



Beverly is more than just Bailey

By Phil Stacey
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BEVERLY - Let's get the obvious out of the way first.

Pat Bailey is a terrific high school football player. The Beverly High senior tailback had himself another monster game Saturday night at Endicott Stadium, rushing for 263 yards and three touchdowns as the Panthers neatly discarded Lynn English, 41-12, in their season opener before close to 2,500 fans.

The 5-foot-7 whirling dervish that is Pat Bailey broke open a close game by scoring on runs of 47, 6 and 72 yards in the third quarter. Bailey juked, jived and jitterbugged all over the synthetic turf field, leaving English defenders grasping at air as he darted past them on virtually all of his 17 carries.

In his last five games dating back to the final four contests of last season - all Beverly wins - the reigning Salem News Player of the Year has rushed for a mind-boggling 1,032 yards and 15 TDs combined. That, my friends, is the stuff of schoolboy legend.

Yes, Bailey is the most skilled, exciting player in the entire Northeastern Conference - if not the entire North Shore. It would be tough to argue that.

But he's not the entire Beverly High team. Far from it.

Whether you want to believe it or not, it's not a one-man show in Pantherland; the Beverly Baileys, they are not. Rather, they are a team with one superstar and a slew of fine complimentary players who are intent on making big things happen in 2006.

"Pat's the best guy around; everyone knows that. But what they don't know is that we have a lot of depth, a lot of other guys who can play, too," said junior running back Greg Pierce. He also had himself a terrific game Saturday, rushing for 102 yards (all in the second half) and scoring a pair of touchdowns, including a nifty 38-yard run.

"People might not know who our other guys are, but believe me, they're solid. And this year, everything is going to come together for us."

Bailey himself would be the first to agree with that statement. Always quick to deflect attention away from himself, his face lit up when he was asked about his teammates in the aftermath of Saturday's triumph.

"We know what others don't know," said Bailey with a devious grin. "By that I mean, if other people want to think I'm the whole show and focus just on me, fine; we know better. We have so many guys on this team who can play, guys who people are going to have to step up and take notice of this season."

Where do you start when pointing out the many contributors to this satisfying opening night victory, one that enabled the Panthers to win their fifth straight game (over two seasons) for the first time in seven years?

Well, start with the offensive line. The grunts up front never get the proper credit they deserve, but it would be a crime to omit them in this instance. Their precise blocking and trapping paved the way for their teammates to rush for 422 yards on just 35 carries, an average of better than 12 yards a carry.

Center Brian Kutera had himself a particularly fine game. His job was to slow down English's monster nose tackle, Alejandro Perez, so that Bailey & Co. could work their magic on the sweeps and traps that the Panthers like to run. Despite giving his opponent an advantage in size, Kutera put the clamps down, especially in the second half as the Black-and-Orange rang up 34 points.

Joining Kutera as the primary blockers up front were guards Liam Blodgett and Levi Anderson, tackles Nick Traicoff and Nick Doig, and tight end Pat Abate. On a muggy night this unit seemed to get stronger as the game wore on, their offseason conditioning paying huge dividends.

"You should have seen how hard these guys worked to get ready for the season," said captain J. Michael Nardella, who finished with a game-high 10 tackles. "Those guys on the line just worked (English) down tonight. It all comes back to that conditioning."

Nardella also opened some big holes as a fullback, allowing Bailey, Pierce and senior David Molk (47 yards on 4 carries) ample running room. Abate, the 5-11, 220-pound junior tight end, hauled in a pretty pass from senior quarterback Nick Tanzella (6-for-12, 56 yards) in the right corner of the end zone from 10 yards out to start the scoring for Beverly in the second quarter, and senior wideout Ben Lawler threw a vicious block to spring Bailey for his second TD.

Defensively, the Panthers were just as impressive. Senior linebacker Nate Verry had a pair of sacks; Pierce also had a fine game with eight tackles and an interception; Traicoff, a lineman, was in on five tackles; and junior Chris Jason also picked off a pass late.

So go ahead and think that Beverly is just one good player and a bunch of no-names. But don't wonder how those no-names beat you after the fact.

"People's perception that Pat is the whole team can actually help us," said Nardella. "Truthfully, we don't have a lot of other big name guys. But the smaller name guys are a big, big help to us. Pat is so humble that he'd be the first one to tell you that."

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