

WEEK TWELVE

N’WESTERN AT MINNESOTA

Northwestern stays in stride with 24-14 win at Minnesota

MINNEAPOLIS -- When he was an assistant at Northern Illinois, Minnesota coach P.J. Fleck once cold-called Pat Fitzgerald for a lunch meeting to learn about being a head coach.

A decade later, Fitzgerald and his Northwestern Wildcats are still teaching teams like the Gophers how to win in the Big Ten.

Isaiah Bowser rushed for 85 yards and two touchdowns, and No. 24 Northwestern turned three turnovers by Minnesota quarterback Tanner Morgan into 10 points on the way to a 24-14 victory on Saturday that stretched its program-record road winning streak to eight games.

“The teams that win in our league are the teams that have the sustainability over the long period of time,” Fleck said. “You have to earn that, but they have that.”

Clayton Thorson completed 15 of 21 passes for 230 yards without a turnover and had a 13-yard touchdown run in the first half for the Wildcats (7-4, 7-1, No. 22 CFP), who have their best Big Ten record since 1996 when Fitzgerald was in his final season as a player.

Nate Hall had two interceptions for the Wildcats, who have won 14 of their last 15 conference contests, including 11 games in a row against opponents within the West Division they clinched the week before. Hall, who also made the tackle on a fourth-and-1 stop of Seth Green at the Northwestern 26 in the second quarter, was ejected for targeting on a helmet-to-helmet hit on Morgan in the fourth quarter.

“A very businesslike championship-type approach to the week culminated with a very businesslike win,” Fitzgerald said. “I thought our guys were very focused.”

Mohamed Ibrahim rushed for 98 yards and a touchdown and Blake Cashman had a sack among his career-high 20 tackles for the Gophers (5-6, 2-6), who fell to 4-13 in conference play under Fleck.

With a kickoff temperature of 23 degrees, which was actually slightly warmer than when Minnesota beat Purdue here last week , Thorson and the Wildcats played the field-position game well. The secondary missing three injured starters complemented a strong pass rush led by Joe Gaziano, who forced a fumble by Morgan with a sack in the fourth quarter, setting up a short field goal.

That came right after a 68-yard completion on third down from Thorson to J.J. Jefferson, who slipped past freshman safety Jordan Howden and was tackled at the 2 before Bowser’s second score.

Morgan finished 19 for 32 for 197 yards and a late touchdown pass to Tyler Johnson, who topped the 1,000-yard mark for the season. Minnesota’s streak of four straight games with 400-plus total yards, the longest for the program in more than 12 years, was stopped.

“They’re fighting for bowl eligibility. We knew we were going to get their best shot,” Fitzgerald said. “That’s what jumps out to me so much about our defense.”

MONEY MAN

Cashman, a senior playing in his final home game, had a career performance. Fleck said he planned to have the team review all 20 of the former walk-on’s tackles this week to be reminded of what full effort looks like.

“I’m very excited to see where this team goes,” Cashman said, “and one day I’ll come back here and I think we’ll see a lot of success.”

POLL IMPLICATIONS

After cracking The Associated Press Top 25 for the first time this season following last week’s win at Iowa , Northwestern will remain a ranked team for now. The Wildcats aren’t part of the College Football Playoff conversation, but to be headed for the Big Ten championship game in December after losing at home to Akron and starting the season 1/3 in September is quite an accomplishment.

The Gophers were actually favored by two points on the final betting lines.

“That was a joke,” Fitzgerald said, adding: “The level of respect for the guys in that locker room is not very high because of a couple games earlier in the year.”

THE TAKEAWAY

Northwestern: Fitzgerald implored his team to maintain a “pedal-down” mentality despite the outcome of this game having no bearing on the Wildcats’ bid to become Big Ten champions and reach the Rose Bowl. Right after the Gophers tied it with 2:18 left in the first half, they responded with authority. Kyric McGowan had a 39-yard kickoff return, and Thorson followed two straight completions with his untouched run into the end zone to take the lead for good.

“Our guys came in on Monday and were ready to go,” Thorson said.

Minnesota: With a freshman quarterback, limiting turnovers this season was bound to be one of the biggest challenges for the Gophers. They entered the week with a minus-6 margin that was the second-worst in the Big Ten.

“I’ve got to play better, 100 percent no question about it,” Morgan said.

Final	1	2	3	4	T
NW	7	6	0	11	24
MINN	0	7	0	7	14

Scoring Summary -----

FIRST QUARTER	NW	MINN
NW TD 2:20 Isaiah Bowser 2 Yd Run (Drew Luckenbaugh Kick)		
4 plays, 45 yards, 1:43	7	0
second Quarter	NW	MINN
MINN TD 2:18 Mohamed Ibrahim 1 Yd Run (Emmit Carpenter Kick)		
11 plays, 62 yards, 5:13	7	7
NW TD 1:12 Clayton Thorson 13 Yd Run (Drew Luckenbaugh PAT failed)		
3 plays, 55 yards, 1:06	13	7
fourth Quarter	NW	MINN
NW TD 11:07 Isaiah Bowser 2 Yd Run (Clayton Thorson Pass to Cameron Green for Two-Point Conversion)		
7 plays, 92 yards, 3:11	21	7
NW FG 7:49 Jake Collins 29 Yd Field Goal		
4 plays, 6 yards, 2:19	24	7
MINN TD 4:32 Tyler Johnson 6 Yd pass from Tanner Morgan (Emmit Carpenter Kick)		
9 plays, 60 yards, 3:17	24	14

Team Stats	NW	MINN
First Downs	16	18
Total Yards	325	306
Total Plays	60	67
Avg Gain Per Play	5.4	4.6
Net Yards Rushing	95	109
Rushes	39	35
Yards Per Rush	2.4	3.1
Net Yards Passing	230	197
Comp-Att	15-21	19-32
Yards Per Pass	11.0	6.2
Times Sacked	2	4
Yds Lost To Sacks	-23	-24
Interceptions	0	2
Punts	6	3
Punt Average	43.7	46.3
Penalties	2	3
Penalty Yards	20	34
Fumbles	0	3
Fumbles Lost	0	1
Possession	29:26	30:34

Individual Stats

RUSHING							
NW	Rush	Yds	Avg	Long	TD		
25 Isaiah Bowser	29	85	2.9	15	2		
16 Berkeley Holman	1	10	10.0	10	0		
1 Chad Hanaoka	1	9	9.0	9	0		
4 Solomon Vault	5	1	0.2	7	0		
18 Clayton Thorson	3	-10	-3.3	13	1		
MINN	Rush	Yds	Avg	Long	TD		
24 Mohamed Ibrahim	20	98	4.9	29	1		
17 Seth Green	3	7	2.3	4	0		
2 Tanner Morgan	11	4	0.4	10	0		
21 Bryce Williams	1	0	0.0	0	0		
PASSING							
NW	Comp	Att	Yds	Y/A	TD	Int	QBRat
Clayton Thorson	15	21	230	11.0	0	0	163.4
MINN	Comp	Att	Yds	Y/A	TD	Int	QBRat
Tanner Morgan	19	32	197	6.2	1	2	108.9
RECEIVING							
NW	Rec	Yds	Avg	Long	TD		
12 JJ Jefferson	1	68	68.0	68	0		
19 Riley Lees	4	48	12.0	17	0		
88 Bennett Skowronek	2	44	22.0	23	0		
Ramaud Chiaokhiao-Bowman	2	30	15.0	19	0		
84 Cameron Green	1	22	22.0	22	0		
16 Berkeley Holman	2	13	6.5	9	0		
4 Solomon Vault	1	2	2.0	2	0		
2 Flynn Nagel	1	2	2.0	2	0		
1 Chad Hanaoka	1	1	1.0	1	0		
MINN	Rec	Yds	Avg	Long	TD		
6 Tyler Johnson	8	88	11.0	23	1		
13 Rashod Bateman	4	54	13.5	17	0		
24 Mohamed Ibrahim	2	25	12.5	15	0		
Jonathan Femi-Cole	1	12	12.0	12	0		
82 Demetrius Douglas	2	9	4.5	7	0		
17 Seth Green	1	6	6.0	6	0		
3 Chris Autman-Bell	1	3	3.0	3	0		