the way for an offense that finished with 2,264 yards of rushing. He finished with 1,023 yards rushing and no fumbles in his career.

Running back — Brodie Frederiksen, Madison. Frederiksen, a 5-8, 170-pound senior, led the Bulldogs with 1,459 yards on 219 carries, including a long run of 98 yards and a whopping 31 touchdowns. He also caught 14 pass receptions for 206 yards and one score. He is a two-time all-state performer,

running for 2,913 career yards and 48 touchdowns.

"Brodie is such a hard worker. He is motivated to be a great football player," Hodgen said. "He has been the spark to this team all year."

Running back — Bryson Westland, Belle Fourche. Westland, a 6-1, 180-pound senior, led the state with 2,132 yards rushing and 28 touchdowns. He also had one kick return for a score. In his career for the Broncos, he finished with 4,135 yards rushing and 50 touchdowns.

"Bryce has been our workhorse on offense for the past three years," Belle Fourche head coach Scott Slotten. "As the game goes along, he wants the ball more and more."

Wide Receiver — Mason Leighton, Madison. The 6-1, 178-pound junior missed two games this season but still caught 25 passes for 592 yards and seven touchdowns. He also carried the football nine times for 47 yards.

"When we need a big play we go to Mason," Hodgen said. "Every time he touches the ball he has a chance to score. His teammates and coaches trust him to be a playmaker when the game is on the line."

Wide receiver — Alek Keegan, St. Thomas More. Keegan, a 6-3, 185-pound senior, had 25 pass receptions for the Cavaliers for 542 yards and seven touchdowns. He had six catches for over 40 yards on the season. In his last two seasons, he finished with 52 catches for 994 yards.

"Alek is the type of athlete that

comes along once in a great while," STM head coach Wayne Sullivan. "He will play at the next level."

Tight end — Jacob Hinker, Lennox. Hinker, a 6-2, 225-pound senior, had seven catches for 85 yards and helped the offense rush for 2,264 yards on the season. He was also the team's defensive MVP and team captain.

Tackle — Brevin Wagner, Tea Area. Wagner, the biggest player on the all-state team at 6-10, 357 pounds, is a senior and paved the way for the Tea Area offense to run up 3,444 yards of total offense, 1,821 on the ground and 1,623 through the air. The offensive line gave up just three sacks this season.

"Bevin has made huge strides since last season," Tea Area head coach Craig Clayberg said. "He worked his butt off in the weight room last off-season, which helped him develop into our top offensive lineman. He helped our offense to improve tremendously from last season."

Tackle — Austin Lohsandt, Madison.Lohsandt, a 6-7, 235-pound junior, allowed no quarterback sacks this season and blocked for an offense that had a 1,500-yard rusher and 2,000-yard passer. The Bulldog offensive line gave up just three sacks all season.

"Austin has done a great job at left tackle for us in the last two years," Hodgen said. "He has shown improvement this year and he is a leader on the field. We count on Austin and trust him to get his blocks when we need him."

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Iowa's Ferentz Vindicated With 12-0 Season

BY LUKE MEREDITH
AP Sports Writer

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) — Kirk Ferentz knew it would take a major turnaround to get the Iowa Hawkeyes back to where they wanted to be.

Few believed the veteran coach could actually pull it off. That's why the most successful of Ferentz's 17 seasons at Iowa is arguably his most rewarding one.

Ferentz has taken a team pegged for mediocrity to the Big Ten championship game against No. 5 Michigan State (11-1, 7-1) on Saturday, with a playoff spot likely going to the winner.

"We've never ever had any doubt in Kirk Ferentz. He's an unbelievable coach. An unbelievable man to play for," tight end Henry Krieger Coble said. "We're just doing a little better job carrying out the plan."

More like a lot better. The fourth-ranked Hawkeyes are 12-0 for the first time in school history and 8-0 in the league for the first time since 2002, when Ferentz won national coach of the year honors. Ferentz might claim the award again in a few weeks after a season few saw coming after Iowa went just 34-30 from 2010-14.

"If you have success and then you dip, and then you're able to drive back up to success ... those are the things that amaze me," Michigan State coach Mark Dantonio said.

Though it seemed so unlikely back in August, it wasn't entirely surprising that Ferentz fixed the Hawkeyes.

He did it twice before.

Ferentz led a program whose talent level had slipped dramatically at the end of coach Hayden Fry's tenure to three consecutive top-10 finishes from 2002-04. After a three-year dip, Iowa won nine games in 2008 and made a national title run the following year that culminated in their only BCS bowl win.

Before the 2010 season, Iowa gave Ferentz a 10-year deal, priced at roughly \$40 million, with a prohibitive buyout clause that was often quoted whenever the Hawkeyes started slipping.

There was a lot of that in the years that followed with the Hawkeyes an afterthought not just in the national title conversation but the Big Ten as well. Iowa stuck by Ferentz, no doubt partly because paying his \$13 million buyout likely wasn't a viable option.

Unlike most embattled coaches, Ferentz didn't fire any of his assistants — a decision he joked made him a "maverick" given the current coaching landscape.

Instead, Ferentz stood by his coaches and players while implementing a series of small but significant changes that have seemingly all worked out.

"I know in the world we live in right now, walking the plank is really a popular thing," Ferentz said. "Sometimes it's not all what it appears to be...sometimes it's about changing a few things, making some tweaks."

Those changes included naming C.J. Beathard his quarterback. Iowa is 13-0 in games he has started. Ferentz moved practices to the mornings, hoping to keep his players fresh. Iowa has outscored its opponents 183-116

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Gant To Play At MSU-Mankato



P&D FILE PHOTO

Yankton's Sheldon Gant fires the ball across the infield during the 2015 season. Gant has signed a national letter of intent to attend Minnesota State-Mankato, and play baseball for the Mavericks.

Bucks Standout Draws Inspiration From Yankton Grad Somsen

BY JEREMY HOECK
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On a Saturday afternoon in June of 2013, Sheldon Gant caught a bullpen session at Riverside Field from a Yankton pitcher by the name of Layne Somsen. Gant, who was gearing up for his sophomore year at Yankton High School, had no idea that Somsen was about to be taken in the Major League Baseball Draft that same day.

Yes, Gant was aware of who Somsen was — a former YHS and South Dakota State star who ended the 2015 season with the Cincinnati Reds Class AAA affiliate — but didn't know at the time that a simple pitch-and-catch session would eventually lead him to wonder if he too could someday be drafted.

"There were people saying that day, 'He's going to get drafted today,' and I had no idea," Gant said. "I thought that was pretty cool."

Two years later, Gant's dream of one day making it to the major leagues took its first step. The YHS senior signed Monday to play college baseball at Minnesota State-Mankato, one of the nation's top Division II programs that has had a total of 33 players taken in the MLB Draft (most recently in 2014).

And yes, that track record played a big role in Gant's decision.

"They've had a couple players go pro," he said Tuesday. "It's a good example. You don't need to be a D1 guy. It shows that if you work hard, it could happen."

Gant, who has also led Yankton to a pair of state high school football championships, was a first team All-State selection for the Bucks last season. He then helped guide Yankton Post 12 to a second straight runner-up finish at the state American Legion tournament.

Although he had college football opportunities, baseball was always going to be Gant's first choice — the sport that was most likely to lead him to his ultimate goal of being a professional.

"Baseball's been my favorite sport," Gant said. "Football is definitely a close second, but I've always seen baseball as something I wanted to do in my future."

MSU-Mankato entered the pictured last summer when Gant took a tour of the campus and met with the baseball coaching staff, he said. The interest between the two parties was immediate, and Gant was invited back to a camp, where he was able to showcase his versatility.

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Commentary: Two Icons Near The End, As Father Time Wins Again

BY TIM DAHLBERG
AP Sports Columnist

One played into the final hours of the Thanksgiving weekend, laughing when a 3-pointer that would have kept his team in the game hit nothing but air.

The other stood at the same time on the sidelines on a snowy night in Denver, watching a much younger replacement help his team find a way to hand the New England Patriots their first loss of the year.

Kobe Bryant was going somewhat willingly, finally accepting that after 20 years of long nights on the hardwood neither his body nor his team were going to miraculously recover anytime in the near future. He could afford to laugh at himself because his future is clear after years of injuries and aborted comebacks.

Peyton Manning put his best game face on, but had to know his time is coming, if not here already. The Denver Broncos seem smitten with their new quarterback, and even if Manning recovers from his foot injury there's no guarantee he will get back on the field.

Both are in an awkward dance with Father Time that neither will win. Bryant, though at least has the consolation of going out on his own terms.

It's not a bad way to end a great career. Bryant is still getting paid an NBA-high \$25 million to showcase his declining skills, and his immediate future includes a trip around the league where he will surely be serenaded by adoring crowds.

It's a farewell tour he will enjoy, even if there has been



DAVID EULITT/KANSAS CITY STAR/TNS

Denver Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning (18) fumbles the football after a hit by Kansas City Chiefs nose tackle Jaye Howard (96) during the first quarter on Sunday, Nov. 15, 2015, at Sports Authority Field at Mile High Stadium in Denver.

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