Northwest Missouri State running back LaRon Council ran for 172 yards and Jake Soy caught a 26-yard touchdown pass in the fourth quarter to lead the Bearcats to a 30-23 win against Grand Valley State in the Division II national championship game Dec. 12 at Braly Municipal Stadium in Florence, Ala.

It’s the third championship for Northwest (14-1) and first since 1999. It also ends a string of four national runner-up finishes. The Bearcats are the only team to play in five straight championship games.

Bearcat coach Mel Tjeerdsma tied former North Alabama coach Bobby Wallace by winning his third national title. Tjeerdsma’s 29 postseason victories are a Division II record.

“Tjeerdsma said. “We’ve worked so hard for this and we’ve prepared hard. This was our goal.”

Northwest quarterback Blake Bolles broke Chris Greisen’s MIAA record for passing yards in a season. Bolles completed 15 of 23 passes for 198 yards. He threw 42 touchdowns this season and finished with 4,145 yards passing – both are MIAA records.

Council had 136 yards in the first half to help stake Northwest to a 21-0 halftime lead. Grand Valley State cut the deficit to 23-20 early in the fourth quarter, but Soy’s touchdown grab on 4th-and-4 with 10 minutes left helped seal the deal. The Lakers (13-2) had a final drive end near midfield in the final minute.

Soy caught nine passes for 118 yards and broke Ronnie West’s MIAA single-season record for receiving yards. It was the third championship game in which one team had a 100-yard rusher and a 100-yard receiver. Soy’s 27 touchdowns and 1,559 yards receiving both led the nation.

It was a Bolles pass to Council that set up the final score. Bolles scrambled out of the pocket on 3rd-and-22 before finding Council, who broke several tackles to net 18 yards. The play gave Tjeerdsma an easier decision to go for it on fourth down. Bolles laid a fade pass into Soy’s hands at the 5-yard line and Soy carried his defender into the end zone for the score.

The touchdown ended a 20-2 run by the Lakers to open the second half after Grand Valley netted 127 yards of total offense in the first. The Lakers finished with 91 yards rushing after entering the game with an average of 237.

Bearcats Claim Third National Title