

Roosevelt tops Class 11AAA poll

August 26, 2014

The first South Dakota Sportswriters Association's high school football poll puts Roosevelt at No. 1 in the Class 11AAA rankings.

The Rough Riders, who lost in last year's state finals to Lincoln, took all eight first-place votes and finished with 40 total points in the poll. Brandon Valley was second with 27 points and the defending champion Patriots were third with 25.

Roosevelt coach Kim Nelson didn't turn down the top ranking but cautioned that his team is still a work in progress.

"We're not very deep, so we need to shore that up," said Nelson.

"There are a lot of question marks for both teams at this point. We'll know a lot more a month from now."

But the action starts this week. There will be a No. 1 vs. No. 2 matchup on opening night as Brandon Valley visits Howard Wood Field to face Roosevelt on Friday.

In Class 11A, Brookings earned the top spot while Harrisburg, Yankton and defending champion Pierre also received two first-place votes.

The top spot in Class 11A belongs to West Central, which is coming off a championship victory over Madison in the state finals last year.

Top-ranked teams in the other classes are Parkston (Class 11B), Bridgewater-Emery/Ethan (Class 9AA), Howard (Class 9A) and Avon (Class 9B).

PREP RANKINGS

For a complete list of the preseason rankings, see the high school poll on Page 4D

TIME TO SHINE

August 28, 2014

As the clock melted away on Roosevelt's 47-24 loss to Lincoln in last year's Class 11AAA finals at the DakotaDome, Taryn Christian found a message amid the misery.

We need to score more points.

Tired of putting so much pressure on his defense, the all-state quarterback vowed to come back for his senior year with an offense that would strike fear in the hearts of foes and produce a different ending at the dome.

"That final score on that scoreboard is always in the back of my mind, pushing me to work harder," says the 6-foot-2, 195-pound Christian, who committed to South Dakota State earlier this month.

"If we put more points on the board, the defense won't have to be so stingy. It would be nice to have the offense win some games this year."

That might have to be the case for the Rough Riders, a consensus preseason favorite that returns seven starters on offense - including three NCAA Division I recruits - but just two on the defensive side of the ball.

A clash with No. 2 Brandon Valley looms Friday night at Howard Wood Field, and Roosevelt will be without several defensive standouts due to disciplinary action, so the time to shine on offense is now.

"We're not going to change a lot offensively; we just need to get better at what we do," says coach Kim Nelson, who brought the spread offense to Roosevelt upon his arrival in 2009 and delivered a state title two years later. "Our personnel fits the system, but we need to play at a more efficient level than we ever have. We have the guys to do that."

Helping to protect Christian up front is senior left tackle Grant Schmidt, a 6-6, 285-pound Ohio State recruit who will also see some action in the defensive trenches.

The other Division I recruit is wide receiver/kicker Chase Vinatieri - nephew of former Super Bowl hero Adam Vinatieri - who broke his collarbone in last year's state title game and would like his senior year to end on a brighter note.

"My championship experience ended pretty quickly," says Vinatieri, who is joined by other senior standouts such as running back Jake Bear and center Sam Denevan. "That game was pretty rough for me, so going back and winning it this time would be a good way to go out."

As usual, the stiffest competition on the way to a state title will come from within the Sioux Falls metro area. The last 10 top-class state champions have come from the state's biggest city, and the last eight titles were captured by public schools.

The Riders won a pair of crowns under Brent DeBoer in 2006 and '07 and then became the only team to dent Washington's dynasty when Nelson's 2012 squad knocked off the Warriors at the dome.

Now the program is to a point where the Riders expect to make noise every year, whether coming off a deflating DakotaDome defeat or not.

"We're a big school, and we should compete for a state championship every year," said Nelson. "Last year's (championship loss) is in the back of our kids' minds, but this team is different and so is everybody else. It's a whole new season with new challenges."

It was an eventful summer for the Riders, with Schmidt becoming the first Ohio State commit in state history and Christian choosing to chart his future with SDSU rather than MAC schools Ohio or Eastern Michigan.

"Getting recruited like that was a blessing but it was also a big distraction," said Schmidt, who was lauded for his footwork but is working on improving his upper-body strength to prepare for Big Ten competition. "I wanted to get it out of the way so I could focus on my season with Roosevelt."

Vinatieri also found the recruiting spotlight while attending elite kicking camps and has offers from area FCS schools, but he wants to see how his season plays out before making a decision.

"I'd like to kick and play wide receiver in college, but it's going to be tough to do both," Vinatieri said. "I might have to focus on one or the other."

To put such concerns aside and grow closer as a team, the Riders held their first few practices in the Swan Lake area this month, with no phones or other electronics permitted.

For Nelson, the goal was to block out all the expectations and exterior noise to put his players in a better position to succeed once the real stuff arrives. Now that time is here, and Roosevelt hopes to rise again and find its moment in the dome.

"We're proud that we're considered the best team in the state by some people," said Nelson. "But in August it really doesn't mean much."

Kueter's quest

Entering his 32nd year as O'Gorman head coach, Steve Kueter leads all active South Dakota coaches with 274 wins.

He ranks second on the state's all-time list behind Max Hawk of Yankton, who retired with 284 wins. The only way Kueter could pass Hawk this season is if O'Gorman puts together a perfect 11-0 mark, but it appears certain that the 59-year-old Humboldt native will ultimately own the record.

"Of course, I didn't win any of them," says Kueter. "A lot of good kids and good coaches have come through here, and that's where that comes from. If you stay alive and keep coaching, you're going to reach some of those milestones."

"I will say that it speaks well for O'Gorman. To have a good product every year says a lot about our coaches, our kids and our community. That's what I'm really proud of. We're always in the discussion every year. We're never not considered."

Several other active coaches are moving up through the ranks, including Yankton's Arlin Likness (234) and Bridgewater-Emery/Ethan's Jeff Van Leur (224).

Can Patriots repeat?

Defending champion Lincoln came in at No. 3 in the preseason rankings after losing a slew of top players from last season's 11-0 team, including Argus Leader player of the year Caden Quintanilla.

But with quarterback Isaiah Roach at the helm after seeing action in the title game and a solid offensive line, no one is ready to write off the Pats just yet. They host Rapid City Central on Friday and then face O'Gorman in the Dakota Bowl and Roosevelt in the Presidents Bowl, so they'll have plenty of chances to prove themselves.

"I still think Lincoln is going to be tough," said Nelson. "They've got a quarterback with championship experience, but I think they're going to try to run the ball behind that offensive line and just never give it up."

CITY STRENGTH

Here are the last five top-class

football champs in South Dakota:

2013: Lincoln (11AAA)

2012: Washington (11AA)

2011: Roosevelt (11AA)

2010: Washington (11AA)

2009: Washington (11AA)

RIDERS HOLD ON

August 30, 2014

When Roosevelt and Brandon Valley get together on the football field, weird things tend to happen. Last year, the teams opened the season in Brandon and a 30-0 Roosevelt win was called early due to lightning. They squared off again in the playoffs, with the Riders winning a wild slugfest 65-35.

Then came Friday's 2014 opener, with the top-ranked Riders and No. 3 Lynx having to wait until 9:30 p.m. to kick off due to a pair of lightning delays at Howard Wood Field.

When the game finally started, the Riders roared out in front. They looked ready to pull away when the Lynx turned it over trailing 21-7. And it appeared that they had put it away when the Lynx punted to the Riders down 42-13 late in the second quarter. The rout was on.

But there was a penalty. A personal foul against Roosevelt's Dan Larson allowed Brandon to keep the ball, and they drove down the field to score the first of 21 unanswered points to turn a sure defeat into another wild shootout with the Rough Riders.

But once the Lynx got within a score both teams tightened up. BV shutout the Riders in the second half, and they had one last chance to tie when the Riders attempted an ill-advised option play on 4th down in their own territory in the final minute. But Roosevelt's Nate Durfee picked off Brandon's Jake Comeaux in the end zone with 30 seconds to play, allowing the Riders to escape with the 42-34 win.

Taryn Christion threw for 394 yards and two touchdowns and ran for 111 yards and three scores for the Riders, while Comeaux threw for 364 and four scores for the Lynx. Alex Wilde had possibly the biggest receiving day in state history, catching 17 passes for 257 yards and four touchdowns. Riley Franzen ran for 138 yards for the Lynx, almost all in the second half.

The Riders wasted no time, taking the lead on a 40-yard strike from Christion to Jett Thune. The Lynx quickly answered, with Comeaux hitting a totally uncovered Wilde for a 75-yard TD to tie it at 7.

Christion would score on runs of three and six yards to make it 21-7, and when the Lynx turned it over on downs and the Riders began driving, it appeared the rout was imminent. But the drama was just beginning.

MORE PREPS INSIDE

Knights roll: O'Gorman uses big plays to rip RC Stevens.

Warriors stumble: A blocked field goal lifts Aberdeen Central.

Riders, Lynx came through with entertaining late show

August 31, 2014

Friday night's season-opening win by Roosevelt over Brandon Valley was just as wild and wacky (and late) as most people expected it to be. Actually, it exceeded expectations.

As the second game of a Howard Wood Field doubleheader, the Class 11AAA showdown was already set for a late start when the Lincoln-Rapid City Central game - won 63-7 by the Patriots - was delayed by lightning.

Then, just seconds after the starting lineups for No. 1 Roosevelt and No. 2 Brandon Valley were introduced, lightning was spotted to the north of the stadium, the players were pulled off the field and the bleachers were evacuated.

By the time the nightcap finally kicked off, it was 9:30 p.m., and the game itself ended up taking well over three hours.

That's because, once again, the Rough Riders and Lynx gave us a bit of everything in a game ultimately won 42-34 by Roosevelt.

There were lots of passes. Lots of yards. Some impressive efforts from some of the state's best playmakers. There wasn't much defense, at least not in the first half. Guys were cramping up all over the field. But after some early fireworks, it looked like the Riders were going to cruise to victory.

Three unanswered touchdowns to open the second quarter gave Roosevelt a 42-13 lead, and it actually felt like the Lynx were lucky to be that close, considering they had negative rushing yards and their only stop had been a missed Rough Rider field goal.

The Lynx set up to punt to Roosevelt with about four minutes left in the half, giving Roosevelt a chance to push their lead to 49-13, or at least run out the clock and take their 29-point lead to halftime.

For all intents and purposes, the game appeared to be over. But a personal foul on Roosevelt kept the Lynx drive alive, and they scored to cut the lead to 42-20 at the break. When the ESD favorites scored again on their first possession of the second half to make it 42-27, the stage was set for a frenzied finish.

"I think you had them beat if you got to halftime up 42-13 or more," I told Roosevelt coach Kim Nelson after the game.

"Maybe," he said. "But they're an explosive offense and we're pretty untested on defense. They get the ball to start the second half and score and then it's a new ballgame. We made it hard on ourselves with those mistakes. We didn't really help ourselves very much, and then we started to sputter offensively a little bit when Grant got hurt and guys started cramping up."

Grant would be offensive tackle Grant Schmidt, the senior Ohio State recruit, who went down with an ankle injury. He told an assistant coach after the game it might be broken, but Nelson said Saturday that didn't appear to be the case, and an MRI is scheduled for Tuesday.

That injury hurt the Riders, and so did the repeated instances of players going down with cramps. Nelson didn't think his team wasn't properly conditioned, pointing out that a few Riders almost never left the field and avoided cramps, and Brandon Valley had some issues with them as well.



Roosevelt's Chase Vinatieri escapes from Brandon Valley's Andrew Sorensen during Friday night's season opener at Howard Wood Field. The top-ranked Rough Riders held on to win 42-34 on a late interception by junior linebacker Nathan Durfee after the No. 2 Lynx mounted a second-half comeback.

"I don't know what it was," Nelson said. "I talked with our trainer about it. Sometimes they take an energy drink right before the game and that dehydrates you. It was humid, but I'm not sure what the deal was. We're going to try to get to the bottom of it."

With the Riders reeling, the Lynx offense rolled. Riley Frantzen rushed for 126 of his 138 yards after halftime, and Alex Wilde asserted himself as a player to watch at wide receiver with a game for the ages.

The 6-foot-4 senior caught 17 passes for 257 yards and four touchdowns, setting an all-time state 11-man record for receptions in a game. His 257-yard output ranks fourth all-time.

Quarterback Jake Comeaux completed 20 of his first 22 throws and finished the game 32 of 45 for 364 yards and four touchdowns. But an interception by Roosevelt linebacker Nate Durfee in the final minute denied his team the win.

Comeaux was so effective that when the Riders had fourth down from their own 40-yard line with just over a minute to go, Nelson refused to punt. Christian ran a sweep that appeared to have the option for a rugby punt, but he was sacked, and Nelson - whose team was playing with a handful of players suspended for disciplinary reasons - said afterward it was a straight "go for it."

"I just didn't want to give them the ball back," said Nelson, whose team faces Washington on Friday. "We thought we could get it with that play. It didn't work. But our defense picked us up."

Lynx coach Chad Garrow compared the game to last year's playoff semifinal, in which the Riders roared out to a huge lead, gave it up, then pulled away for a 65-35 win. The Lynx fought back from another early deficit Friday, and this time the defense kept it close.

"We made some good adjustments at halftime and kept playing," Garrow said. "Three touchdowns is nothing for us, so we knew we could come back when we got that one before halftime. That was huge. It's just disappointing because we had three chances to score at the end. I'm proud of our kids, but they're hurting because they feel like we should have won the game."

Roosevelt quarterback Taryn Christian had a monster game, throwing for 394 yards, rushing for 111 and totaling five touchdowns. He threw the ball well. He ran it better. Any SDSU fans watching the game had to be salivating. Of course, if Schmidt is out for an extended period of time, it'll hurt this offense.

After another wild showdown, though, both coaches seemed excited to see where their teams can go from here.

"Brandon's pretty good," Nelson said. "I think you saw that. We played really well in the first half. And our defense finished the game strong. Brandon never quit playing and did some really good things.



Roosevelt's Chase Vinatieri flips over the back of Brandon Valley's Riley Bennett on Friday at Howard Wood Field.

Some weird stuff happened out there, which seems to be the case whenever we play these guys. I'm just glad we won."

HANGING TOUGH

September 6, 2014

For the second straight week, top-ranked Roosevelt had to reach deep to pull out a hard-fought victory at Howard Wood Field, with star senior quarterback Taryn Christian leading the way.

This time it was the Washington Warriors making an upset bid, using a mammoth offensive line to control the trenches and keep things interesting in the second half.

But Christian was too much, rushing for 188 yards and two touchdowns, passing for 90 and pulling off a crucial fake punt to lead the Rough Riders to a 26-14 triumph.

"When you're playing a Sioux Falls school, that's how it works," said Christian, who carried the ball 25 times and also played cornerback on defense. "We knew we would get their best shot. Their defense flew around and stalled our offense a few times, but we finally just figured it was time to get going."

The Riders (2-0) racked up 362 yards but also were flagged for six penalties for 75 yards, including several personal fouls for after-the-whistle skirmishes and two sideline interference calls.

More disturbing was the fact that Washington (0-2) steamrolled the Rider defense at times for 212 rushing yards (including 104 from senior Logan Raabe), putting together long drives that kept the Roosevelt offense simmering on the sidelines.



Roosevelt quarterback Taryn Christian (3) tries to run through the Washington defense during Friday's game at Howard Wood Field. The South Dakota State recruit rushed for 188 yards and two touchdowns as the top-rated Rough Riders pulled out a 26-14 victory. They face Lincoln in next week's Presidents Bowl.

The Riders tried to stem the tide with senior Ohio State recruit Grant Schmidt, the 6-foot-6, 285-pound offensive lineman who was shifted to nose guard despite suffering a sprained ankle last week. Roosevelt was missing several defensive linemen due to disciplinary suspensions, but they will return next week.

"Washington's offensive line is huge, and we didn't have anybody like that," said Roosevelt coach Kim Nelson. "Our trainer did a great job of getting (Schmidt) ready, and by Wednesday he said, 'I think I can play.' We needed him tonight, and he came through for us."

Still, nothing came easy for the Riders against a spirited Washington team.

After trailing 17-8 at halftime and giving up a third-quarter safety to make it 19-8, the Warriors mounted a seven-play, 80-yard march capped by an 11-yard scoring strike from Jack Schelhaas to Rasheed Benton to cut the lead to 19-14 late in the third quarter.

Washington then appeared to stop the Riders on the ensuing drive, but Christian (who also punts for RHS) saw an opening on fourth-and-4 and sprinted around the left edge for a first down that knocked the wind out of the upset bid.

"It wasn't a called fake punt from the sideline; I just kind of went for it," said Christian, who is given the green light by Nelson if he sees an opening. "I knew we needed a momentum shift, and it really turned the game around for us."

When the ensuing Washington drive stalled on a fourth-down incompleting from the Roosevelt 6 (WHS was 0-for-3 on fourth downs), a valiant effort by the struggling Warriors had come up short but still offered hope.

"I just think that the clock ran out on us," said coach Chad Stadem, whose team came out in an offensive look that Roosevelt hadn't seen. "It's no fun to lose, but I'm really proud of our kids. We pushed them hard this week, and they responded. It's starting to come around."

As for the Riders, they face a key showdown with defending champion Lincoln in next Saturday's Presidents Bowl.

Christian quickly admitted that his team will have to play much better if they expect to emerge from that contest with a 3-0 record.

"This type of (performance) will not beat Lincoln," he said. "We need to get better."

Washington 0 8 6 0 - 14

Roosevelt 7 10 2 7 - 26

First quarter

RHS - Jake Bear 13 run (Chase Vinatieri kick)

Second quarter

WHS - Chayden Fitzsimmons 9 run (Ian Ailts run)

RHS - Vinatieri 42 FG



Photo: Washington's Logan Raabe (44) rushes downfield during Friday's game against Roosevelt at Howard Wood Field. Raabe rushed for 104 yards in the game, won 26-14 by No. 1 Roosevelt.

RHS - Taryn Christion 1 run (Vinatieri kick)

Third quarter

RHS - Safety (QB tackled in end zone)

WHS - Rasheed Benton pass from Jack Schelhaas (pass failed)

Fourth quarter

Christion 5 run (Vinatieri kick)

No. 1 Riders, No. 2 Pats to clash in title rematch

September 13, 2014

A pecking order within South Dakota's top class could be established today when four teams look to make a loud statement at the Presidents Bowl.

The 23rd annual event at Howard Wood Field will feature no shortage of intrigue and star power. The event will begin when fourth-rated O'Gorman battles Washington, leading up to the night cap of No. 1 Roosevelt against No. 2 Lincoln.

"The Presidents Bowl is something that I enjoy and love," said Roosevelt coach Kim Nelson, who has coached in 19 Presidents Bowls. "It's a great experience for our students, coaches and fans."

Pats, Riders could hinge on defense

The last matchup between the two powerhouses saw the Patriots conclude their perfect season with a 47-24 triumph to clinch the Class 11AAA title in 2013. Despite last year's heartbreak for some of the current Rough Riders, revenge isn't on the top-ranked Rough Riders' minds.

"The guys who played in the game will have a better memory of that, but some of the kids playing right now weren't even dressed," Nelson said. "You can write the score up in the locker room, but it's not like college where you have the same guys for four years. Most high school guys are one- or two-year players, and every year is so different. It's tough to sell it as a revenge game."

The notion that it's a clean slate after last year's title game is supported by the fact that Roosevelt has been listed as the state's top team in most polls. The Rough Riders are led by Division 1 recruits Grant Schmidt, Chase Vinatieri and Taryn Christion.

"Kim always does a nice job with Roosevelt," Lincoln coach Aaron Beavers said. "They are a very fast team that has some special players."

The Patriots' ability to slow down Christian and company will be hindered by two injuries. Starting safeties Nolan Burchill and Paul Thanel are both out with injuries, leaving Lincoln with a big holes against an elite offense.

"Roosevelt spreads you out so much, so there is a personnel challenge there," Beavers said. "We'll use the guys we have and rep Isaiah Roach as a backup a bit. We might call upon a sophomore to fill the void, and what a great stage to do it on."

Nelson and the Rough Riders also have some adjustments to make in order to slow down Roach and a Patriots offense that has been dominant. The Rough Riders will have five players make their season debuts and start on the defensive side after sitting out the first two games due to disciplinary reasons.

"It's frustrating because it's hard to establish some continuity early in the season if you're not at full strength," Nelson said of the suspensions. "I hope that our team learns a lesson from it and that we make up for it in some way."

The Rough Riders hope that the returning players help keep their defense off the field. Washington was able to find success sustaining long drives a week ago with its running attack, but don't look for Lincoln to change its identity in order to do the same.

"We're not going to do anything different," Beavers said. "We will run the ball well and use the play action well. We have to make some adjustments because they play a different defense than O'Gorman, but one thing I learned was that we tried to reinvent the wheel offensively a little too much."

Warriors looking for first win vs. Knights

The first game of tonight will feature two teams who have a different look than last year's editions.

O'Gorman (1-1) has shown an aerial display not often seen by Steve Kueter's teams. The Knights feature a dual-threat quarterback in Luke Fritsch along with two matchup nightmares in 6-foot-5 Jack Peery and 6-2 Ben Johnson.

"We knew going into the season that we would be able to throw the ball more than what we have in the past because we have some big targets," Kueter said. "Running is still what we do, but we need to do a better job of that."

Washington has also seen a change this year with new offensive and defensive schemes. The Warriors (0-2) are now trending in the right direction in their second year under Chad Stadem, evident with their flirtation with an upset against Roosevelt last week.

"I really like where we are going right now," Stadem said. "We do not feel like an 0-2 team, and I tell the kids all of the time that we all make the playoffs, so we just need to worry about improving each week."

The war in the trenches could be where tonight's game is decided. Despite O'Gorman's ability to throw the ball around, both teams will look to establish their ground game.

"Washington has a huge offensive line and does a great job running the football," Kueter said. "They do a great job of just sustaining drives. It's tough to get the football from them."

Washington and O'Gorman were each impressive in defeat a week ago against Roosevelt and Lincoln respectively, and today's game gives both the opportunity at a signature win as the season begins to heat up.

"A win this week would just propel us. Our kids would just go to another level," Stadem said. "The loss against Aberdeen probably benefited us more than we would like to say. It made our kids upset, and they responded in practice."

Best do battle

September 14, 2014

If the Roosevelt Rough Riders and Lincoln Patriots have an encore this postseason, the two powerhouses will have a tough act to follow.

The Patriots (3-0) emerged victorious in Saturday's Presidents Bowl classic by a score of 35-27 at Howard Wood Field. The story of the game for the top-ranked Rough Riders (2-1) may be the health of their quarterback. Taryn Christian left the game with a leg injury midway through the fourth.

"We are going to get X-rays. We think it might be a broken ankle, but we don't know," Roosevelt coach Kim Nelson said. "We hope to get him back by playoff time. If we get him back, we get him back, but we have a lot of confidence in Jett Thune. He's a good quarterback, so we will be OK."

Christian's injury derailed what could have been a game-tying drive for the Rough Riders. Down eight, the future Jackrabbit had marched his team down to Lincoln's 33-yard line before he was tackled awkwardly and had to be helped off the field. Jett Thune took over at quarterback, but the drive stalled and resulted in a missed field goal by Chase Vinatieri.

"Taryn going down kind of deflated us, and Jett hadn't thrown a ball at that time," Nelson said. "Asking him to come in and rally the troops is a lot at that time."

The injury was a somber note to an otherwise electrifying battle between the two teams. The matchup lived up to the billing of a showdown between the top-two teams in the state with the Patriots capturing a big win.

"This is a big win because we played an outstanding, classy, well-coached team," Lincoln coach Aaron Beavers said. "We knew it was going to be hard-fought."

Lincoln held the eight-point lead thanks to a drive down the field in the fourth quarter that was highlighted by a 43-yard run by Lucas Heitkamp and a clutch fourth-down conversion. Needing five yards

and only up a point, Lincoln quarterback Isaiah Roach found Nickel Meyers for a 16-yard reception that set the stage for Braxton Large to punch it in from three yards.

The Roach-to-Meyers connection was explosive throughout the night, especially when the pair answered a Rough Riders field goal with an 81-yard touchdown. Meyers had nine receptions for 196 yards. Roach threw for 248 yards off of an efficient 16 of 20 passing and ran for 37 yards.

"Nickel got us on a couple of big plays," Nelson said. "He's a good player at 6-foot-4, and we're not very tall in the secondary. I can live with that, but we just need to figure out a way to slow them down a bit. Maybe we'll just have to outscore them."

It took all of that and more from the Patriots' deadly combination, especially after Roosevelt's near-perfect start.

Christion orchestrated the opening drive with a six-play, 80-yard drive that was capped with a 49-yard pass to Vinatieri. After the Rough Riders recovered a fumble, Christion found Tyler Van Voorst for a 35-yard touchdown that put the Rough Riders up 14-0 less than five minutes in.

"The first two touchdowns were almost easy. Lincoln started playing softer and made us earn them a bit," Nelson said. "We just stopped ourselves with penalties and execution from that point. Those are things that we can fix."

The first two drives were just the tip of the iceberg for Christion, who went 15 of 23 for 275 yards and two touchdowns. Christion also ran for 112 yards, but was sacked six times. Vinatieri hauled in eight catches for 155 yards.

The Patriots rebounded nicely from the flurry though as Roach led the Patriots down the field for an 80-yard drive that saw Large complete with an 11-yard run. The Patriots tied the game early in the second with another Large TD.

"It took us a while to get in the groove," Beavers said. "My offensive coordinator, Jae Sim made a couple of adjustments on the run game that just worked nice. Defensively, Coach Brian Bechard made a couple of adjustments to slow them down. We bent, but we didn't break against some special players."

The second quarter concluded the way it started with Large scoring with only 39 seconds remaining. Christion led the Rough Riders quickly down the field, but Vinatieri missed a 29-yard field goal to close the half. Vinatieri was 2-of-5 on field goals, also missing from 51 and 44 yards.

The Rough Riders showed no quit after the 81-yard bomb to Meyers in the third quarter. Christion was able to take Roosevelt down the field in just 1:42 and scored on a keeper. After a stop, Christion did it again when he found Van Voorst on a third-and-17 to move the chains. The drive resulted in a field goal and a one-point deficit.

From there, Large scored his fourth and final touchdown of his 109-yard night, and the Patriots were able to leave with an unblemished record.

"It really started up front," Large said. "I'm really proud of the way they played. We had a lot of discipline on our drives after the start, which starts with Coach Beavers."

Lincoln 7 14 7 7 - 35

Roosevelt 14 0 10 3 - 27

First Quarter

RHS--Chase Vinatieri 49 pass from Taryn Christion (Vinatieri kick), 9:38

RHS--Tyler Vanvoorst 35 pass from Christion (Vinatieri kick), 7:01

LHS--Braxton Large 11 run (Teren Schuster kick) 3:32

Second quarter

Large 7 run (Schuster kick) 11:35

Large 2 run (Schuster kick) :39

Third quarter

RHS--Vinatieri 31-yard field goal 7:53

LHS--Nickel Meyers 81 pass from Roach (Schuster kick) 7:01

RHS--Chrision 10 run (Vinatieri kick) 5:19

Fourth quarter

RHS--Vinatieri 33-yard field goal 11:53

LHS--Large 1 run (Schuster kick) 7:32

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING: Roosevelt, Christion 23-112, Jake Bear 7-85. Lincoln, Large 25-109, Lukas Heitkamp 4-54, Roach 9-37, Ned Sudbeck 1-6, Mason Nelson 1- -2, Team 3- -8.

PASSING: Roosevelt, Christion 15-23-0-275, Jett Thune 0-2-0-0, Lincoln, Roach 16-20-0-248.

RECEIVING: Roosevelt, Vinatieri 8-155, Tyler Van Voorst 5-96, Thune 1-13, Bear 1-11. Lincoln, Nickel Meyers 9-196, Ned Sudbeck 2-33, Faud Legesse 2-13, Braxton Large 1-7, Dalton Jones 1-0, Heitkamp 1-(-1).

Riders top Kernels; Lincoln rolls to win

October 4, 2014

Tyson Jahn rushed 15 times for 108 yards and scored on a 33-yard run as Class 11AAA No. 2 Roosevelt beat Mitchell 35-6 on Friday night in Mitchell. Jett Thune added TD runs of 17 and 3 yards, and the Roosevelt defense scored twice as Justin Mueller had a 17-yard interception return and Andrew Batt a 3-yard fumble recovery. Roosevelt led 21-0 after one quarter and halftime and 35-6 after three quarters. For Mitchell, Spencer Neugebauer scored on an 86-yard kickoff return. Roosevelt had 168 total yards, while the Kernels had 87. Next: RHS (5-1) is host to Rapid City Stevens; Mitchell (1-4) visits Brookings.

Roosevelt 21 0 14 0 -- 35

Mitchell 0 0 6 0 -- 6

SCORING SUMMARY

First quarter

SFR -- Jett Thune 17 run (Isaiah Bower kick)

SFR -- Thune 3 run (Bower kick)

SFR -- Tyson Jahn 33 run

Third quarter

SFR -- Justin Mueller 17 interception return (Bower kick)

MIT -- Spencer Neugebauer 86 kickoff return (kick failed)

SFR -- Andrew Batt 9 fumble recovery (Bower kick)

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING -- Mit, Neugebauer 1-13, Jet-Li Heng 1-2, Mitch Johnson 11-(-3), Kanin Nelson 18-(-8). SFR, Tyson Jahn 15-108, Jett Thune 6-24, Nathan Durfee 2-13, Luke Peterson 1-(-4), Torren Devericks 11-(-7).

PASSING -- Mit, Kanin Nelson 8-24-2-83, Jacob Cersosimo 0-2-1-0. SFR, Devericks 7-12-2-33, Thune 2-12-1-8.

RECEIVING -- MIT, Cersosimo 4-55, Tyler Larson 3-24, Sam Michels 1-4. SFR, Jamal Albousafi 2-14, Ryan Benson 2-5, Tyson Jahn 2-(-2), Austin Johnson 1-9, Luke Peterson 1-8, Tyler Van Voorst 1-7.

LINCOLN 62, R.C. STEVENS 20 in Rapid City -- Top-ranked Lincoln stayed undefeated with a big second half against Rapid City Stevens. The Raiders had a solid first half as they trailed 34-20 at the intermission before Lincoln ran away with it.

Lincoln's Braxton Large scored four rushing touchdowns and Paul Thanel added two long TD receptions for the Patriots (6-0). The Raiders actually led 14-13 late in the first quarter after Austin Hagen found Jeremy Schick on a 55-yard scoring play, Hagen's second scoring pass of the quarter. His first went to Luke Bates.

Grant Youngblood added an 8-yard scoring run for the Raiders before halftime but that was the last time Stevens (2-4) would find paydirt. Lincoln will host Class 11AA Harrisburg next week while Stevens visits Roosevelt.

Rough Riders upend Stevens

October 11, 2014

Roosevelt was nearly perfect during the first 12 minutes of its homecoming game, setting the stage for a rout of Rapid City Stevens.

The No. 2 Class 11AAA Rough Riders dominated the Raiders at Howard Wood Field, picking up a 51-29 win. The Rough Riders improved to 6-1 with the win, while the Raiders are now 2-5.

Friday's win was essentially clinched after the first quarter when Roosevelt raced out to a 29-0 lead. The opening-stanza onslaught commenced during the first possession when a fluid eight-play, 68-yard drive was capped with a nine-yard jaunt to pay dirt by Jake Bear.

The next two scores came courtesy of quarterback Jett Thune and Chase Vinatieri. The duo connected for on two passing touchdowns from 29 yards, which helped push the Roosevelt lead to 22-0. Roosevelt concluded the imposing first quarter when a botched snap of punt was recovered in the end zone by Manny Christopher.

When the dust had settled after the first quarter, Roosevelt racked up 184 yards of total offense compared to Stevens' 37. The Rough Riders also eliminated the Raiders' rushing attack, suffocating the visitors to -29 rushing yards during the first quarter.

"I was happy that we came out like that," said Roosevelt coach Kim Nelson of the fast start. "Our offensive line got things going a little bit, and defensively, we did what we had to do. We got a little sloppy in the second half, but we were rotating a lot of guys in and out. Overall, I was pleased with the way we started the game."

The Raiders' rushing total was hampered in a big way through injury. With starting quarterback Austin Hagen already out due to an injury, the Raiders also lost their running back. Grant Youngblood left the game during the first quarter with a hip pointer-the injury is not believed to be serious.

"Roosevelt is a good team, and we knew that going into this," Rapid City Stevens coach Scott Hagen said. "Youngblood going down took away a formation we've been working on with our three main backs. That really limited us with him being hurt."

The first quarter was just the tip of the iceberg for Thune and Vinatieri. The pair connected on two more touchdowns during the first half with Vinatieri racking up 142 yards and four touchdowns on his six catches.

"With the coverage they were running, (Vinatieri) was my first read and I just had to get him the ball," Thune said. "He made plays out there and made things easy for me."

Thune also had a strong showing while only playing during the first half. The junior was 11-for-14 passing with 201 yards and the four touchdowns to Vinatieri. Thune also made plays with his feet with 50 rushing yards.

"Jett's a smart kid. He's a good athlete, and we were really lucky to have him when we lost our quarterback," Nelson said. "The team has really rallied around him."

Thune's performance Friday is just another indication of how smoothly he's transitioned to playing quarterback since the injury to Taryn Christion. Thune has made four starts at quarterback, and the Rough Riders haven't lost any of them.

"I was kind of nervous at first because I hadn't played quarterback in a while, but now, the game is starting to slow down a bit for me," said Thune. "We are starting to build chemistry, which is nice."

The Rough Riders did more than attack through the air Friday. Jake Bear led the Rough Riders with 151 yards on 17 carries. Roosevelt had 254 rushing yards total.

"It's cliché to say, but we just tried to take what the defense was giving us," Nelson said. "I thought we'd be able to throw the football on them a little bit at the beginning, but we also found a way to run the ball. It was a good, balanced offensive night for us."

While the Rough Riders scored the game's first 44 points, the Raiders showed no quit. Rapid City Stevens scored at the conclusion of the first half with a 55-yard pass from Brandon Soucy to Colton Hipple. Soucy was 21-of-34 passing for 268 yards.

During the second half, Soucy found Jeremy Schick for a 10-yard score, and Eric Sanderson also scored two touchdowns during his team-leading 53-yard rushing night.

"We challenged the kids at halftime to play with some pride," Hagen said. "They left everything on the field. I know Roosevelt subbed down, but I was pleased with the way the kids played. We were missing our starting quarterback and four linebackers, so it could have been easy for us to get down on themselves."

Roosevelt scored one last touchdown during the fourth quarter when Torren Devericks found Tyson Jahn for a 30-yard score.

Rapid City Stevens will face Rapid City Central after the bye. Roosevelt will look to continue its winning streak when it finishes its regular season against O'Gorman.

"I hope we have some momentum now," Nelson said. "The big thing for us is to try to feel like we are getting better every game. We will have to watch film to figure out if we did that. The toughest games are coming up, and we need to get better."

RC Stevens 0 7 14 8 - 29

Roosevelt 29 15 0 7 - 51

SCORING SUMMARY

First quarter

SFR - Jake Bear 4 run (Chase Vinatieri kick)

SFR- Vinatieri 29 pass from Jett Thune (Vinatieri kick)

SFR - Vinatieri 29 pass from Jett Thune (Vinatieri kick)

SFR - Manny Christopher recovered fumble in end zone (Vinatieri kick)

Second quarter

SFR - Vinatieri 25 pass from Jett Thune (Austin Wise run)

SFR - Vinatieri 59 pass from Jett Thune (Vinatieri kick)

RCS - Colton Hipple 55 pass from Brandon Soucy (George Johnson kick)

Third quarter

RCS - Jeremy Schick 10 pass from Soucy (kick no good)

RCS - Eric Sanderson 10 run (Sanderson run)

Fourth quarter

SFR - Tyson Jahn 30 pass from Torren Devericks (Vinatieri kick)

RCS - Sanderson 30 run (Luke Bates run)

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING - RCS: Sanderson 12-53, Soucy 7-36, Bates 5-16, Grant Youngblood 1-0. SFR: Bear 17-151, Thune 4-50, Devericks 4-48, Jahn 9-32.

PASSING - RCS: Soucy 21-34-1-268. SFR: Thune 11-14-1-201.

RECEIVING - RCS: Craig Burks 7-43, Sanderson 5-52, Schick 4-89, Hipple 4-81, Bates 1-3. SFR: Vinatieri 6-142, Jahn 2-33, Ryan Benson 2-20, Tyler Van Voorst 1-20, Jamal Albousafi 1-17, Austin Wise 1-2, Luke Peterson 1-2.

RIDER RAMPAGE

October 18, 2014

For all the skeptics who thought the Roosevelt Rough Riders were lost without injured standout Taryn Christian, an answer might have been found.

Junior quarterback Jett Thune found his stride Friday night and the defense made a second-half statement as the Riders rallied past rival O'Gorman for a 28-21 victory in the regular-season finale for both teams at McEneaney Field.

"A lot of people were looking down on us because we don't have Taryn, but we're building some chemistry and things are coming together for us," said Thune, who rushed for 115 yards and passed for 130 as second-ranked Roosevelt (7-1) reeled off 21 unanswered points to overcome a slow start.

"We were missing some assignments early," added Thune, "but the coaches challenged us at halftime and we accepted the challenge."

Senior Jake Bear added 130 rushing yards and caught a touchdown pass for Roosevelt, which struggled to slow down the No. 4 Knights (5-3) in the first half while falling into a 21-7 halftime hole.

Quarterback Luke Fritsch rushed for 105 yards overall and O'Gorman moved the ball at will in the first half, but three turnovers - including an interception that Roosevelt's Justin Mueller returned 62 yards for the winning score - knocked the life out of the Knights.

"We made too many mistakes against a good team, and that's disappointing," said O'Gorman coach Steve Kueter, whose team finished with 323 total yards to 373 for the Riders. "Roosevelt is as good as it gets in the state, and we needed to play better for four quarters to beat them."

The Knights led 14-0 after the first quarter after a short run by Boston Bauer and an 18-yard scoring strike from Fritsch to Jack Peery. Roosevelt struck back when Thune hit Bear for a 13-yard score, but O'Gorman's AJ Martinec rambled in from 4 yards out to make it 21-7 at the intermission.

For a Roosevelt team that lost starting quarterback and SDSU recruit Christian to a broken leg in the Presidents Bowl and was still finding its way, it was not an encouraging performance.

"We wanted to find out if we had improved, and it didn't look like we had," said coach Kim Nelson. "We had a serious conversation in the locker room, and the kids responded. We basically said, 'This second half can make or break our season - what are we going to do?' "

The Riders opened the second half with a 14-play, 75-yard scoring march that included two connections with wideout Chase Vinatieri and ended with a 1-yard TD plunge from Thune, cutting the lead to 21-14 and inspiring the Roosevelt defense.

The Riders forced an O'Gorman punt and then went 87 yards on 13 plays to tie the game 21-21 on Thune's 8-yard pass to Vinatieri with 10:28 left in the game. Thune briefly left the game with leg cramps during that drive but returned to run for 22 yards on third-and-17 to put his team in striking range.

"(Thune) wants to run too much, but he's a good runner," said Nelson. "He's more confident with what he's doing and what he wants to do. It seemed like one of those team things tonight where the offense puts together a good drive and the defense turns things around as well."

That was the case on the next drive, as Mueller stepped in front of Fritch's pass on the O'Gorman sideline and sprinted 62 yards for a score that put the Riders up 28-21 and ignited the Roosevelt faithful.

O'Gorman drove to the Riders' 32-yard line, but Fritsch was sacked by Pearson Evans on fourth-and-8 to end the threat. When Thune continued to pick up first downs with his legs on the ensuing drive, Roosevelt ran out the clock and secured the No. 2 seed for the Class 11AAA playoffs, which begin Oct. 30.

The Knights will also be at home for the first round, but opponents have yet to be finalized.

"O'Gorman is playing a lot of guys both ways and we're not, and that was a big factor in the fourth quarter," said Nelson. "But this is a big win for us, and we hope to carry that momentum into the playoffs."

Roosevelt 0 7 7 14 - 28

O'Gorman 14 7 0 0 - 21

SCORING SUMMARY

First quarter

OG - Boston Bauer 1 run (Collin Zimprich kick)

OG - Luke Fritsch 18 pass to Jack Peery (Zimprich kick)

Second quarter

RHS - Jake Bear 13 pass from Jett Thune (Chase Vinatieri kick)

OG - AJ Martinec 4 run (Collin Zimprich kick)

Third quarter

RHS - Thune 1 run (Vinatieri kick)

Fourth quarter

RHS - Vinatieri 8 pass from Thune (Vinatieri kick)

RHS - Justin Mueller 62 INT return (Vinatieri kick)

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING - RHS: Bear 24-130, Thune 22-115, Tyler VanVoorst 1-10, Torren Devericks 1-2. OG: Fritsch 12-105, Dodi Makwinja 9-65, Martinec 11-63, Bauer 5-28.

PASSING - RHS: Thune 11-21-130-0. OG: Fritsch 3-9-37-1.

RECEIVING - RHS: Vinatieri 5-56, Bear 3-21, VanVoorst 1-19. OG: Peery 1-18, Martinec 1-10, Bauer 1-9.

Wide-open dash to dome is unleashed

October 30, 2014

Lincoln and Roosevelt are exactly where they were a year ago, but a stacked upper half of Class 11AAA means a rematch isn't a certainty.

The upper echelon of South Dakota's highest class presents an unpredictable feel with a number of teams with legitimate chances to get to the championship game at the DakotaDome.

"I think there are about six teams that could win it all in this division," said O'Gorman coach Steve Kueter of the 11AAA playoffs. "There have been dominant teams in the past, but I don't really see that this year. Lincoln is undefeated and probably the best team in the group right now, but teams have played them close. If you look up and down the playoff schedule, I think it's going to be wide open."

Lincoln, Roosevelt

remain head of the class

While the end result very much up for grabs, the Patriots have the look of a team ready to repeat. Lincoln reloaded rather than rebuilt en route to an 8-0 record after beating Roosevelt in the title game last year.

"I don't know if the season gives us any momentum or not, but I feel that our kids have gotten the other team's best every week," Lincoln coach Aaron Beavers said. "The teams we've played have played extremely well, and we've had to play at a very high level every week. We've been able to do that for eight weeks in a row. That's over now, but at least we know we can bring that A game."

With last year's championship journey also comes experience. Although the Patriots have a new cast of starters, those players still benefit from last year's triumph.

"A lot of these guys didn't play for us last year, but I think going through the eight games this year and being on the team last year showed them what it takes," Beavers said.

Lincoln's plethora of playmakers include quarterback Isaiah Roach. He threw for 1,533 yards and 12 touchdowns, receiver Nickel Meyers and halfback Braxton Large, but the action in the trenches might be what most solidifies Lincoln's hopes at back-to-back titles.

The Patriots reshuffled their offensive line a couple of weeks ago after a season-ending injury to Drew Peters. Deyshon Davis has started, while Austin Haushild has transitioned from center to guard.

"The reshuffling of the offensive line is going as well as we could have hoped," said Beavers. "Drew Peters is the finest linemen I've ever coached and he's sorely missed, but we are pretty fortunate to have the depth we do."

Lincoln will begin its postseason against Rapid City Central (1-7). Roosevelt (7-1) begins its postseason at home against Rapid City Stevens (3-5).

The Rough Riders have had an interesting path to the postseason. After being rated first through the preseason and early in the regular season, Roosevelt took a significant hit during its 35-27 loss to Lincoln in Week 3. During that game, quarterback and South Dakota State University recruit Taryn Christian suffered a broken ankle.

Christian's injury was a significant hit, but Jett Thune has cushioned the blow. The junior has filled in nicely, and his cast of weapons keeps Roosevelt among the elite teams.

Red-hot Lynx want

to crash the party

Outside of the top-two teams, nobody enters the 11AAA playoffs with more momentum than Brandon Valley. The Lynx carry a five-game winning streak into tonight against Washington.

"Obviously, the winning streak helps us mentally," Lynx coach Chad Garrow said. "The kids are confident, but we don't want to be over confident. It's great going into the playoffs on a winning streak through."

The Lynx have one of the state's best quarterbacks in Jake Comeaux. He has thrown for 1,809 yards and 23 TDs with only five interceptions, and has 415 rushing yards.

"Jake is in his second year and has a lot of experience," Garrow said. "He's our leader, and how he goes is kind of how we go. We feel very comfortable having him at quarterback."

The Lynx face a Washington team that often has played better than its 3-5 record.

"Washington is physical and has a very good running game that can keep the ball away from your offense when it gets going," Garrow said.

The teams met Sept. 26 in a 38-21 Lynx win, but the Warriors hung with the Lynx.

"Brandon was just dialed in the last time we played them," Washington coach Chad Stadem said. "Their no-huddle kind of got us off pace, and they connected on a ton of passes. They were up 21-0 on us before we even really moved the football. They're as good as an offensive team as we've faced this year."

Excluding the Brandon Valley game, Washington has allowed barely more than 14 points a game.

"Defensively, we have to improve on what we did last time against Brandon Valley," Stadem said. "That was the one game in which our defense didn't play up to where we thought they would."

O'Gorman emerging

O'Gorman might be staring itself in the mirror when it faces Aberdeen Central tonight.

The Knights (5-3) have lost one-possession games to Yankton, Roosevelt and Lincoln.

"We've played a tough schedule and had some tough losses," Kueter said. "We lost to Yankton, who's undefeated, on a Hail Mary pass that put it into overtime. We also lost to Roosevelt after leading 21-7 at the half and we lost to Lincoln by five after a long kick return. Those are games that we had a chance to win, and we hope to get another shot."

Quarterback Luke Fristch is a dual-threat with talented weapons in 6-foot-2 Ben Johnson and the 6-5 Jack Peery.

The Knights can also beat teams on the ground with running backs Dodi Makwinja and AJ Martinec.

"We've played O'Gorman quite a bit over the years and had some good battles," said Aberdeen Central coach Mike Flakus. "The one thing that sticks out this year is their overall team speed. Their speed is going to be our biggest adversary on both sides of the ball and special teams."

The Golden Eagles also feature an explosive offense led by quarterback Jacob Goehring. Aberdeen has also seen its share of close losses.

"Aberdeen is a lot like us. They gave everybody a good game," Kueter said. "Their quarterback is outstanding. He runs the ball well and throws the ball well. They're a big-play team that can score on anybody at any time."

PLAYOFF PREVIEW

Playoff preview replay with Stu Whitney and Craig Mattick.

LIVE VIDEO

Watch coverage and take part in chats tonight for all of the Class 11AAA first-round games.

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INSIDE

Class 11AA playoff preview

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TODAY'S GAMES

Quarterfinal pairings and times for Class 11AAA:

Rapid City Central at Lincoln (HWF), 4:30 p.m.

Aberdeen Central

at O'Gorman, 6 p.m.

Washington at Brandon

Valley, 7 p.m.

Rapid City Stevens at Roosevelt (HWF), 7:30 p.m.

Rough Riders advance with ease

October 31, 2014

The No. 2 Roosevelt Rough Riders took a business-like approach to their first round playoff game on Thursday at Howard Wood Field, scoring on all five first-half possessions on their way to a 49-14 win over Rapid City Stevens in Class 11AAA action.

Quarterback Jett Thune and running back Jake Bear carried the load for Roosevelt (8-1), as their ability to find and run through holes created by the Rider line churned up yards and sustained drives. Roosevelt didn't have a ton of explosive plays - their longest gain of the night went for 37 yards on a run by Thune - but they also never really had to pass, only doing so on occasion for the sake of variety.

Thune would finish with 157 yards on the ground and 110 through the air with two touchdowns each, while Bear rushed for 103 yards and two scores while also catching a touchdown pass.

"We executed really well," said Thune, who completed six of nine throws. "Coach (Kim) Nelson prepares us really well, so we feel like as long as we do our jobs we're going to be successful. When Jake runs like he does, the defense has to respect him. That takes attention off of me, so we really feed off each other."

The Riders scored first when a 14-yard run by Thune capped a seven-play, 57-yard drive, and they quickly pushed that lead to 14-0 when Carter Carstens blocked a Stevens punt near the goal line and Nate Durfee scooped it up and walked in from three yards away for a special teams score.

A 19-yard pass from Thune to Bear finished a 10-play, 74-yard drive to make it 21-0 after one, and a 17-yard strike from Thune to Vinatieri early in the second made it 28-0. The Riders would then go 80 yards in 10 plays before half to go up 35-0 on a 1-yard run from Thune.

Bear would run for a pair of touchdowns in the third quarter, while the Raiders (3-6) broke the shutout when Grant Youngblood picked off a Thune pass and returned it 60 yards to paydirt.

It was, frankly, an uneventful game that did not require the Rough Riders to be spectacular. But that made Roosevelt's efficiency a little more noteworthy.

"We tried to talk to them before the game about this being the time of year where every play counts," Nelson said. "I was really happy that we didn't make a lot of mistakes. We didn't have the bad turnovers or the dumb penalties, we weren't sloppy with the ball. And the conditions were tough, too, so overall I think we played the way I hoped we would."

The Riders outgained Stevens 377-153. Youngblood had 76 yards on 27 carries for the Raiders, while the Roosevelt defense held Raider quarterbacks to six completions on 28 attempts. Carstens had nine tackles to lead Roosevelt, while Dan Larson had eight.

Now the 11AAA bracket moves to the final four, and while Roosevelt had to hit the reset button to some degree when star quarterback Taryn Christian went down, they appear to be hitting their stride under Thune, who will be in command the rest of the way.

"It's been fun building chemistry with these guys," Thune said. "I hope this momentum carries over into the rest of the season."

Rapid City Stevens 0 0 7 7 - 14

Roosevelt 21 14 14 0 - 49

SCORING SUMMARY

First Quarter

RHS - Jett Thune 14 run (Chase Vinatieri kick)

RHS - Nate Durfee 3 punt block return (Vinatieri kick)

RHS - Jake Bear 19 pass from Thune (Vinatieri kick)

Second Quarter

RHS - Vinatieri 17 pass from Thune (Vinatieri kick)

RHS - Thune 1 yard run (Vinatieri kick)

Third Quarter

RHS - Bear 4 run (Vinatieri kick)

RCS - Grant Youngblood 60 interception return (Noah Diamond kick)

RHS - Bear 13 run (Vinatieri kick)

Fourth Quarter

RCS - Youngblood 2 run (Diamond kick)

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING: RCS - Youngblood 27-76, Luke Bates 3-25, Eric Sanderson 1-2, Brandon Soucy 2-(-5); RHS - Thune 15-157, Bear 17-103, Vinatieri 1-3, Tyson Jahn 5-11, Torren Devericks 3-(-4)

PASSING: RCS - Soucy 4-24-1-53, George Johnson 2-4-0-17; RHS - Thune 6-9-1-110, Devericks 2-3-0-8

RECEIVING: RCS - Craig Burks 2-41, Bates 1-20, Sanderson 1-8, Cory Feller 1-2, Youngblood 1-(-1); RHS - Jamal Albousafi 2-57, Bear 2-33, Vinatieri 2-20, Jahn 2-8

Plenty of semifinal drama to soak up in past decade, so which ones were best?

November 7, 2014

State football semifinals are known for their sizzle.

As the gateway to the DakotaDome, they are do-or-die duels where the winner plays for a championship on statewide TV and the loser is forced to ponder what might have been. Played in November with no shelter in sight, semifinal clashes are often affected by South Dakota weather that forces teams to reach deep in order to advance.

Today's Class 11AAA contests - O'Gorman vs. Lincoln, Roosevelt vs. Brandon Valley - both will be played at Howard Wood Field, and that's no surprise.

Since the unofficial rise of the Sioux Falls public schools in 2004, the past decade has been dominated by the state's largest city, which has claimed the past 10 top-tier championships.

Of 44 semifinal slots since 2004 (counting this year), 31 were filled by Sioux Falls schools. O'Gorman leads all top-class schools with 10 appearances over the past 11 years, followed by Roosevelt (nine), Washington (seven), Brandon Valley (six) and Lincoln (five).

Semifinals aren't embraced by history like championship games, but many of these contests were classic battles through which the rise of certain programs - and the near-miss agony of others - can be charted.

As a history lesson entering today's action, I have selected the five greatest semifinal games from the top class in the past decade, giving the memories new meaning:

2005: O'Gorman 14, Roosevelt 6

At McEneaney Field

The era of Sioux Falls superiority had begun the previous season, when these same west-side rivals met in the DakotaDome for the first all-city state championship.

The Knights won that title game to complete an unbeaten season and then knocked off the Rough Riders in the 2005 Dakota Bowl to maintain their mastery over talent-loaded Roosevelt.

Most everyone saw the Knights and Riders as the class of "11AA" in 2005, but undefeated Yankton drew the No. 2 playoff seed and defeated Pierre in the other semifinal.

So coach Brent DeBoer's Riders - with standouts such as Antonio Thompson, Brad Iverson, Andrew Schoenfelder and Erik DeJong - would have to go through O'Gorman at the Mac, creating a festive afternoon atmosphere with a crowd of more than 3,000.

It was a day of missed opportunities and costly mistakes for Roosevelt, which fell behind 7-0 in the first half after an errant punt snap that set up a short TD by O'Gorman's Ryan Isaacson.

The Riders outgained the Knights 252-182 and twice drove inside OG's 5-yard line in the fourth quarter, only to come away empty-handed - first on an end-zone interception by Tom Jarding and next on a fumble recovery by Isaacson.

The Knights' biggest offensive play came in the third quarter, when star quarterback Dusty Coleman followed a key block by Josh Sweets and darted around the right side for a 60-yard touchdown.

Roosevelt, which scored its only points on a punt return by Schoenfelder with no time remaining, lost only four games in 2004 and '05 - all to the Knights.

"I'm getting too old for this," said Knights coach Steve Kueter, whose team went on to beat Yankton 42-7 in the 11AA finals for another perfect season and 26 consecutive wins. The Knights lost to Roosevelt at the dome the following year and have not captured a state title since.

2006: O'Gorman 41, Rapid City Central 34

At McEneaney Field

These days, the notion of a Rapid City team playing for a berth in the top-tier state championship seems surreal, but the Cobblers under pass-happy coach Steve Svendsen were poised to make history.

Rapid City Central never has reached the state finals but came agonizingly close in this dramatic duel with the heavily favored Knights, who had two consecutive titles and a 37-game win streak.

When O'Gorman went up 26-7 at the end of the first quarter, most everyone started looking ahead to another showdown with Roosevelt, which already had won its semifinal game against Brandon Valley.

But Cobblers quarterback Zach Wald had a different script in mind. He threw for 250 of his 364 yards in the first half, connecting 10 times with receiver Allan Schmaltz before intermission as Central pulled within 33-27 at the break.

"Those guys on their offense were studs," said O'Gorman two-way standout and future USD receiver Will Powell. "We just kept fighting. It was crazy."

O'Gorman struggled to move the ball after Tom Jarding went out with a rib injury, and Rapid City Central went up 34-33 late in the third quarter on Wald's fifth TD pass of the game.

But the Knights revived their running game with Danny Isaacson carrying the load, and his touchdown run and two-point conversion put O'Gorman up 41-34 with 5:28 to play.

When Wald was sacked on fourth-and-12 from the O'G 33 on the ensuing drive, the upset threat was over and the Knights were heading to the dome for a third straight year.

No Rapid City team has qualified for the top-class semifinal round since.

"Right now we're disappointed," Svendsen said. "But I'm so proud of my kids."

2008: Washington 21, O'Gorman 14

At McEneaney Field

The Warriors under Brian Hermanson were finding their stride with a young core of standouts - Matt Hermanson, Trevor Gebhart, Tom Farniok, Brandon Mohr - that would set the tone for a dynasty.

Washington was coming off a state title loss to Roosevelt but still had to prove itself heading into a melee at the Mac against O'Gorman, which had big-play performers in Will Powell and Phil Wright and junior quarterback Tony Viger.

Playing before an overflow crowd that ringed a snow-banked field, the Warriors avenged a Dakota Bowl loss by forcing four turnovers and holding O'Gorman to 203 rushing yards on 46 carries.

The Warriors trailed 7-0 early but scored just before half to pull even. Mohr then stepped in front of a Viger pass in the third quarter and returned it all the way to the O'G 36, giving Washington momentum.

Matt Hermanson, taking direct snaps out of a split backfield as part of a "Cobra" formation, took advantage several plays later by running option and pitching to Sam Hoskins for an 8-yard touchdown and a 14-7 lead with four minutes left in the third quarter.

O'Gorman fumbled on its next possession but forced a WHS punt, setting up some "McEneaney magic" when Viger hit Wright on a post route for 59 yards to make it 14-14 with 7:27 left in the game.

That might have rattled most teams, but Washington came right back, with quarterback Brett Grevlos finding Quintin McMartin on third-and-8 and then passing in the flat to Gebhart, the future NDSU recruit who broke a tackle and sprinted 50 yards down to the 5.

When Hermanson found paydirt moments later and Mohr picked off Viger at the WHS 31 to end all O'Gorman hopes on the final drive, the Warriors were heading to the dome for what would be the second of six consecutive trips, a record for the highest class.

Although Lincoln would win the 2008 title, Washington's classic semifinal win over O'Gorman had the feel of a new city powerhouse taking shape.

"We showed we can take a punch," shrugged Matt Hermanson after the game. "We just punched right back."

2009: Aberd. Central 21, O'Gorman 17

At Swisher Field

The last ESD team other than Brandon Valley to reach the semifinals (and eventually finals) was Aberdeen Central, led by current Northern State standout Jared Hannigan.

Coach Mike Flakus' undefeated team had downed O'Gorman 24-16 in the season opener but braced for a bitter battle against Tony Viger and the Knights in the postseason rematch. Hannigan completed 24 of 37 passes for 278 yards and two TDs in the game while also rushing for 57 yards and a score.

Aberdeen was in control most of the game, thanks in part to three first-half O'Gorman turnovers. But the ESD champs found themselves in trouble down the stretch.

Leading 14-10, the Eagles had first-and-goal at the Knights' 2-yard line, ready to score what probably would be a game-clinching touchdown, but were thrown back on three successive plays.

That forced them to attempt a 22-yard field goal, which the Knights blocked. O'Gorman then moved downfield quickly, taking a 17-14 lead on a 7-yard scoring run by Viger, a drive kept alive by a third-and-15 conversion when Viger scrambled toward the sideline before finding Greg Billion for a first down.

Aberdeen fans were stunned to silence when Viger charged through the middle to give the Knights their first lead, but there were still more than three minutes left for Hannigan and his teammates to go to work. Even with 80 yards to go, that was plenty of time.

"Was it good to let them score that fast? I don't know," Hannigan said. "But they left us enough time to do what we did."

The pivotal play came with 30 seconds left, when Hannigan eluded the rush of current NDSU defensive end Mike Hardie and scrambled right, beating Hardie to the edge for 10-yard touchdown that sent Aberdeen to its first state finals since 2003.

The Eagles put a serious scare into top-ranked Washington at the dome, leading 10-0 at halftime, but an eventual 27-10 loss couldn't filly diminish a memorable season.

2010: O'Gorman 28, Roosevelt 27

At Howard Wood Field

The Knights found their way back to the dome for the first time since 2006, but it took another bizarre finish against the Rough Riders to do it.

Roosevelt, making its first semifinal appearance of the Kim Nelson era, bobbled an extra point that would have tied the score with two minutes left as the Riders fell to 3-25 all-time against their west-side nemesis. Drama was plentiful along the way.

O'Gorman rode the powerful stride of fullback Sam Steffl, who rushed for 127 yards and three touchdowns, including a 30-yard sprint up the gut that put the Knights up 14-7 early in the second quarter.

After a Roosevelt fumble, the Knights made it 21-7 when speedster Flynn Donelan broke free for a 26-yard TD. But when O'G stalled on its next drive and had to punt into a driving wind from its own end zone, the Riders capitalized on good field position to pull within 21-14 at halftime behind big plays from quarterback Andrew Smith and running back Andre Criner.

The Riders kept coming in the second half, even after O'Gwent up 28-14 on another Steffl score in the third quarter.

Marquese Brooks went 50 yards on a screen pass to pull the Riders within 28-21 late in the third, and then came a 78-yard, seven-minute march in the fourth quarter that was reminiscent of Roosevelt's game-winning drive in that season's Dakota Bowl against O'Gorman.

Criner made several big plays to keep the drive alive, and Justin Warne scored from 1 yard out to pull the Riders within a point with 2:19 to play. Only the extra point was needed, but the snap was mishandled and O'Gorman pounced to seal its trip to the dome.

The Knights lost to heavily favored Washington 33-7 in the finals, while Roosevelt waited another year to break through with a state title under Nelson.

"It's painful," the coach said after the loss at Howard Wood. "We played well enough to draw even, and then we didn't execute at the end. It's hard to take, but that's football."

HIGH HOPES

November 7, 2014

Familiarity marks the Class 11AAA football semifinals today at Howard Wood Field.

The three Sioux Falls teams and Brandon Valley still standing have faced off this season, and Lincoln beat Roosevelt in last year's championship game at the DakotaDome. So there's little mystery today when Lincoln (9-0) plays O'Gorman (6-3) at 4:30 p.m., followed by Roosevelt (8-1) vs. Brandon Valley (7-2).

"This is the way a semifinal round should be," Lincoln coach Aaron Beavers said. "There are four great teams remaining, and anyone could win."

Lincoln's early-season clash with O'Gorman suggests the Patriots will be pressed to extend their undefeated season. The Patriots staved off a late rally Sept. 6 to beat the Knights 34-29.

"It was the Dakota Bowl, and a game that we kind of went back and forth," O'Gorman coach Steve Kueter said. "We couldn't get an onside kick at the end, but it shows we are two teams that are evenly matched. I think both teams have improved since then, which should make for a pretty good semifinal game."

Quarterback Isaiah Roach and the Patriots' offense provided a glimpse of its explosiveness in that game two months ago. Roach burned the Knights with his legs, rushing for 122 yards and two scores. Since then, he has been much more prolific passing, throwing for 1,957 yards and 18 touchdowns while completing 68 percent of his attempts. He's also ran for 396 yards.

Roach's prime pass targets have been Nickel Meyers and Paul Thanel. Meyers has 1,046 receiving yards on 60 catches.

"He's not the flashy quarterback, but I absolutely believe that he's the best in South Dakota," Beavers said of Roach. "He commands the run game pretty well and is very effective throwing the ball."

Roach won't be the only dynamic quarterback tonight at Howard Wood Field. O'Gorman's Luke Fritsch has put together a stellar year.

Fritsch has connected with 6-foot-5 Jack Peery and 6-2 Ben Johnson for 915 yards and 13 TDs. Fritsch also has run for 640 yards and eight scores. Running backs Dodi Makwinja and A.J. Martinec have complemented the junior quarterback's rushing efforts.

"We're going to have to run the ball - there's no doubt about that and that's what we do," Kueter said. "We're also throwing the ball better this year, and we will need to do that as well. You have to be a little more diversified to beat a good team like Lincoln."

On defense, Braxton Large is the Patriots' lone returning starter from last season, and he's also the leading running back. He has rushed for 947 yards.

"Braxton is just so durable," Beavers said. "He's playing a lot of offense and is an every down defensive player. He's one of the finest football players I've ever coached. He waited for his time behind some great running backs over the years, and he's taken advantage of his opportunity."

Defensively, the Patriots seem to be peaking at the right time. Lincoln has held its opponents to fewer than 20 points in three consecutive games, although O'Gorman features a more potent offense than the trio of Harrisburg, Washington and Rapid City Central.

"We've moved some kids around and found our niche. Our defense is playing at a high level right now," Beavers said.

O'Gorman's defense has relied on keeping players fresh. Yet many of the Knights' top players have been needed on offense and defense, which could make a fatigue an issue.

"We've always had to play players on both sides of the ball because of our size, but we've tried to rotate three guys in two positions," Kueter said. "Although they go both ways, they aren't on the field every play. We do that where we can, but in some cases, like Luke Fritsch, we just can't have guys come off of the field."

Streaks on the line

for Riders, Lynx

Difficult moments have been relative for Roosevelt and Brandon Valley, which have only three losses between them. But each team has responded well to what adversity it has faced.

Both teams last lost in the season's third week. Roosevelt could shake off a 35-27 loss to Lincoln, but the ripples from a broken ankle for quarterback Taryn Christian could have been another matter. The South Dakota State University recruit gave defenses fits with his running and passing. Since that game, however, Jett Thune has stepped in at quarterback to efficiently guide the Rough Riders.

"Jett has become a really good leader," Roosevelt coach Kim Nelson said. "He's just a quiet kid who plays hard and has earned the respect of his peers and the coaches. We are lucky to have kid like him after losing Taryn. That could have been the end of the season, but we've been fortunate enough to have Jett come in and play like Taryn."

The Lynx have excelled since a week three loss against Yankton that left them 1-2. Brandon Valley has won six in a row and defeated Washington 17-7 in the first round of the playoffs. That winning streak has come with Riley Frantzen's emergence at running back and the standout play of quarterback Jake Comeaux.

"It looks like Brandon Valley is running the ball better and more often," Roosevelt's Nelson said. "They have relied on throwing the football in years past, but the running game makes them more difficult to defend. Their quarterback is also a running threat, which makes them a little like us on offense. It will be a challenge for us to slow them down."

The Lynx might go as far as Comeaux takes them. He has passed for 1,923 yards and 23 touchdowns and only five interceptions, and has added 438 rushing yards.

"Jake will have to have a good night," Brandon Valley coach Chad Garrow said. "We can't just line up and try to run the ball against Roosevelt like we've been able to do against some teams."

Tonight's game is a rematch of a season opener that Roosevelt won 42-34, with Christian at quarterback.

"I don't know if the first game means much," Nelson said. "Both teams have changed a lot since then, so the last part of the season is a lot more important in terms of figuring them out. We're a different team, and I'm sure they are in some ways as well."

Today's games

CLASS 11AAA (Howard Wood Field)

O'Gorman (6-3) vs. Lincoln (9-0), 4:30 p.m.

Brandon Valley (7-2) vs. Roosevelt (8-1), 7:30

CLASS 11AA

Harrisburg (4-4) at Yankton (8-0), 7 p.m.

Pierre (3-5) at Brookings (6-2), 7 p.m.

Defense sparks Riders to win

November 8, 2014

The Roosevelt Rough Riders are going back to the state finals, thanks to their defense.

A team that began the year with title expectations but was beset by injuries early, none bigger than a season-ender to star quarterback Taryn Christion, rallied behind backup quarterback Jett Thune to reach the 11AAA semifinals.

On Friday night at Howard Wood Field, the second-ranked Rough Riders punched their ticket to the DakotaDome with a 20-9 win over Brandon Valley.

Roosevelt managed just 151 yards of offense - including two net passing yards, due in part to a whipping wind. But the Riders (9-1) had a solid drive just before halftime to take the lead, then watched the defense pitch a second-half shutout to preserve the win.

The Lynx tallied 358 yards of offense, but their repeated failures to turn yards into points cost them. Sean Powell had a fourth-quarter interception to set up a late Roosevelt touchdown, then Piercen Evans picked off a pass with 90 seconds to go, allowing Roosevelt to begin looking forward to their DakotaDome rematch with No. 1 Lincoln, the team that beat the Riders in last year's state championship.

"It was a defensive win for us, no question," said Riders coach Kim Nelson. "In the second half (the defense) was unbelievable. We had three offensive plays the whole third quarter, and Brandon was just going up and down the field. But we just kept making plays."

Twice the Lynx (7-3) turned it over on downs inside the Rider 10. Another time they failed on fourth down at the Roosevelt 22. The fierce wind was a factor, affecting both the Lynx passing game and kicking game, but the Rider defense had a lot to do with it.

"Goal-line stands, that's what championship defenses do," said Evans.

Manny Christopher had a monster game for the Riders with 15 tackles, two sacks and a fumble recovery. Powell had 10 tackles to go with his big pick, while Andrew Batt had nine tackles.

"They did a great job on us," said Lynx coach Chad Garrow. "Not being able to do some of the things we usually do in the passing game because of the wind was a factor, but the bottom line is we had our chances and couldn't finish. That hurts."

Roosevelt took a 6-0 lead after BV couldn't execute a punt into the wind and were given a short field, with Thune going in on a 9-yard run to open the scoring. The Riders then made a big goal-line stand on the Lynx' next possession. But on their first ensuing play they were tackled in their own end zone to make it 6-2.

Mindful of the wind, Roosevelt made a savvy move before the end of the quarter, calling timeout and opting to punt on third down before the quarter break. The plan appeared to pay off when the punt went 71 yards and rolled out of bounds at the Lynx 2. But two plays later, Jake Comeaux hit Isaiah Blok on a deep hitch and saw him turn and run uncontested for a 92-yard score to put the Lynx up 9-6.

But what little offense the Riders mounted all night would soon follow. Taking the ball at their own 22 with six minutes to go, Roosevelt embarked on a 15-play, 78-yard drive that ended in a Jake Bear touchdown run.

Bear ran for 80 yards on 20 carries for the Riders, while Chase Vinatieri had 57 yards on eight rushes. Comeaux was 14-for-25 for 240 yards to go with 73 rushing yards for the Lynx, while Alex Wilde caught seven balls for 107 yards. But the Lynx were 1-for-6 on fourth-down conversion attempts.

Lincoln-Roosevelt rivalry gains volume

November 14, 2014

The Roosevelt football fan stood in a corner of the DakotaDome parking lot like he owned the place, soaking up cardinal and gold splendor.

His throwback Antonio Thompson jersey fluttered in the wind as he tried to light his grill while adjusting Teddy Roosevelt spectacles. A banner on his RV said simply: "RIDERS AT HOME IN THE DOME!"

He seemed surprised and slightly annoyed when another fan approached, this one adorned in red and powder blue, wearing a three-cornered hat and marching like a Continental soldier. The newcomer's shirt had a picture of Braxton Large on the front and Caden Quintanilla on the back and stated, "PERFECT PATRIOTS - AGAIN."

By the time this Lincoln zealot reached the Roosevelt tailgate and pulled out his commemorative Anthony Muilenburg coffee mug, the Rough Rider rooter spoke up.

"The game's not until Saturday night, pal," he snarled. "Who the heck are you?"

"Who does it look like I am?" the Lincoln fan responded.

"Not sure. An escapee from the Old Courthouse Museum?"

"Very funny. I happen to be here to root for the Patriots as we chase the state football championship."

"I'm surprised you found the dome. This place is reserved for more traditional Sioux Falls powerhouses like Roosevelt, Washington and - actually, go ahead and scratch Washington."

"Wait a minute. You do realize that the Patriots won the state title last year by beating Roosevelt, right? And that we beat the Riders earlier this year and are riding a 21-game win streak?"

"OK. What's your point?"

"My point, Rider Rick, is that we belong here as much as you do, if not more so. Lincoln is trying to join the ranks of recent city powerhouses such as O'Gorman in 2005-06 and Washington in 2009-10 to reel off back-to-back unbeaten seasons."

"Sure, but those teams played more games and against better competition than you see with this 11AAA garbage. Keep in mind Roosevelt is making its sixth appearance in the state finals and is seeking its fourth title. The Patriots have been here just three times."

"And we're ready to go 3-0!" said the Lincoln fan, pulling out a plastic Revolutionary War bayonet that caused the Rider rooter to back up. "It's time that we got a little respect. You don't know all the history behind Lincoln football."

"You mean the part where you were a city laughingstock and lost 31 consecutive times to O'Gorman?"

"No, before that. When Jerry Miller was coaching in the 1970s and the Pats won the last of their five mythical titles. You know, before Roosevelt even existed as a high school and about three decades before the Riders reached the dome."

"That's low, Peppermint Patty. Keep in mind that we also had to earn our respect. With Brent DeBoer as head coach and Brian Hermanson as defensive coordinator, we challenged O'Gorman in the mid-2000s and became the first Sioux Falls public school to hoist the hardware."

With that, the Roosevelt fan pointed to a video monitor on his RV, where Brock Bills' winning touchdown against Washington in the 2007 final ran on a constant loop.

"OK," said the Patriot backer. "But what happened after Hermanson went to Washington?"

"The Riders kept rolling under Kim Nelson, beating the mighty Warriors for the state title again in 2011. Where were the Patriots during those Sioux Falls glory years?"

"Well, Mike Klinedinst arrived from Brandon Valley in 1999 to turn the losing culture around, and Aaron Beavers took it from there. Our 2008 team stunned Washington to win Lincoln's first state crown, and you might recall that we rolled past the Riders last year for a 47-24 rout."

At this point, the Roosevelt fan left the conversation and started doing jumping jacks in the parking lot while chanting, "TEAM, PRIDE, TRUST ... RIDERS! RIDERS! RIDERS!" Steam rose from his body as he flapped his arms and legs.

"I don't think they do that anymore," said the Lincoln fan. "And you're reaching a bit. We beat you earlier this year and plan to beat you again. Our offensive line is dominant, Isaiah Roach is a proven quarterback and Braxton Large scored like 17 touchdowns last week against O'Gorman."

The Roosevelt fan stopped jumping and pondered his reply.

"Yeah, well, we would have beat you at the Presidents Bowl if Taryn Christian didn't get hurt, and we've got more Division I recruits than Lincoln has produced in decades. Our young defense is soaring and Jett Thune has stabilized the quarterback position in that spread offense."

"If you've got a quarterback named Thune, shouldn't your offense be conservative?"

"Oh, that's a good one, Patriot Pete. Now I'm really starting to enjoy this."

Warmed by those words, the Lincoln fan smiled, set down his mug and offered his hand.

"Listen, maybe we should just agree that this is going to be a thrilling rematch and that Roosevelt vs. Lincoln has become the premier rivalry in Sioux Falls. We should try to enjoy it."

"I guess you can hang out for a while," answered the Roosevelt fan. "As long as you find a safe place for that bayonet and promise not to talk about your band."

Argus Leader Media sports editor

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CITY SHOWDOWN

MATCHUP: Lincoln vs. Roosevelt in Class 11AAA football title game

WHEN/WHERE: 7:30 p.m. Saturday, DakotaDome

RIVALS CLASH IN TITLE DASH

November 15, 2014

The most obvious similarity between tonight's Class 11AAA state final and last year's championship game are that the same two teams are playing.

But there are other striking comparisons - including an injured senior quarterback, a quest for perfection and a celebration of Sioux Falls public school superiority.

The top-ranked Lincoln Patriots (10-0) will be seeking their second straight undefeated season when they battle No. 2 Roosevelt (9-1) at the DakotaDome, and sparks are expected to fly as a multitude of top-tier athletes take to the turf.

Making just its third state finals appearance, defending champion Lincoln is averaging 38 points and 450 yards a game and is riding high after a dominant second-half effort in a 28-13 semifinal win over O'Gorman.

With an experienced quarterback in Isaiah Roach - who replaced injured Connor Burchill in last year's finals - surrounded by a slew of skill players and a seasoned offensive line, the Pats have their sights set on a 22nd consecutive victory and a third state title after years of futility.

"I thought before the season that they were the team to beat, and they've done nothing to change my mind," said Roosevelt coach Kim Nelson. "They flipped a switch at halftime against O'Gorman and took over the line of scrimmage, and that's tough to deal with. We'll have to play as well as we can play just to hang with them."

Most pundits picked Roosevelt as No. 1 entering the season, but things changed a bit after star quarterback Taryn Christion went down with a dislocated ankle and broken fibula in a 35-27 loss to Lincoln in the Presidents Bowl.

The Riders haven't lost again with junior Jett Thune running the show, and they defeated Brandon Valley 20-9 in the semifinals to reach the dome for the sixth time (with three titles). But not having Christion makes the spread offense slightly less lethal for a team that has still managed to average more than 36 points and 400 yards a game.

"Taryn is a pleasure to watch but a nightmare to defend, so we weren't sure what to think," said Lincoln coach Aaron Beavers of the SDSU recruit, who will suit up tonight but is not expected to play. "I actually think (losing him) made them more diverse, because you can't hunker down and say you're going to stop one guy. Right now it's all of them."

The 6-foot-2 Thune is a strong athlete who has passed for 848 yards and 14 TDs while rushing for 439 yards and eight scores. Roosevelt's offense is more a spread rushing attack with him at the helm, with read option and jet sweep elements that also include running back Jake Bear (948 yards, 11 TDs) and big-play wideout Chase Vinatieri (621 receiving yards, 9 total TDs).

An offensive line led by left tackle and Ohio State recruit Grant Schmidt (6-6, 280) and center Sam Denevan (6-0, 220) will need to create some space against a Lincoln defense powered by defensive end Dylan Arntz (team-high 14 sacks) and linebackers Dalton Jones, Braxton Large and Ethan Schilling.

"We have to throw the ball a little bit, but we don't need to be slinging it around," said Nelson. "Taryn is a three-year starter, so we're not going to ask (Thune) to do everything he did, but we're lucky we had someone in the wings who can make plays."

The Riders have made strides defensively with a maturing unit that includes just two seniors, with linebackers Sean Powell (team-high 56 tackles), Piercen Evans and Andrew Batt leading the charge.

One of the keys will be how Roosevelt's front seven holds up against a Lincoln offensive line that has excelled even after the loss of standout senior guard Drew Peters (knee). With tackles Derek Peters and Deyshon Davis, guards Kyle Sim and Ben Schilling and center Austin Hauschild, the Pats have racked up more than 2,400 rushing yards while giving Roach room to roam.

The senior quarterback has thrown for 2,084 yards and 18 touchdowns while rushing for 474 yards, and he gained valuable experience while filling in for Burchill in last year's 47-24 championship win.

Large is the leading rusher with 1,132 yards and 23 touchdowns, including 186 yards and four scores in the semifinal win. He's joined in the backfield by fullback Lucas Heitkamp.

But Lincoln's effectiveness revolves around run-pass balance and its variety of looks, with Roach joined by perimeter weapons such as 6-4 Nickel Meyers (1,074 receiving yards), Paul Thanel, Ned Sudbeck and tight end Austin Druse.

One thing both teams have is big-game experience, most notably last year's title game in which many of these players were contributors. Roosevelt has a different quarterback and a lot of young faces on defense, but the Riders are hoping to become prime-time performers in a hurry.

SHOWDOWN AT DOME

MATCHUP: Lincoln vs. Roosevelt in Class 11AAA football title game

WHEN/WHERE: 7:30 p.m. tonight, DakotaDome

ONLINE: Join live chat during the action with Matt Zimmer and Stu Whitney at argusleader.com

INSIDE: Lineups and statistical breakdown for Lincoln-Roosevelt, plus Hamlin rolls past Faulkton Area to claim Class 9B state title, Page 4D

Patriots put stamp on new football era

November 16, 2014

VERMILLION -- Is this fact or fiction? Truth or fantasy?

Can that really be the Lincoln Patriots hoisting the hardware to celebrate another Class 11AAA state title at the DakotaDome, asserting themselves as the torch-bearer of Sioux Falls football superiority?

Do we truly have to retire the catcall of "stinkin' Lincoln" for good?

Yes. There's no turning back now. The Pats are pouring it on.

They held off rival Roosevelt 28-14 on Saturday to foil the Riders for a second straight time, running their win streak to 22 games and joining recent city powers O'Gorman (2004-05) and Washington (2009-10) as back-to-back unbeaten champions.

It's hard to believe that a program that stayed down for so long has risen so high, especially after losing so many key players from last year's title squad. But this year's senior class had no doubt in its mind that the moment was meant to last.

"Every player in this program has had to push to be as good as he can be," said senior standout and Joe Robbie MVP Braxton Large, who rushed for 188 yards and three touchdowns, including a 91-yard dash that put the game away after Roosevelt threatened in the fourth quarter.

He gazed around at the postgame celebration around him and added: "This is a heck of a way to go out."

Standing nearby was coach Aaron Beavers, sporting a gold pistol shell on a necklace. About a decade ago, looking to change the course of the program, he started taking players on a team-building preseason trip to Inspiration Hills, south of Canton.

Supervised by Game, Fish and Parks, the players all fire a round from a pistol and get to keep the shell. For this year's team, the necklaces became a symbol of how far they have come and the heights they planned to reach.

"We've come a long way," said Beavers, letting the understatement hang heavy in the air.

SEEKING A START

Before it rose from the ashes with a state title triumph in 2008, the last time Lincoln was ranked No. 1 in the state was 1977. That's when coach Jerry Miller's team finished 8-2 and captured the last of its five mythical (pre-playoff era) state crowns.

The 1977 season finale was a 34-10 rout of Sioux City West at Howard Wood Field, where the sparse crowd didn't seem suited to the occasion.

"It's unbelievable that there were just 1,121 people out here to watch the No. 1 team in South Dakota play," a miffed Miller told the Argus Leader that night.

He had another stellar team in 1984, when the Patriots routed O'Gorman 27-3 for their final victory over the emerging Catholic powerhouse before suffering 31 straight losses to the Knights.

Before Bob Burns arrived to coach O'Gorman in 1976, Miller's Pats used to routinely beat up on the Knights.

"There were times when I had to call off the dogs at halftime when we played those guys," said Miller, who was Lincoln's head coach from 1973-90.

Lincoln's 1984 team - led by Greg Osmundson, Martin Janis, Steve Ramharter and Gene Luke - went 8-1 to share the Sioux Interstate Conference title.

In the playoffs, the Pats faced O'Gorman in the first round and suffered an upset loss that ended their magical season. Yankton ended up winning the state title, beating the Knights in the finals.

Lincoln's football woes came soon after, when district boundaries in Sioux Falls shifted. It wasn't long before Roosevelt opened its doors on the west side, and Washington moved east from downtown.

"They changed the boundaries a bit," recalled Miller. "We were getting all the (middle school) kids from Patrick Henry and a good share of what I called the 'Morrells' kids from Whittier. But then all those tough Whittier kids were going to Washington, and we didn't get any of them. I think that made a heck of a difference."

NEW ERA BEGINS

By the time Mike Klinedinst came from Brandon Valley to take over Lincoln in 1999, the Pats were coming off rough stints under Bob Garry and Steve Kennedy.

Lincoln went 1-17 the two seasons before Klinedinst arrived, and the veteran coach - who won six state titles with the Lynx - managed to make improvements.

Klinedinst compiled a record of 19-22 at Lincoln - going 4-6 in 1999, 2000 and 2002 and 7-4 in 2001. That 2001 squad had Tommy Flyger at quarterback and won a playoff game (beating Washington in the first round) for the first time since 1992.

But when Klinedinst became assistant principal in 2003 and handed the reins to Beavers, his top assistant, there still existed a culture of losing at the school.

The marching band frequently overshadowed the football team on Friday nights, with fans filing out after the halftime show.

"That was definitely one of the obstacles when I took the job, trying to overcome that culture," says Beavers, who guided Gregory to a Class 11B state title in 1998. "It was something that existed at the school and in the community - and that bleeds right into the football team.

"When we had preseason meetings and asked kids about goals, 90 percent talked about individual goals, just wanting to make varsity and play. No talk of championships, no talk of team unity or pride. I thought that I could get in there, snap my fingers, and it would all change. But I was wrong. It takes time."

So while the Pats made strides the next two seasons - beating Washington in 2006 and nearly shocking O'Gorman the following year - they were never able to take the next step.

They stumbled both times in the playoffs, falling to Brandon Valley on the road in 2006 and to Sturgis the following season at Howard Wood Field.

For Mike Magnuson, a starting center who became a key figure in the 2008 title season and is now a Lincoln assistant coach, that home playoff loss to Sturgis was a wake-up call.

"We didn't feel entitled or anything like that, but we definitely felt that we were better than Sturgis," says Magnuson, an Augustana graduate who coaches the Patriots' offensive line. "It was frustrating to

not play to our potential. I know that personally I got my butt kicked in that game, and it convinced me to get in the weight room and get other guys in there."

TIME TO SHINE

With a strong team coming back for 2008, Beavers put the word out that the Pats would use a true platoon system, empowering more athletes to learn positions and see playing time.

That paid dividends when the coach took his Patriots to college team camps that summer.

"We showed up to go to the USD camp (in 2008), and on my list I had 30 kids that I figured would show. We ended up with 58," Beavers says. "At the Augustana camp we had 65 kids. When I took this job, they had eight at the Augie camp."

When it came time to hand out equipment, the Pats had to order more. Not only had their roster numbers increased - 120 players total, 60 varsity - they had bulked up and outgrown the old pads.

That paid off in 2008, when a team led by Gannon Moore, Brett Anderson, Anthony Muilenburg and Magnuson roared past Roosevelt and Brandon Valley in the playoffs and then upset Washington 27-20 in the state championship game, giving Lincoln its first-ever title in its maiden trip to the dome.

"It was almost surreal," recalls Magnuson, now in his third year on a Lincoln coaching staff also spearheaded by Jae Sim, Jim Jarovski and Mario Massa. "We showed the state what Lincoln football could do and what we were all about."

Even after that breakthrough, though, the Pats were often seen as a skilled-based program that was "soft" in the trenches and lacked intestinal fortitude in big games.

The 2011 squad led by quarterback Alex Schultz and receivers Trey Naasz and Josh Kunzmann snapped the embarrassing skid against O'Gorman and made the semifinals before being pummeled 42-7 by a more physical Washington team at cold and windy Howard Wood Field.

Bulking up in the trenches and changing the mindset became the mantra, and two years later Lincoln rushed for more than 2,400 yards in winning the 2013 title, turning tailback Caden Quintanilla into a star with a formidable front line.

The trend has continued this year, with a new weight room and an expectation of toughness and tenacity that wasn't seen during decades of being a Sioux Falls doormat.

When senior guard Drew Peters went down with a knee injury during the regular season, the rest of the line - including Drew's twin brother, Derek - fought through the adversity and worked harder, pushing back the Riders on several fourth-down conversions Saturday night.

"We play for each other, and tonight I played for Drew," said left tackle Derek of his twin, who still suited up for the game. "It's all about believing and having that pride."

The sentiment was shared by quarterback Isaiah Roach, who spoke on the phone after the game to older brother Dominic, a former Lincoln player now serving in the Marines in Okinawa.

"He told me he was proud of me," said Roach, and it must be assumed that all former Patriots feel the same way. The former doormats of Sioux Falls have reached the mountaintop, and they look every bit like they belong.

THE PATRIOTS' WAY

November 16, 2014

VERMILLION -- For the second year in a row, the Lincoln Patriots are kings of South Dakota high school football, completing their second straight perfect season with a 28-14 win over Roosevelt in the Class 11AAA championship Saturday night at the DakotaDome.

In a rematch of last year's title game, Roosevelt offered a stiffer challenge than a year ago playing behind backup quarterback Jett Thune. The Patriots were in control for most of the way, but Roosevelt had its chance with a late rally. After Thune had found Jake Bear on a middle screen to cut the Pats lead to 21-14 with seven minutes to go, the Riders got a quick stop and drove right back down into the Lincoln red zone. After a pass interference call gave them a first down at the Pats 11, Roosevelt soon faced fourth-and-5 from the 6-yard line. Thune's pass to Chase Vinatieri was right on the money, but the senior standout couldn't grasp it, and moments after taking over on downs, the Patriots iced it when Braxton Large went 91-yards for a score as the Patriot student section roared and Riders fans contemplated a second straight Dome defeat.

Large was named Joe Robbie MVP of the contest, rushing for 188 yards and three touchdowns in leading the Patriots to their 22nd consecutive victory and their third state championship in the last seven years.

"That's tough to do," said Patriots coach Aaron Beavers of his team's accomplishments over the past two seasons. "Especially with the number of kids we lost after last year. These guys hung in there, waited for their turn and made good on it. It's a great bunch of kids that happen to be good football players, too."

The Pats (11-0) did it with physical play, outrushing the Riders 287-76. Large had the gamebreaking touchdown in the final minute, but for the most part Lincoln simply gashed the Riders six, seven, 10 yards at a time.

"We just kept pushing with the running game," said Large, who also made six tackles on defense. "We pushed our O-line all season to be the best they could be and they came up big in this game. We just went back to basics and ran the ball. I'm real proud of them."

It was a tough loss for the Riders (9-2), as they clearly had all the momentum in the fourth after struggling to stay close into the third quarter. The dropped pass at the end loomed large, but coach Kim Nelson stood up for his player.

"We got our best guy against their best guy, our guy won and we got a great throw," Nelson said. "Ninety-nine times out of 100 Chase catches that, but it didn't come down to one play."

Vinatieri had four catches for 92 yards and a touchdown in the game, as Thune threw for 222 yards in a poised and impressive effort. And while the Rider defense got pushed around some, they stiffened up late to give Roosevelt a chance.

"I felt like if we didn't get a stop or two it was going to be a long fourth quarter," Nelson said of his mindset when his team trailed by 14. "Our defense came up big. That big drive at the start of the fourth quarter (where Lincoln went up 21-7 on an 18-yard run by Large) put us in a hole, but we just kept playing. I think our younger guys got a good lesson tonight in what can happen if you just keep playing."

Fourth down conversions proved crucial for the Pats, as they converted one on each of their first three scoring drives. A short-yardage conversion early in the second extended a drive that would end up going 80 yards in 11 plays, with Lucas Heitkamp giving Lincoln a 7-0 lead with a 34-yard run.

The Riders answered in a big way, however, with Bear returning the ensuing kickoff 79 yards to the Patriot red zone, setting up a 24-yard strike from Thune to Vinatieri that tied the game at 7-7. The Riders almost made it to the half still tied, but another fourth-and-short conversion kept the Patriots rolling, and a deep shot from Isaiah Roach to Lee Ransom followed by a quick slant to Nickel Meyers set up a 1-yard plunge by Large just before half that gave Lincoln a 14-7 edge.

The last 4th down conversion resulted in Large's run to make it 21-7.

"It was huge to pick those up," said Lincoln tackle Derek Peters, who was named outstanding lineman playing alongside Austin Haushild, Deyshon Davis, Kyle Sim, Ben Schilling and tight end Austin Druse. "That kept drives alive and it kept the momentum on our side. We really kept the pressure on 'em."

Roach threw for 145 yards and ran for 50 for Lincoln, while Paul Thanel had a team-high four catches. Dalton Jones had 10 tackles to lead the Pats defense, while Dylan Arntz and Meyers each had five stops. They helped hold Bear to just 32 yards on 14 carries. Sean Powell had eight tackles to lead Roosevelt, with Carter Carstens and Nate Durfee adding seven.

Nelson was particularly pleased with Thune's play, as the junior entered the season as a backup but ended up nearly rallying his team to overtime of the state championship. Many observers wrote the Riders off when starting quarterback and South Dakota State recruit Taryn Christian went down with a season-ending injury, and Nelson admitted to taking pride that they made it as far as they did.

"I have to give a lot of credit to our staff and our kids," he said. "Taryn was a big part of our team, but our guys decided that his injury wasn't going to mean the end of our season. I'm proud of them for getting here, and then giving themselves a chance to win the game."

Both teams will certainly be in the discussion again next year with a healthy number of returners, but the Pats will come back with not just a 22-game winning streak and a three-peat on the line, but a legacy that will be tough to follow.

"I definitely think we created a legacy here," Large said. "We really did. It's an amazing feeling, that's all I can really say."

