

NWMSU Bearcats Win Fourth National Title

Sports

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(By David Boyce / NorthwestBearcats.com) - Florence, AL - Northwest Missouri State football program left a wonderful, lasting impression for the folks in the Muscle Shoals area.



In impressive fashion, the Bearcats beat Lenoir-Rhyne 43-28 in the NCAA Division II Football Championship Saturday afternoon at Braly Memorial Stadium.

The win concluded a perfect 15-0 season for Northwest, a fitting conclusion to the 28 straight years the title game has been played in Florence. The championship game moves to Sporting Park in Kansas City, Kan., in 2015.

“I thought we had a group of guys and coaches who played to win today for 60 minutes,” Northwest coach Adam Dorrel said. “I think it has a lot to do with our 12 seniors.”

Northwest won its first title in 1998 when it became the first Division II team to go 15-0. Fifteen years later, the Bearcats did it again. In between those titles, they won championships in 1999 and 2009.

“This is just a great feeling,” Northwest junior linebacker D.J. Gnader said. “I got to experience it 2009. I watched them win a national championship. Ever since that moment, I knew this is where I wanted to be.

“To achieve something this great is an unbelievable feeling. I can’t describe it. It was the best way to send out the 12 seniors on this team. I owe it all to them. They did a great job each week leading us and making sure we were doing things the Bearcat way.”

The fourth title, which came on a balmy 70-degree afternoon, was perhaps more emotional for the Bearcats. They raced onto the field with the word family in red on the back of their jersey.

The red ink and word family was in memory of Northwest former head coach and defensive coordinator Scott Bostwick. Bostwick passed away unexpectedly of a heart attack six months into his head coaching career in 2011.

Family was very important to Bostwick. Playing as a family was the main reason Northwest went undefeated this season and won the final game of the Division II season.

“I made a phone call to (a friend) at adidas. We have a great partnership with them,” Dorrel said. “I asked for some socks. Within 24 hours, he sent some mock-up jerseys and pants.

“I wish you could have seen our players Friday when we showed it to them. They wanted their name on the back. We weren’t going to do that. Family has been our mantra all season. We thought instead of their individual name, we would put that on the back and thought it would be pretty cool.”

Once again, the Bearcats played as a family. Each aspect had its moments. The defense created a couple of turnovers that led to a couple of touchdowns. Senior quarterback Trevor Adams was throwing perfect passes all game. Reuben Thomas caught two touchdowns and Creason made nice runs.

And on special teams, freshman Simon Mathieson kicked two field goals and punter Kyle Goodburn averaged 45 yards per kick.

Northwest needed each phase to work because Lenoir-Rhyne never quit despite playing from a double-digit deficit for most of the game.

“Our plan all week was be aggressive and play to win,” said Adams, who threw for 277 yards and three touchdowns. “All of our receivers had great games. It starts upfront with our offensive line. Those guys had a heck of a day and a heck of a year. It was a good day offensively.”

Early in the fourth quarter, Northwest gave its fans a reason to believe the trophy was headed to Maryville.

With a 29-14 lead, Adams delivered another beautiful pass that senior Clint Utter stretched out his arms and cradled the ball into his hands at the Bears’ 4. One play later, back-up quarterback Brady Bolles came in and ran for a 4-yard touchdown. The score gave Northwest a 36-14 with 11:36 left.

Lenoir-Rhyne answered with a touchdown, but with the run-heavy offense of the Bears and the sturdy defense of Northwest, it was very doubtful that a comeback was occurring.

The Bearcats ended all doubt when they responded with another touchdown. Adams tossed a 17-yard spiral that junior Jason Jozaites caught in the back, left corner of the end zone, giving Northwest a 43-21 lead with 2:56 left in the game.

It was the 13th double-digit victory of the season for the Bearcats. They won their four playoff games by an average of 22.8 points.

Truthfully, Lenoir-Rhyne was never in the game.

Northwest made it look too easy in the first 10 minutes of the game. The Bearcats scored on a 29-yard pass from Adams to Reuben Thomas a little over 3 minutes into the game.

“You have to come out and execute the game plan,” said Thomas who caught five passes for 92 yards and two touchdowns. “I know I am playing with the most efficient quarterback in Division II. I know if I run my route to the best of my ability, he will put the ball on the money.”

Several minutes later, the Bearcats added a 28-yard field goal by Simon Mathieson. The Northwest defense forced a fumble. The Bearcats needed only three plays to go 15 yards and scored on a 4-yard run by Creason.

Boom, boom, boom, Northwest held a commanding 17-0 lead with 5 minutes remaining in the first quarter.

“That was a hug emphasis we had because we wanted to jump on them early because they like to milk the clock,” Creason said. “We knew with them playing from behind and they run the triple option, it wasn’t going to work out.”

The way the Bearcats dominated the line of scrimmage, the game appeared to be over with a little more than three quarters left. Only the count down was left before Northwest won its fourth national

title.

“It usually take a series or two defensively to get used to the speed of the option,” Dorrel said. “I thought our defense came out and did some great things early and made some adjustments throughout the game.”

Lenoir-Rhyne, though, showed the pride it took for it to make its first NCAA Division II title game.

The Bears went on a 9-play, 75-yard drive and scored on a 3-yard run by Chris Robinson with still a minute left in the first quarter.

Lenoir-Rhyne was now settling into the game on both sides of the ball.

“I thought we were rattled a little bit on both sides of the ball,” Lenoir-Rhyne coach Mike Houston said. “I am proud of the way our guys composed themselves and fought back.”

“I thought Northwest looked like a poised, championship team.”

Northwest didn’t score again until redshirt freshman Kevin Berg blocked a punt out of the end zone for a safety with 5:56 remaining in the second quarter.

The Bearcats got the ball and concluded the quarter by putting together an impressive 13-play, 72-yard drive that resulted in a 20-yard field goal by Mathiesen as time expired in the first half. It gave Northwest a 22-7 halftime lead.