



Beverly frosh eye unbeaten slate

Bill Kipouras

Salem News

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The Beverly High freshman football team will bid for an undefeated season today when the 8-0-1 Baby Panthers host Gloucester at the high school at 3 p.m.

For the record, the last time a BHS frosh squad went unbeaten was 2003 when the Patrick Bailey legacy began. He scored a mere 31 touchdowns in a 10-0 season and is the now backbone of the Panthers varsity squad that is 8-1 heading into Thanksgiving vs. Salem at Hurd Stadium.

There are no Patrick Baileys on this year's frosh team.

"At the freshman level, he was just dominant. I think he had five games in a row when he scored on the first play from scrimmage. We ran the same play, a toss to Patrick, to start every game," recalled Dave Wilbur, the longtime (and highly respected) frosh coach.

"Patrick was head and shoulders above everybody in his freshman year. Gifted, and obviously hasn't lost a step."

It might be said the 2006 frosh team appears to have it all - all but a Bailey to run like he was shot out of a cannon.

"It's a collection of good athletes and they're smart. They work hard. It's really a different bag every year and you've got to mold them. Teach them. Although a lot played Pop Warner football, most of the team did not. We have some big linemen who were overweight for Pop Warner and never played.

"Many were starting at square one," Wilbur said. "It's to their credit that this bunch has a great work ethic and we practiced hard."

Yes, six days a week at the beginning of the season, and common for the team to work out 2 1/2-3 hours a day. Wilbur was truly impressed over this team's focus and ability to respond to teaching.

"We are talented," Wilbur assured. "We didn't win games without talent."

Patrick Bailey was in a league of his own, a special kid, as Wilbur said, but the 2006 team has a number of good athletes.

Guard Ryan Flannery and tackle Ryan Gilligan, son of BHS hockey coach Bob Gilligan, have been mainstays on the line. Nick Kozlowski, a guard-linebacker, was equally valuable as a two-way performer.

You want a couple of receivers to catch the ball? Wilbur submitted Curtis Manuel, grandson of the famed Bippy Manuel, one of Beverly's all-time greats, and Justin Marrs.

Wilbur had to come up with a quarterback when varsity head coach Dan Bauer promoted freshman Mark Theriault to the JV

before even three practices took place.

Mark Hannable inherited the QB role and was a terrific leader, the coach said, running the show in textbook fashion. Hannable was Mr. Steady.

The running backs cited were Dylan Terry, Mike Clayton and Steve Dubois.

"We had 37 players at the first practice and still have 37. Nobody left. It's really a fun group and it's been very rewarding to coach them (with Mark Thomas' assistance). Their first athletic experience in high school has been a wonderful year.

"The kids had a great win over Exeter, N.H., 18-6, and Exeter was 6-0 at the time. Danvers had one loss when we played them and that was one of our better games. The tie was against a very good Lynn Classical team in a driving rain storm.

"Obviously there is some pretty good talent on the way to the varsity, but one thing these kids have to understand is that they had a great season, but this is just the beginning. The biggest jump in high school ball is from the freshman to the sophomore level. They will be competing against older kids next season. They must realize they've got to get into the weight room in January to be successful. Coach (Dan) Bauer will have the weight room open to them.

"And no matter what the result against Gloucester, I'm both proud and pleased to have coached this team."

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Bruins, Celtics and Boston College basketball tickets will be available at the Grosvenor Park Nursing Center raffle today (1-3 p.m.) when the facility stages its annual Fair. The event is a fund raiser for the residents. Grosvenor Park is located on the Salem side of Vinnin Square on the Swampscott-Salem line. The raffle will be open until the 1 o'clock start.

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Eric Oxford, the Danvers High first baseman, is another Falcon all set for college. He's committed to Division 1 Holy Cross of the Patriot League and like teammate **Colin Lynch** at Wheaton, Oxford got a great package, reportedly 75 percent. Crusaders' coach **Craig Najarian** had told Oxford he was among his top five recruits.

Oxford said he attracted Holy Cross' interest at some showcases, as well as in the Bay State Games.

"Coach Najarian told me right away they had a strong interest in me and I was in the mix of five prospects. I was delighted. It's a great school and the school I was looking at anyway," Oxford said. "He said I'd have a chance to play right away. It all sounded too great. I loved it."

He's hit .330 and .345 in his two seasons at Danvers after transferring from St. John's Prep. No, Oxford didn't worry about losing Division 1 scholarship exposure at the Prep.

Oxford, a sweeper and captain on the Danvers boys soccer team, said he never considered the Prep's exposure.

"I just wasn't comfortable at the Prep," he said. "**Roger Day** is one of the best coaches in the state, New England and maybe the whole country. I definitely wanted to play for him. That's the main reason I went to Danvers High. I knew he would prepare me for college."

Oxford is in the National Honor Society and ranks in the top 10 percent of his class.

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