

## SPORTS

# Three second quarter touchdowns help Arcola win season-opener that finished Saturday

By Mike Monahan

ARCOLA – It was a game of firsts already when the 2023 Arcola football team opened its season Aug. 25 as it was the first game for new coach Steve Snider, first Lincoln Prairie Conference game for the Purple Riders opponent Nokomis. A new first was added to the list as it was arguably the first season-opener that took two days. A severe thunderstorm delayed the game at halftime. After an hour of a heavy down-pour it was decided to finish the game starting at 5 p.m. Saturday.

Arcola displayed the Wing T offense on many plays after playing the spread formation last year under former coach Nick Lindsay, who remains the athletics director and junior high/high school principal. The Purple Riders scored on four of five possessions, including three out of four in the second quarter to lead the Redskins 27-8 at the half.

"It was nice to get the first win in week one," said Snider. "I have only won one other week one and that was the COVID-19 year in my coaching career. It was nice to get another one. I thought the defense played lights out. I know we gave up 16 points, but those are things we can shore up and fix. Those are things that are week one mistakes."

Arcola went on to win 34-16.

The defense had three interceptions, one each by Jayden Henson-Stice, Brokton Morford and Braden Phillips, two of which were in the second half. In the first half the defense allowed 146 total yards of offense, 57 coming on a pass from Brody Steele to Drake Taylor just 1:25 before a halftime that turned out to be 19 and a half hours long as the deluge of rain fell with lightning and thunder also.

After going three and out on its first drive Arcola's Oden Barron returned the punt 18 yards as the Redskins also went three and out. Barron scored the first points of the season on a 56-yard run,

breaking through some would-be tacklers along the way.

Barron was the left back in the Wing T formation on the play.

"The line got pretty good movement and the dude just didn't wrap me up in the hole so I was able to bounce it outside and just go around," said Barron, who had 13 carries for 101 yards and two touchdowns. "The line helped us get it going. It was great to break free like that and busting a touchdown like that gets everyone up and everyone played a lot better."

It was the first season-opening win for Arcola since 2019 when they beat Argenta-Oreana 43-6.

Nokomis moved into Purple Rider territory on the first drive of the game. The Redskins had a 36 yard run by Saint Newman for the big play of the drive. They were faced with a fourth and five from the Arcola 25 when the Purple Riders stopped Newman for a gain of two.

"We executed and did what we wanted on the first drive, but just didn't finish," said Nokomis coach Paul Watson.

"We were very young last year. We had five sophomores that were freshmen last year that started. They had some experience, but they are still sophomores."

After Arcola got on the board, but had the extra point blocked, the Purple Riders recovered a short high kick with Logan Messer doing the honors. It took just three plays for Arcola to go 44 yards for the touchdown as Tyson Lewis scored from 18 yards out on the first play of the second quarter and junior Gael Elizondo booted the extra point for a 13-0 lead.

The only lost fumble of the game a few minutes later put Nokomis, whose average starting drive was the Arcola 36 in the first half, in excellent shape at the Purple Rider 25. The Redskins Brenton Lyons carried the pigskin four times putting Nokomis at the two with a third down. Raul Guerra



**TANK GRIFFITH (66) sets up to block for teammate Tyson Lewis (9) in the Riders first game of the season. Arcola played Lincoln Prairie Conference opponent Nokomis at Arcola on Friday, Aug. 25 and Saturday, Aug. 26. The game was suspended when stormy weather rolled in at halftime and play was pushed back to the next day. The Purple Riders won 34-16. Photo by Nancy Rairden.**

stopped Lyons for no gain and then on fourth down Arcola stopped him again for no gain.

Arcola drove 98 yards in just six plays with a big play being a 33-yard pass from Henson-Stice, who was making his first varsity start at quarterback, to Braden Phillips. The two hooked up again for a 63-yard touchdown and the point after was good for a 20-0 advantage with 4:28 left in the half.

Morford set up the next touchdown for Arcola by intercepting a pass, putting the ball on the Redskin 30. Henson-Stice had a 14 yard gain and Barron scored from one yard out to complete the five play drive. Elizondo booted the extra point again for a 27-0 lead.

However, Nokomis scored on its ensuing play on the 57 yard pass play where Taylor broke free from two would-be tacklers.

"Those are things that are week one mistakes when we don't make a tackle at the end of the first half on that long pass when we had two guys there to make a tackle," said Snider.

Daryl Evans ran in for the two-point conversion giving the Redskins momentum at the half, trailing 27-8.

Nokomis's defense played much better in the second half

allowing only 94 yards, but Arcola scored early in the third quarter on a 79-yard run by Ryder Wilcox-Rich. Elizondo made the extra point for a 34-8 Purple Rider advantage.

Nokomis went no huddle with less than five minutes left.

"They were picking us apart doing something they have not shown toward the end of the game and we are just not doing a good job responding to that," said Snider. So, those are week one mistakes. The first one is an effort tackling type thing, make sure we get a guy on the ground. The second thing is all on me. We could have spent a little more time preparing for them to throw the ball on us, but we took care of business when we needed to take care of business. Most of the second half we played inside our own 40 with our backs up against the wall. We were playing with matches, but luckily we didn't get burnt too badly."

Henson-Stice led Arcola on defense with eight tackles and was 4-of-7 for 106 yards and a touchdown.

"In the first half he was very impressive and I could not be more proud of the way that he came out as a junior and leader on the team and handled things," said Snider. "Overall, I am very proud of his effort, and leadership."

Saturday was not a normal

day for either football team and Snider tried to make it close to a school day.

"You never know what is going to happen with momentum, with kids and the funky schedule," said Snider. "You never know what to expect because their sleep schedule is off. They are used to playing football games after school. We had them get here by 9 a.m. this morning. We did light stretches and walk-thru. Then we got them gatorades and sent them home. They came back at noon and we watched a bunch of film and tried to fix things that we saw from the first half. Then we fed them a small meal and we got them out of here and then they were back a little before 3 p.m."

Henson-Stice said it is an honor to be the quarterback and also said, "We definitely came out slow on that first drive and were forced to punt. After that I feel like we started clicking on defense and our offense was still a little slow the whole first half, but definitely when I connected with Braden Phillips for the 76 yard touchdown it definitely got a fire in us and we kicked it off pretty good."

Arcola will travel to Sullivan to face Sullivan/Okaw Val-

ley Friday at 7 p.m. at Victory Field. It will be the first time the two teams have met since 1989 when Arcola beat Sullivan 48-26 on a Thursday night (last regular season game).

Nokomis	0	8	0	8-16
Arcola	6	21	0	7-34

**First quarter**

A-Oden Barron 56 run (kick blocked)

1:45

**Second quarter**

A-Tyson Lewis 18 run (Gael Elizondo kick) 11:52

A-Braden Phillips 63 pass from Jayden Henson-Stice (Elizondo kick) 4:28

A-Henson-Stice 1 run (Elizondo kick) 1:59

N-Taylor Drake 57 pass from Brody Steele (Daryl Evans run) 1:25

**Third quarter**

A-Ryder Wilcox-Rich 79 run (Elizondo kick) 10:07

**Fourth quarter**

N-Evans 7 run (Evans run) 1:54

**RUSHING**

N-Brenton Lyons 22-64; Skyler Pavolika 1-2; Saint Newman 3-38; Daryl Evans 2-8, TD; Garret Engelman 1-(-2); Brody Steele 3-(-3); Totals 32-107, TD

A-Tyson Lewis 12-48, TD; Brokton Morford 3-30; Oden Barron 13-101, 2 TDS; Jayden Henson-Stice 4-11; Ryder Wilcox-Rich 4-83, TD; Ryan Lindsay 1-3; Totals 37-276, 4 TDS

**PASSING**

N-Steele 10-21-3-155, TD; Lyons 0-1-0-0-0; Totals 12-22-3-155, TD

A-Henson-Stice 4-7-0-106, TD

**RECEIVING**

N-Anticus Bertolino 1-(-1); Drake 1-57, TD; Lyons 2-29; Pavolika 1-9; Nolan Herpstreith 5-61

A-Braden Phillips 4-106, TD

Total	plays	yards
N	54	262
A	44	382



**ORLANDO MARCOS (60) and Oden Barron (7) teamed up to take down their opponent from Nokomis in Friday's season opener. Also pictured in the back is Gael Elizondo (59). The Purple Riders won the Lincoln Prairie Conference game 34-16 in a game played at Thomas-Bradford Field. The game started on Friday, Aug. 25 but didn't finish until Saturday, Aug. 26 due to stormy weather which suspended play at half time. Photo by Nancy Rairden.**

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