

## 2011 Evansville North Football Banquet Notes by Tim Grimm

Good evening. My name is Tim Grimm and I have had the good fortune to be a speaker at this season ending football banquet for several years now. For those of you who are new to the program and would like some understanding of the history of the group to which you now belong, please check out my website, [www.nhsrecords.com](http://www.nhsrecords.com). There you will find a complete statistical record book of North's achievements in both football and basketball.

The 2011 season witnessed many first time events in a program that has 55 seasons upon which to draw.

First of all, as a result of consolidation at the junior high level, the Huskies now have a separate 7<sup>th</sup> grade football team apart from the traditional 8<sup>th</sup> grade "Cub" football program. In its first season, the 7<sup>th</sup> grade Huskies went through some growing pains but did close out the season with a big 14-6 victory over Castle. The extra playing time for those young men will pay immediate dividends next season.

At varsity games you will have noticed the first use of color in the game programs as well as our new stadium announcer. Both innovations brought new energy to "game night".

Another first for the program may be the boldest one ever undertaken by an Evansville football program: starting in 2011, North's football program—from the 7<sup>th</sup> grade to the varsity—is completely self-funded by North Husky Football Inc. This booster club pays for everything related to the North football program—from buses to athletic tape. Despite the challenges, North Husky Football Inc paid its bills and managed to put close to \$20,000 worth of new equipment, communications gear, and uniforms into the program.

As someone who's been "in the program" here at North since 2003, I can tell you that this type of benefit is uncommon. There were years in the recent past where our budget would barely pay for this banquet and one blocking sled—now this organization is producing the type of assets that can carry the Huskies to the next level. The energy and innovation that Booster Club President Chad Johnson has brought to the program has been simply amazing and he deserves a special round of applause from all of us.

Now, as we look back upon 2011, let's consider some of the "On Field" achievements of the young men that we all hold so dear.

At the lower levels in the Program, North's future appears very bright indeed. As mentioned a moment ago, the 7<sup>th</sup> grade team closed out the season with a big win over Castle. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade "Cub Team" came out of the blocks *smoking* and won four of their first five games this season. A couple of tough road losses finished the season, but combined with the great success that the 2010 City Champion Cub team had, it would appear that North has back-to-back classes coming up in the system that can combine to be a force in the Southern Indiana Athletic Conference.

As I mentioned, last year's Cubs won the City Title with a perfect record. They weren't "quite" perfect as Freshmen, but posted six wins and are now 13-1 over the last two seasons. To top that off, they outscored their competition by over 100 points in 2011. To put that in context, the *average* score of a Freshman game this season was North "30" and their Opponent "12". Good things are ahead for Coach Shemwell's talented crew.

The Junior Varsity *suffered from its own success*. Yes, I know that sounds confusing, but it's the reality of playing on Monday evening—ask any Jay-Vee coach and he will tell you how bittersweet it is to have great success in a reserve game. The reward for winning and playing well is more playing time on Friday night and when the Jay-Vee team blew out of the box with a come-from-behind win over arch-rival Central in their first game and then overwhelmed Bosse on the road in the second week, the handwriting was on the wall. As players got more exposure and added playing time in varsity games, the Jay-Vees stumbled a bit. Nonetheless, the evidence was there that there are young men on hand in 2012 to help take the place of some of the departing senior class.

All of which brings us to the 2011 Varsity team... and I have to tell you, this squad was a "throwback" to the glory days of North football. As I mentioned, earlier, this is my ninth season since my son joined the program (and prior to that, my wife's nephew was an assistant coach for North, so I've followed the Green & White closely since **1997**) and I have to say, when the Huskies can run the ball with authority, North can compete with anyone in the SIAC Conference.

In days of old, I watched first hand in 1999 and 2000 as Derenzo Bushrod led North to back-to-back Sectional Championships while rushing for 65 career touchdowns. I was in the stands in 2003 when Associated Press 1<sup>st</sup> team All-State running back Kendall O'Donnell led us to 9 wins with his 2,000 yard season. I recorded events for two seasons in '06 and '07 as All-City running back and A/P All-State

quarterback carried us to 9 win seasons, Sectional Championship games, and back-to-back State Rankings.

I will say this—what we saw this season on the field of play was as good *of an offensive line performance* as any of those teams possessed.

Now, the first thing any football observer will say is, “offensive line play is not flashy, it’s not something that most fans take note of.” What they will also say is that if your offensive line can open holes to run through, the rest of the game of football gets much easier.

The best measure of whether or not an offensive line is having success is to measure the rushing yards that a team gains in a game. A common standard of excellence is 300 yards rushing in a game. In the last ten years, North has gained 300 yards rushing in 18 games. In those 18 games, North’s record is 17 wins and 1 loss.

But to carry that measure further, to show the greatness of this season’s offensive line, let’s set the bar higher at FOUR HUNDRED yards rushing in a game. That’s a level that would represent complete and total dominance of the opponent. In the 552 games of Varsity football that the North program has competed in since 1957, there have only been FOURTEEN such games.

There have been just 14 four-hundred yard games in 55 seasons or just 2.4% of the time.

And this year’s team had **THREE** of them in just 10 games—versus Bosse, Memorial, and Central. Note that two of those three teams won their Sectional this season, so those holes weren’t blown open against “easy” teams.

The 2011 Huskies were the first North squad since 2000 to post a 400 yard rushing game and they did it *three times*.

Team Captains **Damon Byars** and **Sam Jones** helped anchor the line from their guard positions. Junior **Dylan Simmons** played center, **Jeff Burch** and **Jourdan Seib** filled the tackle slots. They weren’t alone, however.

The offensive line toils in anonymity. But if you ask any long time football fan, they will tell you the line is the heart of a football team. And because they are the heart, they play as a unit. The five guys I named weren’t the only players to line up in an offensive line position for the Huskies in 2011—they were joined by fellow linemen who work in the dirt and the dust and the trenches.

I would like to ask all the players who toiled in the offensive line for the Huskies in 2011 to stand for a moment and that you applaud them for a record-setting season. These young men who get dirty without glory, who lift weights until they're weary, who bleed and struggle in anonymity with big numbers on their back and dents in their facemasks... these are some of the heroes of the 2011 Huskies. Thank you for your hard work!

It's been customary to make these remarks to close out the season as much about the graduating senior class and their accomplishments as anything else. As such I will do my best to recognize those players who made special contributions to North's success. In 2011, it's impossible to do that without also mentioning a few underclassmen along the way—as I have already done with the offensive line.

While this season's senior class enjoyed it's greatest varsity success of its tenure at North in 2011, it's hard not recognize the impact that some of the juniors had in achieving that mark.

Perhaps none shined as brightly as running back **Blake Howell's** record-setting performance in the season opening, record FIFTEENTH consecutive win over the Bosse Bulldogs. I mentioned earlier that North has played 552 varsity football games and in North's 50-18 opening night victory at Enlow Field, **Howell** did something that no one in school history had ever done before: he returned two kickoffs for touchdown in a single game. His 90 yard return following a Bosse touchdown just before halftime gave North a huge boost in momentum that carried through to the second half.

Following linebacker **Colton Lord's** safety in the third quarter, the Bulldogs cast caution to the wind and kicked off to Howell rather than following conventional wisdom and punting. **Blake** made them pay for their foolishness and sealed the Bulldogs fate with a 72 yard return.

The Bosse game was just one of the many big games that the junior would have over the course of the season. He would eventually record three multi-touchdown games, twice rush for over 200 yards in a game, and his 863 yards rushing would end up in the Top 20 seasons all-time for a North running back. Having built upon a good sophomore season in which **Blake** ran for nearly 600 yards, he will return for his senior season already ranked in the school's top 15 all-time rushers.

I mentioned **Colton Lord** earlier. **Lord** was a team captain along with **Damon Byars** and **Sam Jones**. **Colton** moved from defensive back to linebacker for his senior season and made the transition with ease. He scored a safety against Bosse, blocked a punt against Harrison that helped give North a lead

from which it never looked back, and stalled a Castle drive with a recovered fumble before halftime that sustained a North lead. In short, he made some big plays at big moments for the Huskies in 2011.

But his best night came against Henderson County. In that game he did something that had not been accomplished since 2002—**Lord** made 14 solo tackles. Combined with his 5 assists that evening, he accomplished no other Husky has done since Nathan Brooks versus Castle in 1995 by recording 19 tackles in a single game.

He was joined at linebacker by two players who made a world of difference in the 2011 Huskies' success. In 2010, one of the few strengths of the defense had been its linebacker play and unfortunately, a pair of multi-year starters graduated with that team. Combined with some other moves on defense, the linebacker corps had to be completely rebuilt. Senior **Brandon Dickens** and junior **Drew Watters** stepped into the void and more than filled the gap—they led the 2011 Huskies in tackles.

**Dickens** displayed an ability to close on opposition runners at the perimeter with great speed—time and again opponent running backs fell to his pursuit. In the defensive “shut out” at Paoli which North won 28-0, Dickens repeatedly nailed the Rams' All-State running back before he got past the line of scrimmage and took the wind out of Paoli's sails before half time. He recorded 9 solo tackles and 3 assists in his best game of the season. Perhaps his biggest plays came in the fourth quarter in the rain against Memorial when he and **Watters** forced a turnover that led to North's game tying score.

**Drew Watters** was a two-year starter on offense for North but was playing his first downs at middle linebacker for the Huskies in 2011. From his level of play, you'd have never known he was in his first season on defense. While he is quite possibly the best blocking tight-end on offense to have worn the green-and-white in at least a decade, North was asking him to replace an All-Conference linebacker on defense. All **Watters** did in his steady, journeyman like fashion was record the 7<sup>th</sup> highest number of solo, unassisted tackles for a season in school history. With a junior season like that, we certainly await his senior year with great anticipation.

I called the 2011 Huskies a “*throwback*” team—a team with a connection to great teams of the past. One of the reasons I call them that is because they have something very much in common with those teams from yesteryear—they had a quarterback who was capable of breaking away from the pack and wreaking havoc on the defense with his feet.

North has had some great passers in recent years—Cameron Whitler had the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest total passing yards for a season in 2008, Matt Strohmeier went on to play college ball, and Luke Blankenship ranks 6<sup>th</sup> in career passing yardage. None of them, however, were able to parlay their throwing prowess into victories on the grid iron with the regularity that we all hoped for.

**Max Mooney** is a throwback to the quarterbacks who have had great winning records under Coach Wilson and Coach Riley's leadership. **Mooney**, you see, can run. His skill and poise at the line of scrimmage in the heat of battle allows him to read option assignments and either hand off the ball to the full back or take off around end on an quarterback keeper. TWENTY-EIGHT times this season **Max** pulled the ball back from the dive back and took off on runs of 10 yards or longer. To put that in context, North had not had a quarterback run ONCE for ten yards in the three seasons prior to 2011—and **Mooney** did it 28 times.

Which isn't to say that he can't throw the ball. His 941 yards passing ranks 12<sup>th</sup> best in the record books and he's one of only ten quarterbacks in school history to average better than a 50% completion percentage. With **Mooney** returning at quarterback in 2012, North's chances of a City Title are the brightest that they've been in years.

When **Mooney** went to the air, he most often targeted a receiver who few people in the City were aware of as a football player prior to 2011. Senior **Ty Pauley**, a 2<sup>nd</sup> Team All-Metro basketball player, decided to come out for football this season. He and fellow senior, **Jay'von Gilmore** had not played football since they were freshmen and brought their speed and "*ball awareness*" to the football field for their final season at North. Gifted natural athletes and competitors, these two anchored the defensive secondary but it was **Pauley's** spectacular plays on offense that highlighted several games.

He had a touchdown run of 81 yards against Henderson was the 9<sup>th</sup> longest in school history. He also caught a 66 yard TD pass in the game. His 9 receptions against Reitz were the 2<sup>nd</sup> most ever in a single game for North. His 40 yard reception on the first pass play of the game against Paoli let the Rams know that they were up against a class of players the likes of which they had not seen before. Just when Central thought they had an answer for everything that North was bringing to the table, it was **Pauley** who took a reverse against an all-out blitz and danced past the defenders for 40 yards. North had not seen the likes of a wide-receiver with open field running skills like **Ty Pauley** since All-State performer Brandon Stewart was patrolling the grid iron for the Huskies.

**Mooney's** other favorite weapon on offense was another two way performer—**Du'vante Lane**. Not blessed with overwhelming size or speed, **Lane** is nonetheless a “big play” kind of performer. At fullback, he selflessly dove into the line without knowing whether the handoff would come his way or if he was simply a decoy. **Du'vante** ran hard all the same and when the ball did come his way, he made the most of it. Rarely given an opportunity to run “outside”, **Lane** busted “up the gut” behind **Simmons** and **Byars** and **Jones** for the “tough” yards and often broke threw the wall of defenders for big gains. He had back-to-back 3 touchdown games against Paoli and Central and it marked the 1<sup>st</sup> time anyone had done that for the Green & White since 2007.

When **Lane** was selected to start at defensive end against Memorial, it marked a turning point in the season for the Huskies. While North's defensive line had been good, it was Lane's insertion at end that made it spectacular and the results were easily measured in the won-loss column. He led the team in tackles in his 1<sup>st</sup> game as a starter and repeated that feat against Reitz where he also recorded two quarterback sacks and a thrown-for loss. He returned a fumble for a touchdown against Paoli that “iced” the game for North and combined with the rest of the line in the second half to put on a pass rush against Central that orchestrated the Huskies' biggest come-from-behind victory in years.

He was a bookend with fellow junior “Big” **Mike Johnson** at the other defensive end. Shifting to end in 2011 from linebacker (where he had started since his *freshman* season), Johnson made life difficult for opposing quarterbacks. He recorded 8 quarterback sacks, 6 thrown for losses, and caused 3 fumbles. He was a disruptive force and when teamed with Lane, opponent tackles had no answer for North's quick defensive ends. A great pass rush makes every defense imposing. North's defense will certainly be imposing in 2012.

This brings me to my final player to speak of this evening. I mention him last because to me, he was the very essence of the 2011 Huskies. A three year starter on defense and a two year starter on offense, Senior Captain **Damon Byars** displayed a work ethic on the field and off that was the type of example that leaders possess and others envy. Against the best opponents, **Byars** played his finest games—and not just this season, but throughout his career. He anchored the offensive line from his guard position and routinely recorded the pancake style blocks that opened holes into the defensive secondary and allowed short gains to become long runs.

On defense, he just as routinely drew double teams from the opponent guard and center. It made no difference to **Damon**—he held his ground and remained planted squarely where the opponents

intended to run. He “took over” the Harrison game at one point, dropping two runners for losses on a single possession and effectively ending the Warriors’ interest in running the ball for the rest of the game. In the second half of the Memorial game, despite the rain and the elements, **Byars** either sacked the quarterback or threw a runner for loss on the 1<sup>st</sup> down of *three consecutive possessions*.

Think about that, in the turning point game of North’s season, with North trailing by a touchdown and battling the elements against a Sectional Champion Tiger ball club, **Byars** essentially forced Memorial to begin each possession facing 2<sup>nd</sup> and 15 or longer for three straight possessions.

Memorial self-destructed under the pressure and North’s last minute victory resulted from that pressure.

And **Damon** toiled like all linemen do—in the trenches and with little recognition.

Much like this 2011 Husky team. They finished tied for 2<sup>nd</sup> in the City with a 4-2 record and yet you would hardly know it from the press coverage. They refused to quit when the going got tough against Memorial and Central and battled back to overcome deficits. They battle Reitz to a standstill and twice led Castle in the second half. They went and got the job done in Paoli on a field where no visiting team had won in over four seasons.

All the talk in the City may have been about the success of other teams in 2011, but that didn’t stop the Huskies from going out and doing their job. They succeeded where past North teams had failed and they set a standard for the 2012 club to attain.

There should be optimism in this room more than at any time in the last five years this evening. We will miss this senior class and the leadership that they have shown in teaching the underclassmen “how” to win. It will fall to the underclassmen to advance the standard further. It would appear that key players return and that the success of the freshmen may yield some players who can help replace these seniors quickly.

It is now my pleasure to introduce the man who will shape that success. For 23 years he has coached the Huskies and holds a school record 120 victories and five Sectional Championships. He is the Dean of the Evansville football coaching community and a man with a winning record against every member of the Coaching Owen family. He is “my” Coach, “your” Coach, and most of all “our” Coach since 1989, Mr. Mike Wilson...