



Passing fancy makes Panthers a more complete team

Salem News

Phil Stacey

BEVERLY - Who would have guessed, after almost 120 years of playing football, that Beverly High could beat teams with its passing game?

Running the football has been a staple for so long in the Garden City that it's practically part of the town charter. *Thou shall run the football early, often and always. No exceptions.*

Certainly, the Panthers' bread-and-butter remains its running game: the counters, sweeps, traps and delays that have defined Beverly High football since leather helmets were in fashion. With a once-in-a-generation running back in senior Patrick Bailey lining up in the backfield this fall, that formula won't be changing anytime soon.

But even the finest steaks need some seasoning to enhance the flavor and make it perfect.

In that regard, consider the Beverly High passing attack as the perfect compliment to Bailey, Beverly's meal ticket.

"It's unbelievable knowing we can throw the football - and have a lot of success doing so," said Panther senior quarterback Nick Tanzella, who completed 10 of 12 passes for 116 yards and a touchdown, nicely complimenting Bailey's 170-yard, two-TD performance as the hosts roasted Swampscott, 34-7, before a crowd of 1,800 on a sunny Friday afternoon at Hurd Stadium.

"It adds a whole new dimension to our offense," added senior linebacker Nate Verry. "Teams can't stop Pat Bailey even if they try, but now that we can pass the ball too, it opens everything up."

You won't have a hard time convincing anyone from Swampscott of that.

Beverly (3-0), playing its most dominant two-way game since - yes, it's safe to say this - the dawn of the 21st century, had possession of the football on five separate drives and scored on all five of them. They completely controlled the clock, eating up more than 28 of the game's 44 minutes, while also grinding out 20 first downs and an even 400 yards of total offense.

Perhaps most telling was the Orange-and-Black converted 6-of-8 attempts on third down - and the two times they didn't, they went for it on fourth down and got the desired result in both instances.

"They did everything that they wanted to do, and we couldn't stop it," said Swampscott coach Steve Dembowski, his team now an uncharacteristic 1-2. "They split the edge and crushed us on the outside. Tanzella made all the big plays, too, especially on third-and-long. And we weren't sharp on either side of the ball."

Tanzella, who was as cool as a fish in the Arctic Ocean, used the rollout pass time and time again to great success. Following a blocker - usually senior captain J. Michael Nardella, who has begun to perfect the role of what a high school fullback is all about - to either side, the 5-foot-10, 165-pound signal caller connected with junior wideout Sean Deady for four passes, good for 42 yards; junior end Pat Abate three times for 34 yards, including a 5-yard scoring strike; captain Matt McAniff twice for 32 yards, and Nardella once for an 8-yard first down completion.

On the season, Tanzella has completed two-thirds of his passes (22 of 33) for 247 yards and three touchdowns and no interceptions.

"Everything's clicking right now," Deady said of the passing game. "Nick's really been on his game, and we've been getting open.

"I lined up a few times today, and because (Swampscott) was so concerned about covering Pat, I had no one on me. I couldn't believe it! So when that happened, Nick just got me the ball."

Beverly's newfound passing attack will certainly keep teams honest and prevent them from putting as many as nine and 10 men in the box. But it certainly won't change their primary focus of shutting down Bailey as the Panthers' No. 1 option.

In what is becoming a routine performance for the 5-foot-7 1/2, 155-pound tailback, he scored twice on runs of 1 and 38 yards, stretching a slim six-point lead into a comfortable 20-point cushion. Bailey now has 561 yards rushing and eight TDs (six rushing) in his first three games.

Tanzella (a 4-yard sneak up the middle), ever-improving junior back Greg Pierce (72 yards on 7 carries, including a 28-yard TD burst up the middle) and Tanzella's hookup with Abate accounted for Beverly's other scores.

Swampscott's lone touchdown came when quarterback John Cassidy (12 for 24, 131 yards) hit Jordan Kelly with an 11-yard scoring pass in the second quarter.

If you're a Beverly High football fan, you have to hope that Beverly left plenty of reserves in the tank. The Panthers play their most meaningful non-Thanksgiving Day game in years next Friday night, travelling to Miller Field in Winthrop to face the defending Northeastern Conference champion Vikings in a battle of unbeatens. The winner could go a long way towards determining who wins the league title - something Beverly hasn't done in 18 years.

"We always focus on each game at hand - but I have to admit, we've been thinking about Winthrop, too," said Verry. "They're a great team and have three good running backs and a very quick line. We'll have to be at our best next (Friday)."

If the Panthers play anything like they did yesterday - especially if its passing game stays in gear - then they'll have more than a fighting chance.

Phil Stacey is the sports editor of The Salem News. Contact him at 978-338-2650, or by e-mail at pstacey@ecnnews.com.

Copyright © 1999-2006 cnhi, inc.