



WE ARE THE

CHAMPIONS

Rockets make history at Dakota Bowl XXXII

by Nathan Price

The New Rockford-Sheyenne/Maddock Rockets are the 2024 9-man football state champions.

The Rockets claimed their second state championship in program history on Friday, Nov. 15, as they triumphed over the LaMoire-Litchville/Marion Loboes in a record-breaking 62-26 victory at the Dakota Bowl.

The two undefeated squads had been ranked No. 1 and No. 2 in the state throughout this season, and they've consistently proven themselves in a league of their own. But in a battle of heavyweights at the Fargodome, the Rockets proved a cut above the rest.

The first quarter saw each team's defense get off to a hot start, as the first four drives of the game ended in zero points.

But the Rockets turned to their star quarterback Easton Simon on their third possession, and it paid off when he launched a 43-yard touchdown pass to Bennett Meier, who wrestled the ball away from a defender for the score.

On their next possession, Simon unleashed another deep pass to Easton Benz, who made a great adjustment to the ball, avoided a would-be tackler and completed the 51-yard touchdown catch.

Successful 2-point conversions after both scores had NR-S/M with a 16-0 lead midway through the second quarter, and all was going well for the Rockets.

The Loboes would respond, however, as they followed the Rockets' second score with a kickoff-return for a touchdown. Then a screen pass on their following drive broke free for another score, and it appeared this would be the close game most expected after all.

But as it turned out, a few Loboes touchdowns were hardly enough to curtail the Rockets. As the first half came to a close, a string of key plays allowed NR-S/M to

open a commanding lead.

Back-to-back offensive touchdowns by Carter Engebretson and Benz were critical, but it was the Rockets' defense that began making the difference late in the second quarter.

They forced three consecutive turnovers to end the first half, beginning with a pick-6 by Easton Benz, which was followed by a forced fumble by Bradyn Collier and then another interception by Paxton Neppl.

That last interception led to a touchdown throw to Bennett Meier with less than 20 seconds left in the first half, and the Rockets went into the locker room with a 48-14 lead.

With such a strong advantage, Rockets' head coach Elliott Belquist had an important message for his team at halftime.

"What a first half," he said. "Guys just put on the gas right away and just went all gas, all gas, no break. ... We got to get in the locker room and take a deep breath and enjoy that first half, but we have to calm down now. We got to get our heads back on straight and be ready for a tough half of football."

Working in the Rockets' favor to start the third quarter would be the running-clock rule, which went into effect when they opened a more than 30-point lead. And as the clock ticked away it was only a matter of time before the Rockets claimed their prize.

The Loboes did their best to put a comeback together, but the NR-S/M defense that had been dominant all season continued to play well in the second half. The offense, meanwhile, continued chugging along behind the legs of Engebretson and the arm of Simon – and the result was historic.

A 59-yard touchdown run by Engebretson midway through the third quarter gave the Rockets 62 points, breaking the all-time record for points scored by any team in the Dakota Bowl.

In the end, the Rockets came away with a comfortable 62-26 victory.

To no one's surprise, offensive standouts for the Rockets were Simon, Engebretson and Benz.

It was another excellent outing at quarterback for Simon, who completed 15-of-24 passes for 276 yards and four touchdowns. His performance puts a bow on an equally stellar season, with 52 touchdowns and just four interceptions, and a total of 2,940 receiving yards.

Benz, meanwhile, received two of Simon's touchdowns and had five total receptions for 147 receiving yards. And on the ground Engebretson rumbled forward for 180 rush yards on just 12 carries, and found his way into the endzone three times.

The efforts of those three players, as well as Collier, Kage Walford, Brody and Alex Weisenburger, Meier, Neppl and others, are why NR-S/M enjoyed an historically dominant season.

In fact, not once this year did they play a close game, as they claimed victory by 30 or more points in every single match this season.

So to say the 2024 Rockets had a perfect season might be an understatement – they may just be one of the most dominant teams in the history of North Dakota high school football.

The Rockets' 2024 championship is also the culmination of a match seemingly made in football heaven, as they now boast a 22-1 record since New Rockford-Sheyenne and Maddock Public School agreed

to a football co-op two seasons ago.

The Rockets now have two state championships in program history, the first coming in 2012 also under the head coaching of Elliott Belquist.

After winning his second state championship as a coach, Belquist said he couldn't be more proud of his team and their efforts, especially the seniors who now end their high school careers with a championship.

"Proud of these seniors, they worked real hard in the offseason," he said. "They wanted to be here, they wanted to win this game – they got it."

After the game, Belquist was named the 2024 9-man football Coach of the Year.

Meanwhile, NR-S junior Easton Simon said he and his teammates will remember this moment forever.

"It's unbelievable, it's been many years since these fans have got to feel this moment, and none of us have felt this," he said. "So it's something none of us will ever forget and it was a great win."

An emotional Engebretson after the game said the Dakota Bowl may have never seen a 9-man football team quite like this one.

"I think we're the best 9-man team to ever play here," he said after the game. "There might be another team to come by and surpass us but for now we're going to have that record and we're going to hold on to it and we're going to cherish it."

"This has been my dream," Engebretson added. "This has been what's been keeping me up since when we started football in fall camp. It's just overwhelming and I'm so grateful for everything."

Above: Team captains Carter Engebretson, Brody Weisenburger, Kage Walford and Bennett Meier lift the championship trophy as their team rushes forward to join the celebration.



Bennett Meier raises his hands to encourage the crowd to cheer louder as the team exited the Fargodome. Photo by Amy Wobbema.



The sidelines and the stands all celebrate a touchdown by junior Easton Benz. Photo by Amy Wobbema.



From left to right: Bennett Meier, Kage Walford, Easton Benz, Easton Simon, Carter Engebretson and Brody Weisenburger were named to the 2024 all-state teams for 9-man football. Graphic by Nathan Price.

SIX MAKE ALL-STATE TEAMS

Bennett Meier Second Team All-State	Kage Walford First Team Defense	Easton Benz First Team Offense	Easton Simon First Team Offense	Carter Engebretson First Team Defense	Brody Weisenburger First Team Defense
2024 Season Stats: Receptions: 29 Rec. yards: 749 Receiving TDs: 12 Tackles: 17.5 Sacks: 1 Interceptions: 4 Defensive TDs: 2	2024 Season Stats: Receptions: 36 Rec. yards: 781 Receiving TDs: 15 Tackles: 64 Sacks: 3 Tackles for loss: 16 Defensive TDs: 2	2024 Season Stats: Receptions: 36 Rec. yards: 612 Receiving TDs: 15 Tackles: 31.5 Interceptions: 3 Safeties: 1	2024 Season Stats: Pass yards: 2,940 Pass attempts: 148 TD completions: 52 Completion %: 74% Pass yds/game: 245 Rush yards: 40 Rushing TDs: 2	2024 Season Stats: Carries: 117 Rush yards: 1,136 Rushing TDs: 25 Tackles: 61.5 Sacks: 7.5 Tackles for loss: 25 Forced fumbles: 2	2024 Season Stats: Tackles: 35 Sacks: 2 Interceptions: 1 Tackles for loss: 3

by Nathan Price
After a dominant 2024, the New Rockford-Sheyenne/Maddock Rockets unsurprisingly had quite a few players named to this year's all-state teams.

Named to the first team for defense were Kage Walford, Carter Engebretson and Brody Weisenburger.

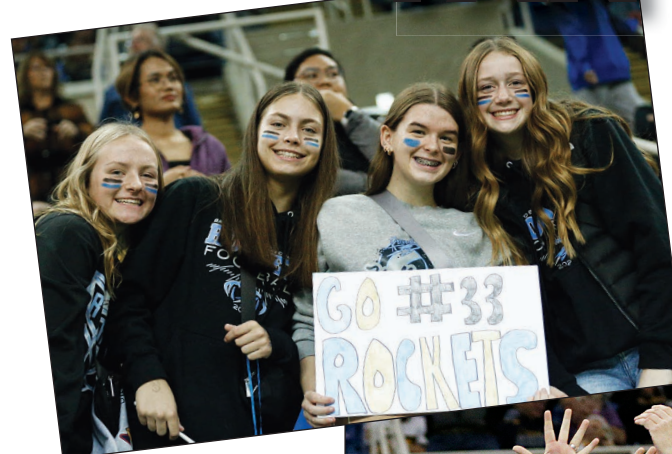
Named to the 2024 first team for offense were Easton Simon and Easton Benz. Notably, Simon broke the school record for TD throws in a sea-

son with 52. Teddy Allmaras held the previous record with 38. Named to the second team was Bennett Meier.

All six players had an incredible season in 2024, both statistically and when it came to finding success.

Some of their most impressive stats from this season are listed above. Additionally, the career stats for seniors Brody Weisenburger, Kage Walford, Bennett Meier and Carter Engebretson can be found on page 4.

FAN CAM



Above: Isla Jacobson, Jaida Schumacher, Camebria Engels and Kaci Weisenburger hold up a handmade sign in the front row of the student section. Photo by Amy Wobbema.



Above: Bryce Yri had his face paint on and pom poms out for the big game. Photo by Amy Wobbema.

Left: Kindra Magnuson and Ryan and Karla Jacobson celebrate a Rocket touchdown. Photo by Amy Wobbema.

2024 Team Stats:

Receiving yards	3,104
Passes comp./att.	156/212
Pass completion %	73.5%
Receiving TDs	54
Rush yards	1,626
Rushing TDs	34
First downs	152
Sacks	27
Forced fumbles	15
Interceptions	18
Fumbles recovered	13
Forced turnovers	31
Defensive TDs	8
Tackles	552
Tackles for loss	81
Safeties	1

Championship Game Stats:

9-Man State Championship
NR-S/M 62, L-L/M 26
Friday, Nov. 15
Fargodome

First Quarter:
NR-S/M: Bennett Meier 38-yard pass from Easton Simon (Thomas Allmaras 3-yard catch for two-point conversion good)
Second Quarter:
NR-S/M: Easton Benz 51-yard pass from Simon (Meier 3-yard catch for two-point conversion)
L-L/M: Gunner Thielges 75-yard kickoff return (Owen Lesko 3-yard catch for two-point conversion)
NR-S/M: Carter Engebretson 50-yard run (Kage Walford 3-yard catch for two-point conversion)
L-L/M: Thielges 33-yard pass from Mason Warcken (Failed two-point conversion)
NR-S/M: Benz 47-yard pass from Simon (Simon 3-yard run for two-point conversion)
NR-S/M: Benz 35-yard interception return (Benz 3-yard catch for two-point conversion)
NR-S/M: Meier 9-yard pass from Simon (Meier 3-yard catch for two-point conversion)
Third Quarter:
L-L/M: Thielges 73-yard pass from Warcken (Failed two-point conversion)
NR-S/M: C. Engebretson 50-yard run (Paxton Neppi 3-yard catch for two-point conversion)
NR-S/M: C. Engebretson 59-yard run (Failed two-point conversion)

Fourth Quarter:
L-L/M: Brayon Karlgaard 15-yard pass from Warcken (Failed two-point conversion)

NR-S Individual Stats
Passing: Simon 15-for-24, 276 yards, 4 TD, 1 INT

Rushing: C. Engebretson 180 yards, 3 TD; Allmaras 22 yards; Aaden Benson 14 yards; Grant Engebretson 2 yards, Simon -4 yards

Receiving: Benz 5 receptions, 147 yards, 2 TD; Meier 5 receptions, 85 yards, 2 TD; Walford 3 receptions, 11 yards; Paxton Neppi 2 receptions, 33 yards

Tackles: Walford 4; C. Engebretson 2.5, 0.5 sacks; Benz 3.5; Brody Weisenburger 3, 1 sack; Bradyn Collier 6.5; Jackson Schumacher 1; Meier 3.5; G. Engebretson 1; Colton Green 2, 0.5 sacks; Alex Weisenburger 0.5; Allmaras 2

Interceptions: Benz 1, 35-yard TD return; Neppi, 37-yard return.

Forced Fumbles: Collier 1



ELLIOTT BELQUIST
9-Man Football Coach of the Year 2024

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Above: Easton Simon tosses to Carter Engebretson in the second quarter. Engebretson went on to score a 50-yard touchdown. Photo by Erik Gjovik.
Below: Rockets fans react to a Rocket touchdown. Photo by Amy Wobbema.



Top right: Both Bennett Meier (11) and Paxton Neppi (21) made a play on this pass to Loboes tight end Braylan Karlgaard, and Neppi came away with the interception. Photo by Erik Gjovik; **Above left:** Easton Benz runs past Loboes defenders. Benz scored two touchdowns for the Rockets in the state championship; **Above right:** Carter Engebretson pushes past a Loboes defender. Photo by Erik Gjovik.

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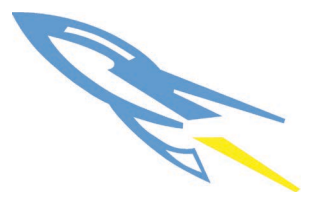
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2024 N.D. 9-Man Football State Champions



Members of the New Rockford-Sheyenne/Maddock Rockets football team, from left to right – Front row: Kolton O'Connor, Ayden Gable, Vinnie Ruppell, Aaden Benson, Bennett Meier, Carter Engebretson, Kage Walford, Lucas Laducer, Thomas Allmaras; middle row: Lance Ziegler, Koy Zieman, Brody Weisenburger, Easton Simon, Easton Benz, Bradyn Collier, Kailar Jacobson, Porter Granger, Jackson Schumacher, Colton Green, Malaki Kukowski, Jax Demester, Sawyer Huso, Alex Knatterud, Beau Baumbach; back row: Paxton Neppel, Alex Weisenburger, James Maddock, Layton Jacobson, Chaztin Wobbema, Hunter Haug, Grant Engebretson, Aiden Rodriguez, Dustin Nystrom, Thad Wobbema, Danny Garcia, Corbin Knatterud. Not pictured: Coaches Elliott Belquist, Reed Weisenburger, Tyler Cook and Nathan Jensen, as well as managers Jason Ehni and Nathan Olds.

2024 NR-S/M SENIORS Career Rocket Stats

**KAGE
WALFORD**
#43



Rushing yards	195	Tackles for loss	34
Receiving yards	919	Sacks	5
Receiving touchdowns	19	Forced fumbles	3
Tackles	176	Defensive touchdowns	2



**BRADYN
COLLIER**
#28

Rushing yards	454	Forced fumbles	2
Receiving yards	100	Fumbles recovered	2
Tackles	108.5	Tackles for loss	7
Interceptions	3	Defensive touchdowns	3

**KAILAR
JACOBSON**
#45



Tackles	110	Tackles for loss	10
Interceptions	2	Sacks	3
Fumbles recovered	1	Forced fumbles	1



**BENNETT
MEIER**
#11

Passing yards	82	Tackles	29.5
Touchdown throws	3	Interceptions	4
Receiving yards	1,051	Defensive touchdowns	2
Receiving touchdowns	12	Forced fumbles	1

**BRODY
WEISENBURGER**
#55



Rushing yards	10	Tackles for loss	9
Tackles	129	Sacks	4
Interceptions	2	Forced fumbles	1



**PAXTON
NEPPL**
#21

Receiving yards	240	Tackles	20
Receiving touchdowns	2	Interceptions	2

**PORTER
GRANGER**
#1



Receiving yards	61
Tackles	3



**CARTER
ENGBRETSON**
#35

Rushing yards	1,510	Tackles	142.5
Rushing touchdowns	30	Tackles for loss	42
Receiving yards	114	Sacks	17.5
Receiving touchdowns	2	Forced fumbles	2

**COLTON
GREEN**
#82



Sacks	4.5
Tackles for loss	5
Tackles	29



**LUCAS
LADUCER**
#50

Fumbles recovered	1
Tackles for loss	1
Tackles	19