

## Bears Face North Alabama In National Quarters

Written by Staff Reports

Friday, 06 December 2013 15:29

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The Lenoir-Rhyne Football Team (11-1) continues its record-breaking season on Saturday against North Alabama (10-2) in the 2013 NCAA Division II National Quarterfinals. Kickoff at Moretz Stadium is set for Noon.

The winner will face either West Chester (12-1) or Shepherd (11-0) in the semifinals next Saturday. Those two schools will play in Shepherdstown, W.Va., in the quarterfinals tomorrow at Noon as well.

In the AFCA NCAA Division II Coaches Poll, the Bears are ranked 13th while the Lions are No. 16. Lenoir-Rhyne has also won 11 straight games while North Alabama is in the midst of a nine-game winning streak. The two teams are meeting for the first time in school history.

In the second round of the playoffs last Saturday, L-R prevailed over Carson-Newman, 27-20, at home and beat the Eagles for the second time this season while North Alabama downed UNC Pembroke, 37-13, in Pembroke, N.C.

Lenoir-Rhyne is playing its first game in December since a 20-7 victory over Northern State (S.D.) on December 1, 1962, in the NAIA Eastern Playoffs. The Bears are also 11-1 on the season for the first time since the 1962 campaign ended at 11-1 and are looking to win 12 games in a season for the first time ever. The 1962 Lenoir-Rhyne Football Team advanced to

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the NAIA National Championship game.

L-R continues to lead NCAA Division II in rushing yards at 371.9 yards per game and is paced on the ground by junior fullback Isaiah Whitaker (Salisbury, N.C.) and junior halfback Jarrod Spears (Bunnlevel, N.C.) with 771 and 769 yards, respectively. Sophomore wide receiver Greyson Wells (West Jefferson, N.C.) leads the passing game for the Bears with five touchdown catches including the game-winner last Saturday against the Eagles.

The offensive line is anchored by sophomore tackle Joe Ray (Atlanta, Ga.). Ray was the 2013 winner of the Jacobs Blocking Trophy, given annually to the top offensive lineman in the South Atlantic Conference.

On defense, L-R junior lineman Blake Baker (Bethlehem, N.C.) has 45 tackles including 16.5 takedowns for a loss and a league-high 10.5 quarterback sacks. Baker is a finalist for the Gene Upshaw Award, given annually to the top lineman in NCAA Division II.

Junior linebacker Tanner Botts (Lawrenceville, Ga.) leads the team again in tackles this season with 110 while senior free safety Michael Green (Kingsland, Ga.) was named the 2013 SAC Defensive Player Of The Year. Green has a conference-leading seven interceptions and is third on the team in tackles with 74. The Bears rank fourth in the nation in scoring defense at 14.3 points per game.

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North Alabama is led by quarterback Luke Wingo (Tuscaloosa, Ala.) and linebacker Tavarius Wilson (Jackson, Miss.). Wingo has accounted for 28 touchdowns - 13 on the ground and 15 through the air - and 2,407 yards of total offense. Meanwhile, Wilson is tied for first on the team in tackles with 111 and was named the 2013 Gulf South Conference Defensive Player Of The Year. The Lions average 39.8 points per game and 411.2 yards of total offense per contest.

North Alabama is tied for the most postseason appearances in NCAA Division II history (18) and has won three national championships (1993, 1994 and 1995), all under current Head Coach Bobby Wallace.

**Photo Courtesy: Isaiah Whitaker, L-R Athletics**