

## Melillo: Fun, winning go together

By STEPHEN WHITE  
Sports Writer

Successful coaches drill their players relentlessly on the same things until they get it right. Right?

Not Neil Melillo — and Melillo is about as successful as they come.

Having led Norton, a Class 3A school in all other sports, to the Class 4A state championship and only undefeated 11-man football record in the state, Melillo has been named The Salina Journal Area Coach of the Year for 1985.

His Bluejays' unblemished mark of 13-0 leaves Melillo 41-7 in his four-year stint at Norton, a stint which has included a playoff appearance every year (and runner-up finish in 1983).

While his personnel and gameplans have changed in those four years, Melillo's "bottom-line philosophy" has remained constant.

"We try to make the game fun for the kids," he said. "If they think they're going to have fun, they're going to have a lot better chance of winning."

And consequently, Melillo said, "I think the game is fun when you win. I

### Coach of the Year

1977 — Ed Buller, Clifton-Clyde; Clayton Williams, Beloit  
1978 — Paul Dennis, Abilene  
1979 — Jan Bingesser, Sacred Heart  
1980 — Larry Friend, Plainville  
1981 — Robert Teeter, Victoria  
1982 — Roger Barta, Smith Center  
1983 — Dave Johnson, Osborne  
1984 — Jeff Crockett, Minneapolis  
1985 — Neil Melillo, Norton

try to impart to the kids (that) we can win with the different things we can do.

"We throw the ball, we run the option, we do a lot of different things."

Lest anyone be misled, don't think that Melillo never drills his players on the same plays. He's quite vocal in doing so.

But you won't find Melillo's players becoming bored from practicing the same plays over and over. That's because Melillo doesn't view diversity as being a hindrance to consistency.

"These kids are bright. They take algebra and chemistry. They're not dumb kids," he said. "These kids come to us to learn, (so) we're not going to teach them the same thing 45 times. We feel we can teach them anything if we work at it."

Which brings up another of Melillo's underlying precepts of success — a strong work ethic.

"We work hard at winning," he said. "And when we win, it makes it fun. I believe the harder you work at it, the better you get."

"I'm one of those people who's very serious about this game. I take it very serious, I work very hard. Nobody's going to outwork me."

Nor could many upstage Melillo in theatrics. His colorful sideline demeanor quickly earned him a reputation around the Mid-Continent League.

"I'm of Italian-American decent and, yes, I'm probably a little more emotional than the next guy," Melillo said, cracking a sly smile, then turning serious again. "It works for me because it's who I am. You don't duplicate others. You've got to do it your way."

"The kids understand that I care about them as people. And that's very important. They have to understand I care about them as people. It goes beyond what happens out there on the field."

But it is precisely "what happens out there on the field," that sets Melillo apart, though he is the fifth MCL coach in the last six years to be named The Journal's Area Coach of the Year.

In winning the Mid-Continent League title this season, Melillo's squad earned top billing to a feat which may never be repeated, as the MCL flexed its tradition-enriched muscles in capturing an unprecedented three state championships in one season.

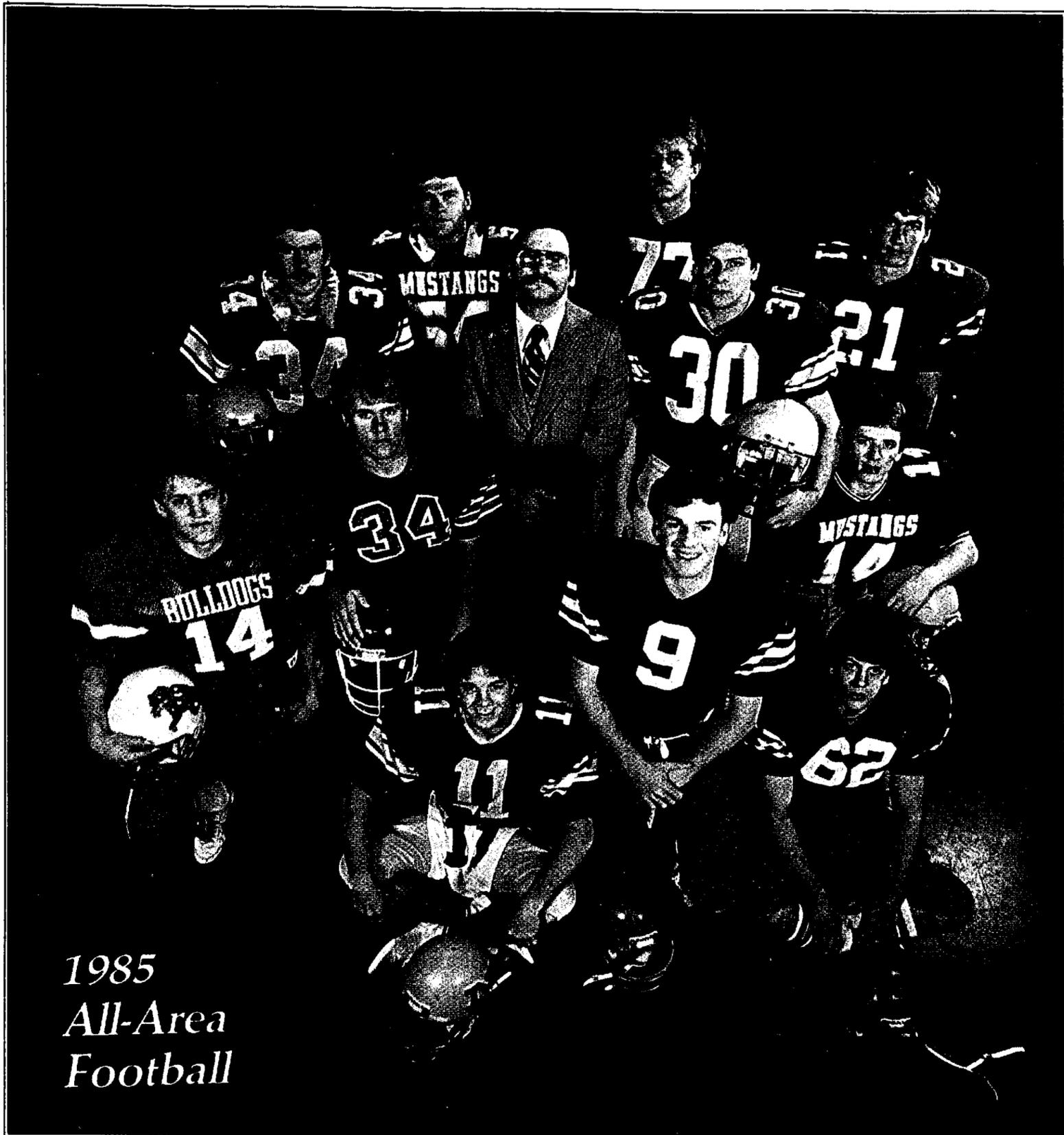
And in winning all 13 of its games, the Bluejays refused to allow a single rushing touchdown to be scored against them.

It was a storybook season for the Bluejays, and Melillo is quick to give credit where credit is due.

"We've had a great group of kids here the last four years," said Melillo, who began his coaching career as a graduate assistant at Colorado State in 1972.

Three years later, after earning his master's in creative writing, Melillo became an assistant at Poudre High School in Fort Collins, Colo., where he stayed two years.

In 1977, Melillo came to the Sunflower State as he took the reigns at



Craig Chandler

Members of The Salina Journal's 1985 All-Area Football Team are: (front row, from left) J.D. Hand, Norton (11); David Wiemers, Clay Center (9); Garth Bloom, Clay Center (62). (Second row) Mike Miller, Golden Plains (14); Troy Weber, Beloit (34); Coach of the Year Neil Melillo, Norton; John Jimenez, Norton (30); Eric Zeeman, Salina Central (14). (Back row) Eric Farber, Norton (34); Darrel Loder, Salina Central (54); Nathan Rather, Atwood (77); Grady Gaschler, Plainville (21).

## 1985 All-Area Football

# Top 11 puts successful traits to good use

By TIM HOSTETTER  
Sports Writer

Leadership, versatility, determination, intelligence, mental toughness and physical toughness.

Those are just some of the successful traits displayed by The Salina Journal's 1985 All-Area Top 11 Football Team during the past season.

Class 4A state champion Norton placed three players — J.D. Hand, Eric Farber and John Jimenez — on the 10th annual team and Neil Melillo of Norton is the 1985 Area Coach of the Year.

Clay Center had two players on the Top 11 — David Wiemers and Garth Bloom.

For the second straight year, an Eight-Man player, Mike Miller of Golden Plains, earned a spot on the elite list. Miller is the first player from the Rexford school to make the Top 11.

Atwood's Nathan Rather also is the first player from his school to earn the honor.

Grady Gaschler represents Plainville's Class 3A state championship team. The rest of the team includes Darrel Loder and Eric Zeeman of Salina Central and Troy Weber of Beloit.

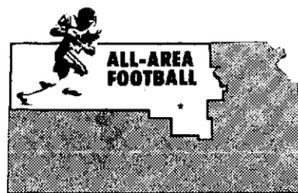
Players on the Top 11 team are selected on the strength of their performances in high school, not their potential for college careers.

Here's a look at this year's squad.

**GARTH BLOOM**  
Bloom is proof that a football player doesn't have to be huge to play on the interior line.

Bloom's heart has overcome any lack of physical size. He's listed at 175 pounds but his coach, Larry Wiemers, believes that 165 would be a more accurate figure.

Bloom was a two-way, first-team all-league player at offensive guard



and defensive tackle in the North Central Kansas League. He was third in the NCKL in tackles with 104 (70 solo). Bloom's quickness enabled him to be around the ball often.

"He's the best offensive guard I've had and one of the best defensive linemen I've had," Wiemers said. "I got more comments from other coaches about him. Garth is very quick and strong. He's able to move sideline to sideline quickly. He has a great desire not to get blocked."

Bloom, who was first-team all-league at guard as a junior, played linebacker for one week at the beginning of the season, but surprisingly, didn't like it and wanted to move back to tackle.

"That's unusual because everyone normally likes to play linebacker," Wiemers said. "It might have been more of a mental thing, but we put him back on the line and he had a great season. He had to take on more double-teaming, though."

**ERIC FARBER**

Farber is one reason why Norton put together a 13-0 record this season. The 165-pounder rushed for a school-record 1,308 yards on just 185 carries (7.1 yards per carry) and 15 touchdowns despite missing two full games offensively because of injury.

"Eric has a tremendous determination to do well," Norton coach Neil Melillo said. "He played in pain most of the season. Before the second game of the year, he broke his right

hand but didn't tell us. He wrapped it up and went out and rushed for 170 yards against Ellis.

"He later tore some cartilage in his shoulder against TMP. The doctor said he'd be out for four weeks. He came back in two. He missed the Russell game the next week then played defense only the next week."

Farber is not the fastest, not the biggest and not the best blocker around, but his desire to excel is second to none.

He finished his prep career with 1,877 rushing yards and 25 TDs, scoring 146 points, and was a two-way All-Mid-Continent League selection.

Defensively, Farber was a three-year starter at defensive back for the Blue Jays. Norton doesn't keep stats for tackles, but Farber had eight interceptions — returning two for TDs — and five fumble recoveries. He returned one punt for a touchdown and a kickoff for a TD. His hitting is what impressed Melillo.

"I think that a 'great hitter' would be Eric's best character trait," Melillo said. "I remember him knocking three TMP kids out of the game in '84. He also was always around the ball."

**GRADY GASCHLER**  
Gaschler is one of three quarterbacks on this year's Top 11. And, like the other two, his leadership was most important in his team's success.

Gaschler was the top returning player on this year's Plainville squad. Gone from an 11-1 1984 team were two top running backs and much of the offensive line. Gaschler's responsibilities had instantly grown.

Most people figured Plainville would be competitive because of its tradition under the direction of coach Larry Friend. But no one figured the

## 1985 All-Area Top 11

Player, School	Hgt.	Wgt.	Yr.	Position
Garth Bloom, Clay Center	5-11	175	Sr.	OG-DT
Eric Farber, Norton	5-9	165	Sr.	RB-DB
Grady Gaschler, Plainville	6-0	175	Sr.	QB-DB-P
J.D. Hand, Norton	5-8	165	Sr.	QB-P
John Jimenez, Norton	6-1	203	Sr.	FB-LB
Darrel Loder, Salina Central	5-11	185	Sr.	C-LB
Mike Miller, Golden Plains	5-10	170	Sr.	RB-DB
Nathan Rather, Atwood	6-4	225	Sr.	OT-DT
Troy Weber, Beloit	6-3	212	Sr.	TE-DE
David Wiemers, Clay Center	6-2	175	Sr.	QB-P
Eric Zeeman, Salina Central	5-10	175	Sr.	QB-DB

Cardinals would march all the way to the 3A state championship game and win.

Although the offensive line emerged into an outstanding unit and running back Gerald Kennedy had a 1,000-yard season as a sophomore, it was Gaschler who ran a steady ship.

Gaschler ran for 640 yards and threw for 510 yards, the most passing yards by a Plainville quarterback in 11 years.

"Grady was our leader," Friend said. "His stats weren't as impressive as other quarterbacks, but he did a lot of good things for us. Before this past season, we figured that we would have to pass a lot more because we did lose some key players. We were concerned with Grady's ability to pass. But he really did a super job for us. We didn't have to pass as much as we thought, but we were still a big-play team and Grady made many of those big plays work."

Although he was a three-year starter at quarterback, Gaschler's best position is defensive back, where he started four years and probably will play in college. He led Plainville in tackles with 85, had seven interceptions and was another

two-way All-MCL selection.

**J.D. HAND**

Like Gaschler, Hand is a three-year starter at quarterback. All statistics aside, the bottom line is winning and Hand was definitely a winner at Norton. The Blue Jays were 30-6 the last three years and played in two state championship games largely because of Hand's leadership.

"We wouldn't have been able to win as many games as we did the last three years without J.D.," Melillo said. "J.D. has a lot of leadership capabilities. He was always able to adapt with the different kids he played with. As a sophomore, he stepped in with a predominantly senior team and did a super job under pressure. He matured a lot as a leader since then."

Hand — a straight A student — also improved his physical talents, especially his passing skills. Melillo calls Hand "the best option quarterback I've coached in 15 years of coaching." But Melillo isn't just a running coach. Hand had to work hard to become a good passer. His 5-8 frame didn't allow him to be a classic

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