

Nunemaker leads Prairie into playoffs

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 24 October 2015 00:13 - Last Updated Wednesday, 28 October 2015 16:27



OTTUMWA - Tyler Nunemaker had a whole bunch of plays and formations to learn this year when coach Mark Bliss arrived at Cedar Rapids Prairie with his concoction of offensive formations from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries that include everything from the single wing to the spread.

Based on Nunemaker's performance Friday night, you'd have to give the Prairie quarterback an A-plus in Advanced Football.

Nunemaker hit 11 of 14 passes for 256 yards and two touchdowns as the Hawks belted Ottumwa, 45-20, at Schafer Field to earn a No. 3 seed in the Class 4A playoffs that start Wednesday.

Prairie rolled up 524 yards of total offense with its unique attack that featured direct snaps to four different players when you count the quarterback, two different running backs and wide receiver Jalen Rima.

Nunemaker, a senior, had to learn a completely new playbook when Bliss replaced Mike Morrissey as head coach. Nunemaker took a cram-course during the summer and was ready when practice began in August.

"It was pretty fun," he said. "I was studying the plays every night. It didn't feel like I was out

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of school, because I was still working every night."

Nunemaker directed a well-balanced offense Friday that ran for 268 yards, passed for 256 and collected 22 first downs.

"He's done a wonderful job," Bliss said. "I'm so proud of him."

The new coach and his new quarterback bonded in a hurry before the season as they studied the offense together.

"There's a lot of complexity to it," said Bliss. "With that in mind, he and I sat down and went through it a lot together."

Rima, a stylish senior who is being courted by the University of Hawaii, put on a show in the first half for Prairie with three long touchdowns. He got things started for the Hawks on the opening kickoff when he broke two tackles, stumbled, kept his balance and raced 97 yards for a touchdown.

He scored his second touchdown on a 20-yard run and got his third TD on a 76-yard pass from Nunemaker, who faked a handoff and lofted a perfect throw to Rima behind the defense.

Prairie raced to a 32-0 lead in the first half and appeared headed for an easy victory, but Ottumwa pulled with 39-20 in the third quarter and was driving for another score when Ty Bolden intercepted a pass to keep the game under control for the Hawks.

Nunemaker finished with two touchdown passes, with the 76-yarder to Rima and a 29-yard strike to Joseph Meyer. Nunemaker also scored Prairie's second

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touchdown on a 6-yard run.

Trevor Northrup broke loose for a 70-yard touchdown for the Hawks and Hunter Johnson finished the scoring in the fourth period with a 4-yard run.

Rima hurt his right ankle midway through the fourth period and did not return to action, but brushed it off. "I'll be fine by Wednesday," he said.

Rima caught four passes for 95 yards and one touchdown, carried the ball five times for 52 yards and a touchdown and had the 97-yard kickoff return, scoring in three different ways. He's also scored on a punt return this season.

Rima missed Game 7 this season against Washington with a knee injury, but he returned last week and scored three touchdowns against Muscatine and tacked on three more TDs Friday night, giving him 15 for the year.

Bliss fully expects Rima to play Wednesday.

"He'll be fine," the coach said. "He'll be back for the playoffs. He knows it's the playoffs. He'll be ready. That's just how he is."

Northrup carried the ball 12 times for 115 yards. Johnson carried 10 times for 66 yards.

Nunemaker completed passes that went for 76, 39, 29, 27, 17, 18, 16 and 14 yards on his big night. Now he's ready to take his team into the playoffs with a 4-5 overall record.

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"It feels great," he said. "The last few weeks we've really started playing as a team. We're going to continue that into the playoffs."

Bliss, a well-traveled coach, has now taken high school teams from six different states into the postseason.

"Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Florida, Illinois. This is my sixth state," he said, counting them off for reporters. "I've got seven years left, guys, and I'm done. I'm going to go farm in Oklahoma."

Ottumwa finished 4-5 and missed the playoffs.

PRAIRIE 45, OTTUMWA 20

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First Downs 22 17

Rushes-Yards 42-268 35-116

Passing Yards 256 174

Comp-Att-Int 11-14-1 10-30-2

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Punts 4-34.5 1-39.0

Fumbles-Lost 2-1 2-0

Penalties 10-65 7-49

Prairie **18 14 7 6 - 45**

Ottumwa **0 13 7 0 - 20**

Scoring Plays

P - Jalen Rima 97 kickoff return (kick failed)

P - Tyler Nunemaker 6 run (run failed)

P - Rima 20 run (run failed)

P - Joseph Meyer 29 pass from Nunemaker (Trevor Northrup run)

P - Rima 76 pass from Nunemaker (pass failed)

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O - Isaiah Cox 9 run (kick failed)

O - Jalen Strunk 19 pass from Sam Moreland (Kane Brumbaugh kick)

P - Northrup 70 run (Joel Collett kick)

O - S.Moreland 4 run (Brumbaugh kick)

P - Hunter Johnson 4 run (kick failed)

Individual statistics

Rushing

Prairie - Northrup 12-115, Johnson 10-66, Rima 5-52, Pinter 3-38, Nunemaker 11-minus 1, Team 1-minus 2.

Ottumwa - Cox 17-74, S.Moreland 15-28, M.Moreland 1-9, Batterson 2-5.

Passing

Prairie - Nunemaker 11-14-1, 256.

Ottumwa - S.Moreland 10-30-2, 174

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Receptions

Prairie - Rima 4-95, Meyer 2-45, Pinter 1-39, Wallace 1-27, Choate 1-27, Johnson 1-18, Ealy 1-5.

Ottumwa - M.Moreland 4-67, Strunk 2-59, Bramschreiber 2-32, Bridges 1-4, Batterson 1-2.