

Riley Duo Shines in 52-24 Football Win over Kent State
Cardinals start quickly, lead throughout in MAC-opening victory

MUNCIE, Ind. -- The Ball State football team was in attack mode Saturday against Kent State, and it started from the word go.

Riley Neal took the first snap from scrimmage and hit Riley Miller 52 yards down the sideline. That proved to be just the beginning. It was the Riley show for most of the afternoon in the MAC opener at Scheumann Stadium.

The Cardinals (2-3, 1-0 MAC) unleashed the downfield passing game more than they had in a long time en route to a 52-24 victory behind career days from both of the former Yorktown High School teammates.

“I’m proud of the overall attitude attacking the week, knowing that we started a new season as 0-0 in the MAC,” Ball State head coach Mike Neu said. “I told the guys before we left the hotel, before we got on the bus, this is the day we turn the corner. We have to go 1-0 in the MAC. That was our goal by the end of today. We were able to do that.”

The Riley duo hooked up 11 times for 208 yards, as Miller became the first Cardinal to reach the 200-yard receiving mark since Willie Snead in 2012, also against Kent State. Neal recorded just the seventh 400-yard passing game in program history, completing 30 of 50 passes for a personal-high 402 yards and accounting for five total touchdowns.

Ball State was going to play the game aggressively. If that wasn’t evident on the opening snap, it was four plays later when the Cardinals went for it on fourth-and-goal from the 3-yard line. Ball State scored with Neal’s short toss to Malik Dunner on a sweep.

It was on display later in the first half when Ball State ran a reverse flea flicker to perfection to catch Kent State (1-4, 0-1 MAC) off guard as Neal hit a wide open Kyle Schrank for 42 yards and a score. Neal also found Corey Lacanaria and Miller for touchdowns and added the last score of the day on a 31-yard scamper.

Ball State did most of its damage through the air, though James Gilbert scored twice on the ground in the first half. Miller, who had a career high in receiving yards by halftime, helped ignite the Cardinals to an early 21-0 lead with the team scoring touchdowns on three of its first four possessions. BSU went on to take a 35-17 advantage into the break.

“The question always gets asked about Riley Miller,” Neu said. “He’s just one of those guys who just comes to work every day. He’s one of those guys that you love his story, to start his college career as a walk-on, to earn a scholarship and just to go about his business the way he has.”

Defensively, Ball State was largely in control against Kent State’s up-tempo attack. Golden Flashes quarterback Woody Barrett and running back Justin Rankin moved the ball, but the Cardinals kept them from quick strikes, racking up a season-high five sacks and forcing three turnovers.

Jaylin Thomas had two of those sacks and an interception of Barrett, while eight different BSU players were involved in tackles for loss.

“I thought the defense did a nice job,” Neu said. “We talked today before we left the hotel about how touchdowns and turnovers are the themes of the day. We’ve got to make sure that we capitalize on it when we have the opportunities. I thought the defense did a good job of trying to contain and not give up a big play.”

Ball State will return to action next Saturday, Oct. 6 to wrap up a three-game home stand with a 3 p.m. kickoff against Northern Illinois. The game will air on ESPN3.