

Bulldogs Place Third in Wild West Bowl By Judy Rogers

The Golden Plains Bulldog football team wrapped up their season with a third place win 58-31 over the Cunningham Wildcats at the Wild West Bowl in Dodge City on October 31.

This is the fifth year of the six-man league and the fifth year of the Wild West Bowl. The Bulldogs are the only team to compete in the WWB all five years with the senior players competing every year of their high school careers. The Dogs placed third in 2016, 4th in 2017, 2nd in 2018, 3rd in 2019, and 3rd this season.

“I am extremely happy about how our season ended at the Wild West Bowl in Dodge City,” said Head Coach Travis Smith on his 21st season at Golden Plains High School. “The team finished by winning the consolation game for the second consecutive year. We have finished third in the state also for the second consecutive year. After losing our first two games, and spending 2 weeks in quarantine, the guys came out more determined than they had been all year. Almost losing our season focused our team and we went on to win 5 of our last 6 games. The 3rd place game was a total reflection of how the last few games went for us. The first half of these games were always very tough, but in the second half of games our physicality eventually wore teams down.”

The Bulldogs won the toss but with strong winds on the field, deferred to the Wildcats. Mason Green made the first tackle of the game. Following additional tackles by Rojelio Loya and Toby Korte, the Wildcats finally broke through to run the field for the first score of the game. The Dogs broke up the PAT pass and the Wildcats led 6-0.

The Bulldogs took over and, with runs by Roberto Loya, Rojelio Loya, and Wade Rush, made a first down. Rojelio ran the ball over the goal line to put the Dogs on the board. Rush kicked the extra points for an 8-6 Bulldog lead.

The Dogs stopped the Wildcats on their next possession to turn over the ball. The Dogs ran hard as the line, led by senior Toby Korte, held strong to allow Roberto Loya to score midway through the first. Rush kicked again for a 16-6 Bulldog lead.

The Wildcats kept the ball moving down the field but Korte, Ethan Shea, Jovanny Infante, and Rojelio Loya made repeated stops forcing another turnover. The Dogs passed the ball but finished the first quarter with a punt.

Switching directions for the second quarter allowed the Wildcats to pass the ball to the end zone once more. Korte knocked down the extra point pass attempt to make the score 16-12.

Roberto made several good long runs for the Bulldogs setting Rojelio up for the touchdown run for GP. Rush kicked a third time through the uprights and the Dogs were up 24-12. The Wildcats answered with repeated successful passes to up their score as well. Their PAT succeeded this time to keep the game close 24-19.

The Dogs ended their next drive with a punt. The Wildcats took the ball to the end zone on their first down to regain the lead 25-24. The Dogs took over, driving the ball down the field as time neared the end of the quarter. With 32.9 seconds until half, Rojelio Loya ran to the end zone. Rush kicked a fourth PAT to give the Bulldogs a 32-25 half time lead.

The Dogs received the ball to start the second half but fumbled the ball allowing the Wildcats to recover. They tried to pass the ball but coverage by Rojelio Loya, Ethan Shea, and Roberto Loya forced a turnover. The Bulldogs kept to the ground with a 31 yard run from Rojelio and a short touchdown run by Rush. The Wildcats responded with a score of their own to keep the game close at 38-31 to end the third.

Typical of six-man football, the game was far from over and there was still a lot of action on the field. The Bulldogs opened the fourth with a touchdown run and a fifth PAT kick by Rush. The Wildcats responded with their own touchdown run only to have it called back for a holding penalty. They tried to pass again, but Roberto Loya intercepted the pass for the Bulldogs in the end zone. The interception was ruled a touchback, but the Dogs still took over. They carried the ball several times ending the series with a turnover on downs. The Wildcats tried passing again only to have it intercepted again by Shea.

Roberto gained a 30 yard run before Rojelio finished in the end zone for another Bulldog score. Infante intercepted another Wildcat pass near the end of the game. Rojelio ran the field 58 yards for the final Bulldog touchdown and a third place win of 58-31.

Rojelio Loya carried the ball 23 times for 183 yards and 5 touchdowns for the Bulldogs. Roberto Loya rushed 13 times for 134 yards and 1 touchdown. Wade Rush had 2 rushing touchdowns and 11 tackles. He also kicked 5 out of 6 point after touchdowns for an additional 10 points for the Dogs. Defensively, there were 4 interceptions—2 by Ethan Shea, 1 by Roberto Loya, and 1 by Jovanny Infante.

Golden Plains finished their season with 6 wins and 3 losses. Following losses in the first two games, the Bulldogs were undefeated until sub-state and finished their season with a win.

The Bulldogs will be graduating a group of four seniors this year but will be returning a large junior class. "I am very happy for all our guys but especially our four seniors, Rolis, Wade, Toby and Austin," continued Coach Smith. "They were great leaders for our underclassman. I hope these juniors are ready to become leaders and get the team ready to make another run next year."

"I knew I was up to the challenge of my senior year," said Rojelio Loya. "We played Cheylin first game of the season and knew they were good. The second game loss to Weskan showed we had a lot to improve on and we had to step it up to replace the two seniors that graduated last year. After that, we opened up. We weren't able to play the Natoma game due to quarantine, but that showed us it could all be over at any time. This increased our motivation to work together for success."

"I was excited for the season to start," said senior Wade Rush. "Our goal was to to make it back to Dodge. We did what we had to do and I'm happy we made it back. I was glad to have Coaches Smith and Aumiller all four years of high school. They have helped us build a solid program. I'm going to miss putting on that uniform on Friday nights and playing the game with my friends."

"I've enjoyed playing the game and being part of the team," added Toby Korte. "I felt I improved as a player and we improved as a team. Everyone helped each other."

"I'm sad it's over," continued Rojelio Loya. "It hasn't hit me yet that this was my last football game with my brother (Roberto Loya) and my classmates. I've been playing football since third grade. I know I will miss all the fans, the cheerleaders and all they do planning pep rallies and providing snacks, and the teachers who supported us after late night games. I hope to play at the next level and appreciate the support of Coaches Smith and Aumiller. They have been, and continue to be, excellent role models for all the GP football players."

"I'm glad I was able to be a part of the team and help the coaches and players in any way needed," said senior Kole Butts who has been team manager the past three years. "I'm going to miss going to the games and experiencing the game with my classmates and friends."

"We had a shaky start, but once we got in the groove we really took off," said junior Roberto Loya. "It helped our mental drive to keep winning. We could have finished the season better, but overall it was good to end the season with a win."

"We will continue to work together as a team," added Jovanny Infante. "With our large senior group for next year, we can again finish at the top of the league and make it back to the Wild West Bowl."

"We will have to work hard next year," continued Roberto. "Once we get the right combination on the field, we will still be a threat."