

MAYVILLE FOOTBALL

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highlights direct-snaps to the running back and bombs downfield from a freshman quarterback with a cannon-for-an-arm, the Novas – on paper – had the makeup of a team that could spoil a one-seed's hopes and dreams.

"Summer" made her last cameo of 2022 – temperatures right before kickoff were firmly in the 60s – and a host of the Novas' fans made the trip to Cardinal Country for what ended up being a spirited WIAA Level 1 contest, wherein the Cardinals (10-0, 7-0) eventually ran away with it, 58-8.

Both fanbases were engaged all night, as it was a high turnout (given the weather) for the opening-round WIAA postseason tilt. The give-and-take of both sides supporting their teams made for a perfect atmosphere in this season's inaugural playoff round.

The first quarter was jam-packed with action, as MAS (5-5) – which plays independently of a conference – took possession first. The Novas – who utilize a spread offense attack with frequent passes both near the line-of-scrimmage and downfield – were only able to tick-off roughly 45 seconds from the game clock before a turnover-on-downs near midfield. The Novas had intended to punt on fourth, but good pressure up the middle from the Cards forced the MAS punter to tuck-and-run, and his effort fell short of extending the Novas' drive.

With good field position, the Cards (quite literally) wasted little time getting on the scoreboard.

On the first offensive play of the game, the Cardinals scored on a 44-yard touchdown run by none other than Blake Schraufnagel – the jaunt was of B.S.'s patented style: a few broken tackles, a shift one direction, a stiff arm and then "off to the races" – and the subsequently successful point-after-touchdown (PAT) gave Mayville an early 7-0 lead.

But all week, Head Coach Scott Hilber and his staff emphasized to the team how explosive this Novas offensive unit could be.

"We knew they had incredible speed and talent," said Hilber, noting that it took a few possessions for his defense to adjust to the quick-

ness of MAS's skill-position players. "Bottom line is: You do not see speed like that all the time."

Just more than one minute of game-time after Mayville scored, the Novas were driving in their own territory, but they ran into a fourth-and-short conundrum. The MAS coaching staff opted for the aggressive approach and kept the Novas' offense on the field. The risk paid off, as the team converted, but it was on the next play that the visitors hit a home run.

Dropping back to pass was the freshman Brayln Albritton – he put on a show in the pregame warm ups with a host of long, tight-spiraled passes to his teammates – and he made one in-game pass look like practice with a long rainbow downfield to open receiver Timothy Davis. Davis had a step on the Mayville defender, hauled in the catch from overhead and he was gone in an instant.

A successful two-point conversion for the Novas gave the underdogs a one-point lead over number-one Mayville.

Despite giving up the big play, Hilber & Co. kept it cool while helping their defense regulate.

"Once they got a chance to adjust, I was really impressed with how [the defense] played," said Hilber.

The Mayville "O" picked up its brothers on the other side and embarked on a minutes-eating drive that brought the Cards just outside the MAS red zone.

Then, the home team ran into a fourth-and-one just outside field goal range.

Down by one point in a game that felt – in the moment – like it could go any direction, Hilber kept his offense on the field and called Schraufnagel's number on the fourth-down play. The Mayville back barreled through the point-of-attack and earned the first, which continued the drive.

On the next play, the Cards made the Novas pay, and on a play-action rollout to the home side of the field, Brad Bushke (from the wideout position) got behind the defense on a post route. Throwing against his body, quarterback Adison Mittelstadt dropped it in the proverbial breadbasket, and Bushke scored six without contention from the nearby



The teams' captains meet at midfield for the coin toss. Pictured from Mayville, left to right, are Cole Legas, Zane Vetter, Hewsten Steger and Blake Schraufnagel. **MITCHELL B. KELLER PHOTO**

Novas defender.

"I had Adison and Brad Bushke on my mind all week," admitted Hilber, who said he had a feeling the pair would have ample opportunities to "go off" in last Friday's contest. "I figured [MAS would] load the box, and I thought maybe those two would have a big game, and they certainly did."

Just minutes later with the Novas in possession of the football, an errant throw by Albritton to the home-side of the field was intercepted by Bushke who was playing at the outside linebacker position (different than his usual roll as a defensive end/EDGE).

Finding his feet, Bushke hoofed it toward his end zone, and while some Novas gave chase, Bushke's head start was too significant, and he ran 40 yards for six. Suddenly, a game that looked like it could be an "Upset Special" was tilting toward Mayville with a score of 22-8.

"Our defensive coordinator Bryce Hilber and the defensive coaches put together a great program," said Scott Hilber of his nephew, who is new to Mayville this season, and the younger Hilber's staff. "[Bushke was] playing in a space at outside linebacker he's not familiar playing, and he came up with that big interception at the right time. Anytime you ask guys to go out there and do something they're not used to doing, and they do it at a high level, that makes quite the impression on us."

In the second quarter, Mayville scored again courtesy a Schraufnagel 52-yard scamper.

Then, the wheels really fell off for the Novas.

After a great kick return for MAS started the Novas' drive in Mayville territory, another ill-advised pass was intercepted by senior Marcus Volkert from the inside linebacker position. A MAS receiver was cutting up the center of the field on a slant route, and the Cards' defender jumped in front, returning the pick to the MAS 45-yard line.

"Marcus had to play inside linebacker with the absence of Braedon Weiglein," said Hilber, acknowledging an injury kept Weiglein from competing last week. "Being alert, being in the right place at the right time... I was really impressed."

While there was still plenty of time on the clock, the Volkert interception seemed to be the emotional boost for



Roll Cards. Adison Mittelstadt looks deep to Brad Bushke on this play. The pair connected from roughly 30-yards out. It was Bushke's first of two receiving touchdowns on the night and Mittelstadt's first of four passing scores. **MITCHELL B. KELLER PHOTO**

both players and fans, as Mittelstadt would connect with Bushke, again, for a long touchdown just moments later. With the score at 36-8, it was just a matter of Mayville playing turnover-less, heads-up football to close out the game.

Providing a "heads-up" play on defense in the second was Schraufnagel. With the game slipping away, the Novas attempted to convert a fourth-and-12, but the passing play set up was well-defended. Quarterback Albritton threw a desperation pass downfield, which was overthrown, and the ball appeared it would fall right into the arms of Schraufnagel for an interception. The junior put his hands out but, then, quickly pulled them to his side when the ball arrived, allowing the pigskin to hit the turf for an incompletion.

The result was a turnover-on-downs and possession for Mayville in MAS territory. Had Schraufnagel intercepted the pass, Mayville likely would have started its possession inside their own 20. The smart senior play saved the Cards roughly 60 yards in field position.

"In that specific moment, that was just Blake doing 'Blake stuff,'" said Hilber, who added that the coaching staff, from day one, makes sure the



Joren Schlender, #6, had a hand in bringing down this runner from the Milwaukee Academy of Science. On the offensive side of the ball, Schlender took his only rushing attempt of the night to the house for 60-plus yards. **MITCHELL B. KELLER PHOTO**