

9B Finalists Combine For Nine On All-State Team

Football: Avon Puts Three, Viborg-Hurley Has Two On Elite List

BY PADRAIC DUFFY
Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY — If there was any doubt that the Class 9B state championship game was a showcase of the best of the best at that level, it was erased with the selection of nine different Harding County and Colome players to the South Dakota Football Coaches Association all-state team.

And there was none better than Harding County quarterback Jess Feist, who set a Class 9B championship game record with 376 yards of total offense, going 16-of-18 passing for six touchdowns and 290 yards in leading the Ranchers to a 50-20 win over Colome for the state title.

“He’s not the biggest or the fastest, but he is the toughest kid I have coached,” Harding County head coach Jay Wammen said of Feist. “He’s a complete game changer. We kept the ball in his hands every chance we got and he was by far the leader of our team. He led and everyone else followed him.”

The 5-foot-11, 175-pound three-time all-Little Moreau Conference selection was an ideally balanced weapon for the Ranchers as he completed 108-of-175 passing attempts for 1,745 yards and 20 touchdowns while also rushing 126 times for 1,133 yards and another 21 scores this season.

Feist was hardly a one-man team, however, proven by the four other all-

state selections that Wammen’s team picked up.

The Ranchers’ Ckyler Floyd was named to the team at wide receiver after catching 48 passes for 824 yards and nine touchdowns from Feist this season.

“He broke the school record for receptions in a season and is just 10 yards away from the yards record,” Wammen said of Floyd. “He’s the game changer on our offense.”

While the skill players were racking up big numbers, it was the Rancher offensive line that gave them room to operate. There was no more vital cog on that line than senior guard Tate Gress, who was a major reason that Harding County racked up over 4,500 yards dur-

ing the regular season. If an opposing defensive coordinator was looking for the football, he had to look no further than the 270-pound Gress.

“We ran behind him as much as possible,” Wammen said of the three-time all-LMC selection. “He’s big and strong and we ran behind him 80 percent of the time. If we weren’t running at him, we would try to pull him in the opposite direction.”

Dalton McCann was named to the team at defensive end after amassing 44 tackles and 16 sacks. McCann also caused four fumbles and recovered three.

“He’s the fastest player off the ball that I’ve ever coached, a disruptive force on the quarterback,” Wammen said of the 5-11, 185-pound senior. “We play a run-dominant schedule, so the

fact that he’s amassed 16 sacks is amazing.”

Harding County junior Steven Koch was named to the team as a long snapper after leading the Ranchers in tackles with 105.

“He was the leader of our defense,” Wammen said of Koch, who also caught two TD passes in the championship game. “He’s a smart player who understands the game and led the team in tackles.”

Another Little Moreau Conference player who did all he could individually to slow down the Ranchers was Bison linebacker Lane Kopren. The 6-foot, 220-pound senior linebacker was a defensive machine for the Cardinals, racking up

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A SEASON OF MISSED OPPORTUNITIES



South Dakota quarterback Josh Vander Maten, 16, finds an opening during the Coyotes’ home finale against Northern Iowa. The loss to the Panthers was one of five Missouri Valley Football Conference setbacks of three points or less for the Coyotes, who finished the season on Saturday with a 1-10 record.

P&D FILE PHOTO

Commentary

USD Needs Work, But Program Can Be Turned Around

BY JEREMY HOECK
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The 2012 football season for the University of South Dakota will be remembered as one that snowballed on the Coyotes.

One loss led to another, and all of a sudden, it was nine straight and a 1-10 finish.

Not much went right for USD in its first season in the Missouri Valley Football Conference with head coach Joe Glenn. About the only positive in an otherwise disappointing fall was a win over playoff-bound Colgate, and I suppose you could throw in “close losses.”

Moral victories, though, are clearly something Glenn is not interested in. Just ask him.

“I think we’ll close the gap a little bit next year,” he said after Saturday’s 31-8 loss at South Dakota State. “I hope. We have to. We can’t keep going like this.”

If one thing was abundantly clear this season, it was that USD has more work to do than probably most realized after leaving the Great West Conference. The style of play in the Missouri Valley is



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much more physical, much more competitive and ultimately, a step and a half ahead of the Coyotes.

There wasn’t much to cheer about, and though Glenn admitted that, yes, it was frustrating, he remains optimistic — exactly the mindset the program needs right now.

“It’s frustrating only in that we didn’t win. I’m not frustrated with the kids I work with or the coaching staff I have; I love them,” Glenn said. “Every day I go to work it’s a fun day. “They’re hard workers, they’re effective, it’s just too bad that it doesn’t show in our scoreboard.”

The scoreboard. That’s the area where fans, supporters and third-party onlookers will judge the Coyotes. It won’t be — cannot be — in near wins or close losses.

Statistics are proof that USD needs some work. The Coyotes finished ninth in the league in total offense (284.7 yards per game) and last in total defense (386.6). Penalties, 80 in all, proved to be the bigger problem, specifically when it came to halting drives or moving the opponents forward.

Flags against the Coyotes played key roles in five league losses that came by a field goal or less — four by a field goal.

Easily the most puzzling and disturbing loss came Oct. 13 at winless Missouri State. With the Coyotes up 21-3 after a dominating first half, my buddy texted me to say, “Ouch.” I responded with, “Just hang on to the lead.”

You know the rest. USD gave up 17 points in the final 5:27 and lost 27-24 on a last-second field goal.

At the time, it was perceived to be the worst possible scenario going into the Oct. 20 matchup with North Dakota State in Sioux Falls. The Coyotes, coming off another deflating loss, had to contend with a Bison team that was furious from a home loss.

The eventual 54-0 shellacking to NDSU, if nothing else, proved just how

far USD was from their league rivals to the north — specifically when it came to size, speed and execution. I won’t get into the whole playing-in-Sioux-Falls thing, but suffice to say, it was the perfect storm for North Dakota State to succeed.

“We have a lot of work to do to close,” Glenn said. “But look at Indiana State three years ago and North Dakota State three years ago, that gives me hope.”

Let’s examine.

In 2009, North Dakota State (in its second year in the Valley) had a 3-8 record, while Indiana State went 1-10. Both turned a corner the next season — the Bison went 9-5 and made a deep playoff run, while the Sycamores won six games.

The Bison put together a 2009 recruiting class that included future stars Cole Jirik (DE), Brock Jensen (QB), Sam Ojuri (TB) and Josh Gatlin (CB). The 2010 squad was also rather young — the same faces guided NDSU to the 2011 national championship.

The question of how NDSU changed the culture is simple: Recruiting. Glenn ac-

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Elgin Public-Pope John Defends D1 Championship

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Ross Schindler ran for 141 yards and two touchdowns and Blake Anderson for 110 yards and a score as second-ranked Elgin/Pope John won its second straight state football championship with a 40-14 victory over No. 4 Exeter-Milligan in the Class D1 final Monday.

The Wolfpack (13-0) trailed 14-8 at halftime. Anderson’s 9-yard TD run gave the Wolfpack the lead and started a half in which it outscored Exeter-Milligan 32-0.

Elgin/Pope John has won 26 straight games and is 33-3 in three seasons as a co-op between Elgin Public High and Pope John High.

Exeter-Milligan’s James Sluka completed 12 of 19 passes, with one interception, for 114 yards and a touchdown. Kyle Jensen caught six of Sluka’s passes for 69 yards for Exeter-Milligan (12-1).

D2: Giltner 42, Humphrey St. Francis 26

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Jake Findley threw five touchdown passes and ran for another score, and top-ranked Giltner won its first state football championship since 1984 with a 42-26 victory over No. 2 Humphrey St. Francis in the Class D2 final Monday.

Findley completed 35 of 52 passes for 396 yards for the Hornets (13-0). He finished the season having thrown for 3,904 yards, 67 touchdowns and no interceptions.

Dustin Hastings caught 14 balls for 118 yards and two TDs, Kyle Hawthorne 11 for 112 and a score and Ben Hinrichs seven for 132 and two TDs.

Nathan Classen was 9 of 17 for 117 yards and two touchdowns for the Flyers (12-1). Chad Haiar ran 17 times for 90 yards and JJ Oltmer had 24 carries for 89 yards.

A: Millard North 17, Omaha North 14.

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Isaac Akre threw a 46-yard touchdown pass to Clay Fisher with 1:00 left to give top-ranked Millard North a 17-14 victory over No. 9 Omaha North in the Class A final Monday night.

Akre moved the Mustangs 68 yards in four plays — all on passes — after the Vikings had taken a 14-10 lead on Zach Martin’s 7-yard pass to Casey Sales with 1:40 to play.

The Vikings (10-3) had a chance to force overtime, but Conner Phillips pulled a 32-yard field-goal attempt wide left with 13 seconds left.

Akre ran 22 times for 110 yards and completed 6 of 8 passes for 106 yards and two touchdowns for the Mustangs (13-0).

Calvin Strong led Omaha North with 157 yards and a touchdown on 25 carries, and Martin was 9 of 24 for 154 yards and a TD.

It was the Mustangs’ fourth state title since 2003.

N.D. State Stuffs Penguins In OT

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Mike Felt scored 10 of his 24 points in overtime as North Dakota State defeated Youngstown State 81-77 Monday.

Felt, who entered the game averaging 16.3 points per game, was 6 of 14 from the field — all his

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Nebraska Defense Tightening Up

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Even after his defense gave up 653 yards to UCLA and 498 yards and 63 points to Ohio State, Nebraska coach Bo Pelini didn’t waver in his belief that things would get better.

Over the last five games, that’s exactly what has happened.

No. 17 Nebraska allowed Minnesota a season-low 177 yards on Saturday and held the Gophers to just 10 of 28 passing. Nebraska now ranks 19th nationally in total defense and 41st in scoring defense.

“Obviously, we had a couple games there early on that didn’t go well,” Pelini said Monday. “But I think we’ve gotten steadily better as the season’s gone on. That’s what you try to do. We stayed the course. We didn’t panic and our kids have gotten better. Offensively, I think we’ve been at a high level all year. Right

now, we’re kind of hitting stride and playing pretty good in all phases of the game.”

The Ohio State game was the low point for the defense, senior linebacker Will Compton said.

“Things started to hit the fan,” he said. “We always talk about doing your job and staying in the system. We kind of got out of that. We were trying to do other people’s jobs. For whatever reason, things weren’t clicking. We learned from that experience.”

That learning process, Compton said, was led by defensive coordinator John Papuchis, who, when he meets with the defense after a game, always finds some positives from his team’s performance.

Even after Ohio State, Compton said, Papuchis praised the defense for its first-half play and emphasized that the Blackshirts weren’t as bad as the score might have indicated. With Papuchis,

Pelini and the defensive staff leading the way, the players have responded.

“It wasn’t anything special,” Compton said. “Just prepare and do your job and don’t worry about a mistake. Go on to the next play.”

Much of the improvement has come in pass defense, where Nebraska’s secondary and linebackers are holding opponents to a nation’s-best 45.4 completion percentage.

“You never think of something like pass completion percentage when you’re out on the field,” Compton said. “It’s pretty awesome to see.”

Asked for his completion percentage goal, Pelini quipped: “Zero. I guess I’m joking to a certain extent. We want to challenge every route. We have pretty high expectations. We work pretty

GAZELLES EARN SPORTSMANSHIP HONOR



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The Yankton Gazelles received the 2012 AA Girls Division Sportsmanship Award at the South Dakota State Soccer Awards and Recognition Banquet. The honor marked the sixth time in 12 years that a team coached by Yankton head coach Dave Lacombe, back right, received the honor.

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