

Four Downs: Huskies at Raiders

By MICHAEL HUGHES
mhughes@northfieldnews.com

Teams: Owatonna (1-0) at Northfield (0-1), 7 p.m. Friday at Northfield High School.

Last year: The Huskies topped the Raiders twice, first in the second-to-last game of the regular season by a score of 29-11, and then in the Section 1-5A championship by a score of 49-25.

Last week: Northfield surrendered 40 consecutive points in a 48-15 loss at Rochester Mayo to start the regular season, while Owatonna raced to a 44-7 victory at home against Rochester Century to start its Class 5A title defense.

1. Many of the major players from last year's section final clash are gone. For Northfield, that means no more attempting to slow down graduated Owatonna running back Jason Williamson, who gashed Northfield for 583 yards and eight touchdowns between the two games. Apparently his absence isn't going to slow down the back-back state champion Huskies, though, as evidenced by their season-opening blow-out victory in which Ethan Walter (six receptions, 75 yards), Isaac Oppgaard (three receptions, 77 yards), Payton Beyer (three receptions, 50 yards) and Matt Williams (two receptions, 55 yards) all looked dangerous on the outside. That quartet was catching passes

primarily from Brayden Truelson, who finished 12-for-16 for 240 yards and a pair of touchdown passes.

2. The final score at Rochester Mayo was indicative of a second half in which the Spartans kept pushing a snowball downhill and accumulating buckets of yards. At the end of the first half, the Raiders were driving to potentially tie the game at 14-14, but an 80-yard fumble return for a touchdown provided Mayo with a 20-6 advantage that only grew in the second half. Northfield's best shot at keeping up with Owatonna on Friday night is to not commit turnovers and surrender the explosive plays that plagued them Friday, while also slicing down the costly penalties that negated a few of its own big plays.

3. With just about every rushing yard from last year lost to graduation, it was on open battle all preseason for which Raiders would carry the ball the most. After Friday's win, it appears the leader is senior Simon Dickerson, who led the team in carries (11) and rushing yards (62). On Northfield's first drive of the game, in which it took a 6-0 lead, senior Joey Glampe received three straight carries inside the 5-yard line before he punched it in from a yard out. Senior Drew Woodley appears to be split between the backfield and lining up on the outside, as he received five carries



Northfield senior Drew Woodley sprints upfield during Friday's 48-15 loss at Rochester Mayo. Woodley rushed five times for 21 yards in addition to catching a pair of passes for 19 yards. (Michael Hughes/Northfield News)

and hauled in a pair of receptions.

4. What's led the Raiders to success in the past, as a whole and against the Huskies, has been a stout defense. In the first half against Mayo, that appeared to be Northfield's strength once again, with the unit surrendering only a pair of touchdowns against a high-octane attack from the Spartans. That unraveled in the second half, though, when coach Bubba Sullivan said his team's lack of depth started to show. Likely to be without star linebacker Luke Stanga for a second week, and

possibly without starting nose tackle Justin Malecha, who suffered a knee injury while playing on special teams, that depth might be exposed again against Owatonna. If Northfield manages to not wear down, Sullivan and defensive coordinator Mark Woitalla have a history of hamstringing Owatonna's offense better than any other team in the district.

Reach Sports Editor Michael Hughes at 645-1106. Follow him on Twitter @NFNSports.

Rochester Mayo pulls away from Northfield football in season opener

By MICHAEL HUGHES
mhughes@northfieldnews.com

The start was nearly perfect for Northfield football Friday night at Rochester Mayo.

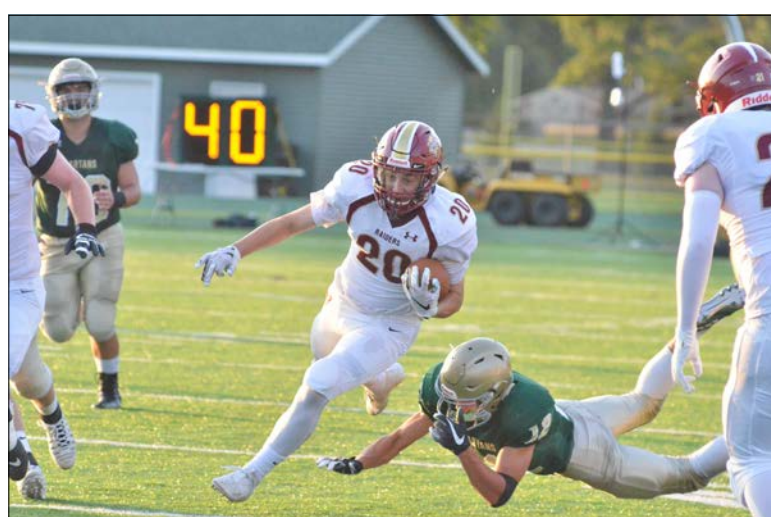
On the season's first drive, the Raiders marched 67 yards down the field in 12 plays while taking six minutes off the clock before senior Joey Glampe burst across the goal line from a yard out on third and goal.

After that touchdown drive, though, plenty of issues arose in what eventually turned out to be a season-opening 48-15 loss — a final score that ballooned as the margins around perfection became blurrier and blurrier for Northfield.

"We're not going to be the type of team that can afford to hurt ourselves. We've got to play pretty perfect," Northfield coach Bubba Sullivan said.

A Rochester Mayo offense that's likely to score a bucket-load of points this season scored on its first drive as well to take a 7-6 lead. It initially appeared the Raiders would answer right back after a 36-yard pass from senior Gavin Rataj to senior Drew Woodley placed the ball at Mayo's 29-yard line.

That play was called back for an illegal procedure penalty, though, and three plays later, Northfield was forced to punt. After the Spartans and Raiders traded another punt each, Rochester Mayo took a 14-6 lead with two minutes,



Northfield junior Blake Mellgren evades the tackle of a Rochester Mayo defender during Friday's 48-15 loss in Rochester. Mellgren caught three passes for 32 yards and scored a rushing touchdown in the loss. (Michael Hughes/Northfield News)

27 seconds left in the second quarter on Cade Sheehan's 1-yard quarterback keeper.

Woodley then raced the ensuing kickoff back to Mayo's 42-yard line, and in three plays Northfield had the ball at the 19-yard line with just over a minute to play in the half. On the next play, though, Rataj attempted to escape the pocket and was hit hard from behind, forcing the ball loose and allowing Mason Greseth to scoop up the fumble and return it 80 yards for a touchdown to push the Spartan lead to 20-6 entering

halftime.

"There were some other nice flashes of the offense, but we also hurt ourselves," Sullivan said. "We lined up improperly to get a pass taken away, a couple holding (penalties). The first half I thought we hurt ourselves offensively and then things got out of hand in the second half."

Part of the reason the score widened so much in the second half, Sullivan said, is his team's lack of depth started to show. With so many players lining up so often on both sides of the ball, it

became difficult to track Mayo's pair of speedy wide receivers, Ethan Loehrer and Cayden Holcomb, who combined for 10 receptions, 232 yards and three touchdowns.

Couple that with Sheehan's ability to escape the pocket, improvise and fire strikes on the run, preventing Loehrer and Holcomb from separating themselves from coverage proved too difficult a task.

"Our depth is showing out there. We were tired, but we have to keep playing within plays," Sullivan said. "At times you'd see guys taking a break during a play, and you can't do that."

While his stat line was muddled by a pair of interceptions, Sullivan complemented the play of Rataj in his first varsity start at quarterback, while also highlighting the positive play of Glampe at running back and defensive end, senior Simon Dickerson's ability to run through tackles in the backfield, junior Josh Johnson's effective running once the second team entered the game in the fourth quarter and junior Sam Pratt's first varsity field goal with just over a minute to play in the fourth quarter.

Still, with a Friday visit set from two-time defending state champs Owatonna, who boat-raced Rochester Century 44-7 Friday night, there's plenty of areas to improve.

"Overall, we're going to learn from it, build and get better," Sullivan said.

DICKERSON

From Page 1B

of a strong point because Mitchell and Jim played for like three years at running back, but we have a bunch of guys that can fill in at that spot," Dickerson said. "I think

that's one of our stronger areas."

With the shift from Northfield's traditional split-back look on offense to this year's pistol formation, the majority of the carries will fall to whoever is occupying the tailback position. Most of the time that figures to be Dickerson, with the other weapons for the Raiders lining up elsewhere on

the field.

That's not the only change, since the pistol doesn't necessarily create as many well-defined holes on a given play, leaving the onus on the ball-carrier to pick which part of the defense to try and exploit.

"It's a lot more reading cues and finding holes than having

them made for you," Dickerson said.

Of course, filling in for last year's large senior class goes beyond on-field production, since the departure of that much of the locker room leaves a void in leadership. This year, Dickerson is one of Northfield's four captains, a role Sullivan said Dickerson ful-

fills by demonstrating the level of hard work and hustle that Sullivan expects up and down the roster.

You can also add leadership to the list of eye-opening experiences for Dickerson.

"It's been different," Dickerson said. "You kind of take (the seniors) for granted and you never think about all the things you

have to do when you're in that position."

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VOLLEYBALL

From Page 1B

just because of the personnel we have."

Junior libero Emma Torstenson contributed a team-high 28 digs in addition to a team-high three aces and three assists, senior Bronwyn Timperley grouped 19 digs with eight kills and two blocks, and senior Lida King dished out 52 assists in addition to pitching in defensively with four blocks.

It was King who rotated over to stuff the New Prague outside hitter for the final point of the match.

"All I wanted in that fifth set was I wanted that last point to be Lida blocking their outside," Koenig said. "That was something we talked about a lot was getting that block up on the outside. Their outside hitters are so good and super-strong hitters, so when Lida got up and stuffed her on the last point, that was just the best feeling."

Early on, there wasn't much resistance against New Prague's attacks through the outside channels.

After dropping the first set by eight points, the Raiders shifted their block to not only better contest the Trojans (2-1) at the net, but to also allow their back line to better position themselves for the balls that made it through the block.

"After we adjusted, it was easier for our back row to make decisions on what they needed to do," Tim Torstenson said. "They felt more confident in what they were doing, because they were guessing to begin with. Once we had that set up, I think our defense got to the level it's usually at and where we need it to be. Defensively in the back row, I think we're one of the strongest teams in the state with our passers and the way we play defense back there."

That was evident during the final point of the third set, which Northfield won following a marathon rally that featured a number of athletic and acrobatic digs and saves until Reilly pounded a final spike through the New Prague defense.

Those rally-prolonging efforts allowed the Raiders to pick up a tight win against their first ranked opponent of the year, before blowing past their second of the season two days later.

In a preseason poll, Northfield was among those receiving votes. After the pair of victories, Northfield shot up to No. 7 in the latest poll released Sunday.

If last week's performances are anything to go off of, Northfield's youthful varsity contingent, which consists of two seniors, six juniors and three freshmen, won't fear much entering a loaded field at this weekend's Marshall Invitational.

"I think for most of them, they've played in big matches," Tim Torstenson said. "That has a lot to do with it. They've played ranked teams before."

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