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FEATURED

## Bombers solve Grizzlies, eliminate North Woods 48-26

BEN ROMSAAS MESABI TRIBUNE

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North Woods' TJ Chiabotti dives forward after being caught from behind during the first half of Saturday's Section 7A semifinal against Barnum in Cook.

Mark Sauer

COOK — The North Woods football team looked to be in the driver's seat up 26-12 over Barnum in the third quarter of their Section 7A semifinal contest.

But a key injury to a Grizzlies corner on defense and costly turnovers on offense turned the tides in favor of the Bombers as they scored 36 unanswered to close out the contest, eliminating North Woods 48-26.

While they led when the clock struck zero, Barnum also had a successful first quarter, outscoring the Grizzlies 12-6 after the opening 12 minutes.

Bombers quarterback Hayden Charboneau had no issue slinging the ball all game long and hit Willie Richardson from 30 yards out to put up six on Barnum's opening drive.

North Woods looked to answer back with quarterback Ty Fabish handing the ball off to star running back in senior TJ Chiabotti. TJ, along with junior Jared Chiabotti, took the bulk of the handoffs on the first drive as the Grizzlies went from their own 18 to the Bomber 22. On fourth and four, however, North Woods was stuffed at the line of scrimmage, handing the ball back to Barnum.

Barnum began getting the running game involved with Charboneau calling his own number on designed plays while also finding his target through the sky as well. Putting together another successful drive, the Bombers scored from 13 yards out with Charboneau finding Max Moors for the touchdown, 12-0.

Less than a minute to go in the first quarter, the Grizzlies turned things around at the right time. Starting the next drive from their own 21, Fabish handed the ball off to TJ Chiabotti, who broke free for the 79-yard score to make it 12-6.

North Woods' first drive of the second quarter was more sustained, but just as successful as the first. Marching from their own 28 to the Barnum 23, the Grizzlies got the air game moving with Fabish finding Jared Chiabotti for the touchdown pass. On the two point play, TJ Chiabotti bullied his way into the endzone to give North Woods the 14-12 lead.

The Grizzlies defense kept the Bombers at bay in the second quarter with TJ Chiabotti continuing his strong start by recovering a Barnum fumble that gave North Woods the ball at midfield.

Taking the handoff on the first play from scrimmage, TJ Chiabotti went for 26 yards to put the Grizzlies within striking distance. Just two plays later, Fabish aired it out for the senior Chiabotti to bring down, giving North Woods another touchdown to extend their lead to eight, 20-12, a lead they'd take into halftime.



The Grizzlies got the ball to start the second half and kickstarted things with a 16-yard run from Jared Chiabotti on third and four. On the very next play, Fabish hit TJ Chiabotti for the 30-yard gain, putting the Grizzlies on the Barnum 25.

A play later and it was a 20-yard reception to Erik Aune that put North Woods on the one-yard line. TJ Chiabotti then punched it in for the score, making it 26-12 in favor of the home team. The Grizzlies played aggressively on the ensuing kickoff and recovered the onside kick to maintain possession.

TJ Chiabotti looked to expand on the Grizzlies lead in the third quarter but a fumble at the Barnum 28 was recovered by the Bombers' JJ Stevens and that's when the Barnum onslaught began.

A first half injury to North Woods corner Davis Kleppe meant the Grizzlies had a hole on defense in the second half that Charboneau was ready to exploit. Down two scores, Charboneau connected with JJ Stevens through the air for a touchdown on three straight possessions to give the Bombers the late lead.

The first came on a 16-yard pass to the corner that Stevens brought down with ease to make it 26-18. On the ensuing kickoff, Barnum took some notes from the Grizzlies and went for their own onside kick, recovering it to go back on offense starting at midfield.

Charboneau kept attacking the North Woods weakness at the corner position and found Stevens multiple times on the next drive, capped off by a 21-yard touchdown pass that knotted the game at 26.

North Woods' woes continued on the ensuing drive. The Bombers defense had all but figured out the Grizzlies run game, meaning Fabish had to go through the air if North Woods wanted to stay alive. That spelled disaster, however, as Fabish was picked off on a third-and-six play by Charboneau, putting himself back on the field on offense.

It took the Bombers just three plays to score again with Charboneau airing it out for Stevens, this time on a 35-yard pass that the tight end hauled into the end zone, 32-26.

Barnum had the Grizzlies solved and added two more scores in the fourth to put the game away. Charboneau connected with Joe Peterson for the 25-yard touchdown early and then a late sustained drive was capped off by Max Moors, who punched it in from the one-yard line to put the final score at 48-26.

Speaking on the loss, North Woods head coach Joel Anderson gave credit to Barnum for figuring out the Grizzlies weakness and exploiting it for the entire second half.

"They have got a very nice quarterback," Anderson said. "And very good receivers. They have a lot of good athletes and once one of our starting corners went down, they saw that and picked us apart with anyone else we put in there."

"Hats off to Barnum. They played a very good football game. It's not what we wanted but they found our weakness big time there in the second half."

Offensively, Anderson said he noticed North Woods stopped being productive after the fumble that came right before the Bombers took over.

"That fumble in the third seemed to be a big momentum change for us. We did everything we could to calm our guys down but it felt like it was a little too late. Our line kind of quit firing forward and we weren't opening holes like we were in the first half and the beginning of the second."

"We've played better football games and today we were not the better team."

For North Woods' nine seniors, the loss means the end of their high school playing days, a tough fact for Anderson to reconcile with.

"This particular group is a phenomenal group of young men. They're leaders in the classroom and leaders on the field. I can't speak highly enough of every one of them for what they've done for this school and this program. It's going to be tough to replace a lot of them.

"We'll have to go back to the drawing board on a number of things next year but it's been a lot of fun being able to be their coach throughout their careers as I watched them grow and mature. It's a sad and somber deal here when you have to watch them leave."

North Woods finishes their season with a 6-3 record. Barnum advances to the 7A championship game Friday and will take on top-seeded Deer River in Proctor.

BHS 12 0 20 16 – 48

NW 6 14 6 0 – 26

First Quarter

B: Willow Richardson 30 pass from Hayden Charbonneau (pass failed)

B: Max Moors 13 pass from Charboneau (pass failed)

N: TJ Chiabotti 79 run (pass failed)

Second Quarter

N: Jared Chiabotti 23 pass from Ty Fabish (T. Chiabotti run)

N: T Chiabotti 26 pass from Fabish (run failed)

Third Quarter

N: T. Chiabotti 1 run (run failed)

B: JJ Stevens 16 pass from Charboneau (Stevens pass from Charboneau)

B: Stevens 21 pass from Charboneau (pass failed)

B: Stevens 35 pass from Charboneau (pass failed)

Fourth Quarter

B: Joe Peterson 25 pass from Charboneau (Charboneau run)

B: Moors 1 run (Peterson pass from Charboneau)

