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SPOTLIGHT TOPICAL

Trae Taylor, No. 2 Millard South surge late to break away from Lee's Summit North

Julianna Schwindt
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When Millard South came out after halftime against Missouri No. 2 Lee's Summit North on Friday night, everything started to change.

Quarterback Trae Taylor went 11 for 14.

He scrambled 9 yards for a touchdown.

Then with less than 10 minutes left in the game, running back Aiden Marshall had a 54-yard pick-six to put the Patriots up 24-7.

"We knew they were going to load the box, so the run game was going to be difficult," coach Taylor Mendenhall said. "So when we started executing some of our RPOs, catching the ball was a big key there."

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The Patriots took advantage of their home turf to defeat the Broncos 24-14 on Friday night. But it wasn't smooth sailing at first.

In the first half, the Patriots had the ball seven times, the Broncos eight. Yet after 15 drives, the score was a meager 7-7.

Taylor tried passing on the first drive and came up empty four of five times. Part of that was due to the efforts of Husker commit, Lee Summit linebacker Caleb Green, who was ever-present to break up plays.

"Early on in the game, we thought we could come out and try and take shots," Taylor said. "I thought he (Caleb) was going to try and take my head off a couple more times, to be honest. But you know, I respect that boy. Every single time I play a Husker commit, I just see the future looking even brighter."

Luckily for the Patriots, the Broncos made their fair share of offensive mistakes. The Patriots' first score came on their fourth drive, after the Broncos fumbled a punt return at the beginning of the second quarter. Taylor threw a four yard pass to tight end Carter Margheim, and a good kick from Kooper Wilkason put Millard South up 7-0.

A turnover on downs by Millard South with five minutes left in the second quarter led to a series of rushing plays by the Broncos' Bryce Thompson, who scored on a 35-yard run. A good kick, and the game was tied at 7-7.

"Credit to the defense, right?" Mendenhall said. "Like they gave up, I believe, three or four big plays against Millard North that that kept Millard North in the game. And tonight it was only one. So if we take those out completely, it's probably a shutout. Those guys played their tails off."

Another piece of the Patriots' first half struggles was wide receiver Tay Ellis' limited targets. Taylor only had one complete pass to Ellis for 12 yards in the first half. The Patriots started the second half with two in a row, and Ellis finished the night with 70 receiving yards. Ellis was able to move the ball downfield in a way no one else had in the first half.

"I'm always thinking, 24/7," Ellis said. "Knowing what the defense is doing is big in how I play the game."

Much like last week's game against Millard North, Millard South shone brightest in the second half. Taylor totaled 183 passing yards and 33 rushing yards.

Millard South (2-0) will play at No. 8 Elkhorn South next week.

Earlier this week, Ellis announced his decommitment from Nebraska. He had relocated from Texas this summer to be closer to his future team and to play with Taylor. Ellis declined to comment when asked about his decision to decommit.

"Coach Mendenhall is one of the best head coaches that I've played with. He's like-minded, very smart, good on offense, good on defense," Ellis said. "My plan for now is to stay in Nebraska."

Lee's Summit North (1-1) .... 0 | 7 | 0 | 7 — 14

At Millard South (2-0) ..... 0 | 7 | 10 | 7 — 24

MS: Carter Margheim 4 pass from Trae Taylor (Kooper Wilkason kick)

LSN: Bryce Thompson 35 rush (Grant Scribner kick)

MS: FG Wilkason 33

MS: Taylor 9 rush (Wilkason kick)

MS: Aidan Marshall 54 interception return (Wilkason)

LSN: Kenzo Hockerson 20 rush (Scribner kick)

Photos: Millard South football hosts Lee's Summit North

Millard South's Najee Brown (13) celebrates after an interception against Lee's Summit North during the first half of a high school football game in Omaha on Friday, Sept. 4, 2026.

NIKOS FRAZIER, THE WORLD-HERALD
