

WILDCATS SUFFER HEARTBREAKING LOSS IN DIVISION II QUARTERFINALS *Game-Tying Extra Point Blocked as #1 Central Falls 21-20 to #2 Northwest Missouri State*

ELLENSBURG, Wash. (Nov. 28) -- Senior **Mike Waller** (Pomona, Calif./Todd Beamer HS) scored a 15-yard receiving touchdown with six seconds remaining, but the ensuing extra-point attempt was blocked as top-ranked Central Washington University suffered a heartbreaking 21-20 loss to second-ranked Northwest Missouri State in the quarterfinal round of the NCAA Division II Football Championship on Saturday afternoon at Tomlinson Stadium.

The Wildcats end their season with a school-record 12 victories, finishing up at 12-1. Northwest Missouri State improves to 12-1 overall and will play California (Pa.) in the national semifinals next Saturday (Dec. 5) at a site and time to be announced.

Waller made a leaping grab from senior **Cole Morgan** (Seattle, Wash./Ballard HS) in the end zone on a third-down play to give Central a chance to tie the game. After an offside penalty on the first extra-point attempt, which the Wildcats declined, senior **Garrett Rolsma** (University Place, Wash./Curtis HS) lined up for a second try. However, his kick was blocked by Tyler Roach to keep the Bearcats in the lead by one.

Central took the game's initial lead on its opening possession, marching 75 yards on 12 plays and capping it with a one-yard scoring run by senior **Randall Eldridge** (Lynnwood, Wash.). After the Wildcat defense held Northwest Missouri scoreless inside the red zone for the second time in as many possessions, Morgan was intercepted on the second play from scrimmage and Chad Kilgore returned the pick 25 yards for a touchdown and the Bearcats' extra point tied the game at 7-7.

On the next drive, which carried over to the second period, the Wildcats turned to the throwing arm of Morgan, who had a 36-yard completion to **Reggie Westmoreland** (Stockton, Calif./Edison HS) and a 19-yard pass to **Johnny Spevak** (Edgewood, Wash./Puyallup HS). They also relied again on the legs of Eldridge, who capped the possession with a 12-yard touchdown run that put Central ahead 14-7 with 13:07 to go in the half, and neither team scored again before the intermission.

Northwest Missouri State, the nation's second-leading scoring offense, gained momentum early in the third quarter by piecing together a 12-play, 78-yard scoring drive that was capped by a 15-yard scoring pass from Blake Bolles to Jake Soy, and the two teams were again tied. Morgan was intercepted by Myles Burnside on the Wildcats' first second half series, a turnover that the Bearcats converted into seven more points with a 19-yard TD pass from Bolles to Jordan Simmons that gave Northwest a 21-14 lead late in the third quarter.

Each team traded punts before heading to the fourth quarter, when Central appeared poised to tie the game or at least attempt a field goal. However, after driving to the Northwest Missouri State five-yard line, a pass on fourth-and-one by Morgan was batted down to preserve the Bearcats' seven-point lead.

Central's defense turned away the Bearcats on the next series, but not after Northwest Missouri had chewed up nearly seven minutes of game clock with a 15-play, 66-yard drive. Senior **Jerome Williams** (Seattle, Wash./Ballard HS) intercepted a Bolles pass that senior **Prince Hall** (Moreno Valley, Calif.) had redirected. However, the Wildcats were unable to capitalize, punting away the football with just over four minutes remaining after advancing to near midfield.

The Wildcats surrendered just one first down on their next defensive series, and were therefore forced to use their two remaining timeouts. They prevented Northwest running back LaRon Council, a Harlon Hill Trophy finalist, from getting a first down on three successive carries, forcing the Bearcats into a punt with 1:19 left.

On the next series, which started at Central's 30-yard line, Morgan marched the Wildcats into Northwest territory with completions on two of his next three throws -- a 21-yard pass to Waller and a 19-yard first-down throw to sophomore **Justin Helwege** (Sammamish, Wash./Eastlake HS). After three straight attempts to Spevak in the end zone were incomplete, a pass interference penalty on a fourth-down attempt to Waller gave the Wildcats a first down at the Northwest Missouri 15. Morgan then threw consecutive incompletions before the scoring strike to Waller.

Central Washington held its own offensively with Northwest Missouri State, totaling 337 yards of offense including 250 through the air from Morgan. However, the Wildcats spent nearly 33 minutes on the field defensively -- some five minutes more than their opponents' season average for time of possession -- and allowed 11 of 18 third-down conversions to the Bearcats. Central entered the game holding opponents to an astounding 24 percent on third-down attempts this season. Northwest Missouri State finished with 395 yards of offense -- a total that was more than 90 yards below its season average -- and managed just 100 rushing yards including 102 by Council.

Eldridge, who finished his lone season at CWU with 935 rushing yards and 12 touchdowns, led the Wildcats with 69 rushing yards on Saturday. He was also Central's second-leading pass catcher with five receptions for 37 yards, trailing only Waller who finished with six catches for a career-high 88 yards. Morgan completed 21 of 38 pass attempts.

The Central defense was led by senior **Buddy Wood** (Chattaroy, Wash./Riverside HS), who had a career-high 19 tackles to break the school's career tackle record in his final collegiate game. Fellow linebacker **Adam Bighill** (Montesano, Wash.) matched his career-high with 16 tackles, including a career-best four tackles for losses.

Northwest Missouri State, which has advanced to the NCAA Division II Championship game in each of the past four seasons, was led by Bolles, who completed 31 of 40 passes for 295 yards. Soy was the Bearcats' top receiver with 11 catches for 136 yards and the aforementioned touchdown, his 23rd of the season. Defensively, Burnsides led Northwest with 12 tackles.

Saturday's game was the final collegiate contest for 23 Central Washington seniors, many of which have been a part of the program's three consecutive NCAA Division II postseason appearances.

NOTES: Northwest's 14 third-quarter points against the Wildcats on Saturday were four more than Central's first 12 opponents had combined to score in the first 12 games of the season ... Rolsma finished as the school's all-time leading scorer with 330 career points, four ahead of Spevak who had 326. Rolsma also reached the 100-point plateau for the second straight season ... With just three catches (for 30 yards) against Northwest, Spevak finished his career ranked second in Division II history with 318 catches. He also amassed 4,426 receiving yards in his illustrious career ... Williams' fourth-quarter interception was the 14th of his career, moving him into a tie for third in school history in his final collegiate game ... Wood's final total of 385 career tackles moved him ahead of Blake Walker, who totaled 370 tackles from 2001-04 ... Central Washington is now 0-2 in NCAA Division II national quarterfinal games and is 1-1 when playing as the number one nationally-ranked team in Division II ... The loss at Tomlinson Stadium snapped an 11-game home win streak and was the Wildcats' first home defeat since a 59-21 decision against third-ranked Nebraska-Omaha in the 2007 regular-season finale ... Head coach **Blaine Bennett**'s two-year head coaching record at CWU is 22-3 (.880 winning percentage), the best 25-game start in school history.

Northwest Missouri State	7	0	14	0	--	21
Central Washington	7	7	0	6	--	20
CWU – Eldridge 1 run (Rolsma kick)						
NWMSU – Kilgore 25 interception (Adolf kick)						
CWU – Eldridge 12 run (Rolsma kick)						
NWMSU – Soy 15 pass from Bolles (Adolf kick)						
NWMSU – Simmons 19 pass from Bolles (Adolf kick)						
CWU – Waller 15 pass from Morgan (kick blocked)						