

Best games of 2009? Miners played in most

In mid-November, the Deseret News polled its sports writers to determine the best high school football games that were played in Utah in 2009. The games are not in any order, but it's notable that Bingham played in three.

Bingham 38, Alta 34 (Friday, Aug. 28)

In late August about 11,000 people crammed into Bingham's home field to watch another classic battle between the Miners and the Alta Hawks. People were everywhere. The stands were full about an hour and a half before kickoff, making it so a prime seat was standing in the front row on the track at either end of the field. Alta's speed was the difference in the first half as the Hawks took a 28-14 lead on several long pass plays. But after adjusting to a zone defense in the second half, the Miners dominated the line of scrimmage and came back for a 38-34 win in another chapter of this classic rivalry. What really stood out for me was the atmosphere of a preseason game. One would have thought it was a state championship contest. There was electricity and anticipation in the air, and it was evident right off the bat that these were two of the best



Chris Nichols puts a hard hit on Alta's Zach Liston in Bingham's 38-34 victory.

teams in the state.

Other games:

* - **BINGHAM 38, SYRACUSE 3 (Nov. 6)** - Classic football rationale says to never leave timeouts in your pocket. The best example of that this year was Bingham's **Dave Peck** using his remaining TOs to prevent Syracuse from kneeling the ball and running out the clock before halftime in a 3-3 game. The clock was on zeros when **Kamron Coon** caught **Jake Bright's** block at the back of the end zone. That play blew open what had been a tight, tense game, as Bingham went on a tear to win 38-3.

* - **BINGHAM 62, JORDAN 42 (Oct. 31)** - Let's not get too carried

away and say that eventual 5A champion Bingham was ever in trouble in its first-round playoff game. The Miners did lead 41-7 at one point. But it was an interesting game that took more than three hours to play, and mostly because neither offense could be stopped in the second half.

Successful inside kicks gave the Beetdiggers some momentum in the third quarter, and Jordan's passing attack caught fire. Jordan's Alex Hart threw for 398 yards and accounted for all six touchdowns, and receiver Steve Morgan had 12 receptions for 188 yards.

Jordan couldn't make up too

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much ground though because Bingham's offensive line and running game was the difference in the game. Bingham rushed for 352 yards as **Harvey Langi** gained 159 of them and **Richie Vakupuna** had 107 yards on 12 carries.

* - **PLEASANT GROVE 12, BRIGHTON 6 (Oct. 9)** - PG coach Dale Sampson compared to it a heavyweight fight, and that's exactly what it seemed like. After the two teams scored touchdowns on tipped passes in the first quarter, they proceeded to beat the crap out of each other. Neither team could get near the end zone until Jeff Harris scored on a 7-yard run in the fourth quarter – a few plays after quarterback Dallas Lloyd was knocked out of the game.

"I'm glad it's over," Pleasant Grove's Bryan Sampson said. "It was a tough game. I knew from the first play it was going to be long game."

* - **JUAN DIEGO 12, HURRICANE 10 (Nov. 20)** - Bruce Nix caught a 31-yard "Hail Mary" pass for a touchdown to lift the Soaring Eagle to the 3A state championship game over Hurricane. Juan Diego drove 80 yards in the last 45.7 seconds for the win.

* - **HIGHLAND 49, WOODS CROSS 30 (Oct. 16)** – The Rams battled back from a 30-6 deficit, taking advantage of a converted fake punt, a wasted Woods Cross possession and a turnover to get within 30-25 at halftime. The second half was no contest, as Highland finished off its remarkable 43-0 run to clinch the Region 6 championship.

* - **HUNTER 45, LONE PEAK 37 (Nov. 6)** - Neither team was ready to go home. Hunter and Lone Peak were deadlocked 17-17 at the end of regulation in 5A state quarterfinal playoff game. So they had to duke it out in overtime to determine which team would move on to The Turf.

* - **JORDAN 35, BRIGHTON 30 (Oct. 27)** - With Jordan needing a victory on a snowy field at Hillcrest High to claim the final spot in the 5A tournament, Taylor Smith became an immediate hero for the Beetdiggers when he stepped in front of a Derek Newell pass and made an interception with 1:13 remaining to seal the win.

* - **MORGAN 28, SNOW CANYON 26 (Aug. 28)** - The Trojans and Warriors kept answering each other with scores, but timely defensive stops by Morgan made the difference in an early season non-region tilt.



Braeden Loveless smiles after kicking what would result in the game-winning field goal against Alta.

Trailing 28-20 with 3:33 to play in the game, Snow Canyon pulled within two points on Nick Bott's 2-yard touchdown run. The Warriors had to go for a two-point conversion to tie, but Morgan's Braden Saunders deflected Snow Canyon QB Austin Larsen's pass to preserve the Trojan victory.

* - **HIGHLAND 9, BOUNTIFUL 7 (Oct. 9)** - With a 7-7 deadlock at halftime, the Rams completely shut down Bountiful's offense in the second half. The decisive safety came at the end of the Braves' opening drive of the third quarter. A bad snap sent a ball sailing over Ty Talbot's head on a fourth down punt attempt. It set the Rams up to recover from a rough non-region start and claim yet another Region 6 title.

* - **SPRINGVILLE 33, SPANISH FORK 27 (Oct. 9)** - Both the Red Devils and Dons were undefeated in league play when they met. The Dons, behind the passing of Hayden Nielsen and the legs of Travis Still, took a 20-7 lead into halftime. But when Springville's Raul Delgado returned the second-half kickoff for a touchdown, the game was on.

* - **JORDAN 43, AMERICAN FORK 42 (Sept. 18)** - Hart and the 'Diggers battled back from 15 down in the fourth quarter to win the game in overtime. It was the sort of game where both teams were so exhausted they were barely standing by the time regulation ended. The Cavemen scored but missed their PAT, and Hart responded with a fade pass to McCoy Hill to tie it with a touchdown in OT.