Diane Stamm | The Wauneta Breeze

Chris Carl, left, and Cody Barrett (68) team up to tackle Elkhorn Valley's Noah Rutjens Friday. Following the play are Tyler Carl (83, front) and Gage Crowell (back).

By Diane Stamm

The Wauneta Breeze

Wauneta-Palisade left no doubt that West is best when it comes to six-man football. The Broncos demolished Elkhorn Valley 51-16 Friday to set up a rematch with fellow West division member Sioux County in the State Championship game.

The Broncos quickly took the game in hand against the Falcons. Following an 18-yard kickoff return by Connor Kayton to set WP up on its own 22, Jacob Maris handed the first snap of the game off to Kayton who blew through the Elkhorn Valley defense for a touchdown.

Elkhorn Valley's luck didn't improve any once it got its hands on the ball. The Falcons fumbled the kickoff and gave the Broncos the ball on the Elkhorn Valley 12-yard line. After a seven-yard run by Kayton, McGraw ran in from five yards out. After missing the extra point kick into the wind after the first touchdown, Logan Bischoff found Hayden Pollmann in the end zone for a one point conversion. With less than a minute gone in the game the Broncos were leading 13-0.

With Bischoff's kick off going out of bounds, the Falcons brought its offense out. A 32-yard pass from Trevor Rautenberg to Blake Buchanan quickly moved the ball down to the WP six-yard line. Taylor Hansen carried much of the load for Elkhorn Valley, rushing for 23 yards and a touchdown on the five-play drive.

Taking over at its own 21, Wauneta-Palisade marched down the field to the Falcons' 16. A Kayton fumble gave the ball back to Elkhorn Valley. Delay of game and false start penalties doomed the drive short of midfield and the Falcons punted the ball back to the Broncos.

Kayton once again led his team down the field carrying the ball five times and completing a 13-yard pass to Bischoff. Kayton's 11-yard touchdown run and Bischoff's kick with the wind put the Broncos up 21-8 with 6:46 left in the half.

Forcing a three-and-out, the Broncos' offense kept the pedal down. A 23-yard completion from Maris to Bischoff and a 23-yard run by Kayton moved the ball to the Elkhorn Valley 14-yard line. A seven-yard run by McGraw led to a seven-yard touchdown run by Kayton to put the Broncos

up 27-8.

Holding the Falcons to a two-yard drive, the Broncos scored once more before halftime. Kayton completed a 23-yard pass to Weylin Davis and a nine-yard pass to Bischoff. Kayton also ran for six yards and the touchdown.

With Elkhorn Valley unable to move the ball, the Broncos headed into halftime up 35-8.

Coach Randy Geier said “Our guys came out very focused from the get go. The team was very determined to play a great first half, which we did.”

The Broncos showed no let down in the second half.

After McGraw stuffed Elkhorn Valley’s fourth-and-one attempt, Wauneta-Palisade took over on the Elkhorn Valley 27. An 11-yard run by Kayton and a 10-yard run by McGraw put the Broncos first-and-goal on the six-yard line. Maris found Bischoff in the back of the end zone to push the lead to 43-8.

Following the touchdown, Maris picked off an Elkhorn Valley pass, but the Broncos gave the ball back three plays later on a McGraw fumble.

The Falcons took over on its own 26-yard line and could only move backwards. A run of -13 yards followed an incomplete pass. After a false start, Elkhorn Valley saw a 30-yard Hansen run come back because of a hold.

Forced to punt, Elkhorn Valley still could not stop the Bronco attack. Kayton added another 14 yards to his total and McGraw rumbled for 25 yards. Kayton rounded out the drive with runs of three and 10 yards to score his fifth touchdown on the afternoon.

With time running out on its season, Elkhorn Valley went to the air. Despite runs of 14 yards by Jacob Heldt and 36 yards by Hansen, four incomplete passes stalled the Falcon drive.

“Coach Joseph Frecks really had our defense ready to go,” said coach Geier. “Our starting defense is giving up under 10 points a game and they played another great game this week.”

Now in the fourth quarter and with a 51-8 lead, the Wauneta-Palisade second team took the field.

With quarterback Lorenzo Cavanaugh handing the ball off to Chris Carl and Chase Rathe, the Broncos gained 25 yards over the course of two drives but weren’t able to pick up a first down.

The Falcons were able to add a touchdown to its total against the younger bunch, but the first string Broncos were able to douse the coaches with water while the second string was on the field.

Kayton ran for 206 yards in the game.

“Conner really stepped up and ran hard and threw the ball well. The type of defense Elkhorn Valley ran keyed on the fullback, so we limited Jack’s carries and he blocked very well,” said coach Geier. “Weylin Davis, Wes Anderjaska, Logan Bischoff and Hayden Pollmann also blocked well,”

Kayton and Maris combined to complete five of seven passes for 76 yards.

Bischoff caught four passes for 52 yards and Davis nabbed one for 24 yards.

Geier added, “Jacob did a good job running the offense and had some nice passes. Logan was

our leading receiver, but Wes and Hayden are also dangerous threats."

Sioux County defeated Silver Lake 48-35 in the other semifinals to earn their first-ever trip to a state football championship game.

Sioux County opened up a 19 point lead in the second half after only leading 24-21 at halftime.

The Warriors caused five turnovers while only committing one.

Sioux County back Jonny Dunn rushed for 230 yards on 31 carries and scored three touchdowns.

As a team, Sioux County rushed for 287 yards on 31 carries. Garret Gray ran for 37-yards on three attempts and completed three of five passes for 91 yards with two touchdowns. Philip Parker had an interception on defense and had three catches for 65 yards and a touchdown offensively. Caleb White had two interceptions.

"They were pretty excited after the game, but it turned pretty quickly to going and trying to beat Wauneta-Palisade," Swisher told the Omaha World Herald. "I think our kids are going to be ready to go."

As for the Broncos, coach Geier said, "We do not expect Sioux County to make many changes. They are very well coached and Coach Frecks and I are positive they may add a few wrinkles, but nothing major. We have added a few wrinkles, but nothing major. As coaches, we feel that it is important to keep doing what has gotten us to 10-0."

Coach Geier also commended the fans.

“We had amazing fan support again this week; the coaches would like to issue a public thank you to our incredible fans!”

The teams will face off Friday at 6:00 p.m. MT/7:00 CT in Kearney on the UNK campus.