



## Panthers happy with win, but hardly satisfied

**On Football , Phil Stacey**

Salem News

BEVERLY - The cheesy music that blared from the Hurd Stadium sound system in the minutes prior to Saturday afternoon's kickoff was a steady stream of early 1980s arena rock anthems: "Working for the Weekend" by Loverboy, "The Night Owls" by Little River Band, and the like.

Had there been a video scoreboard at Hurd, the appropriate viewing on this day would have been another staple of the early 80s: the equally cheesy comedy "Too Close For Comfort".

That TV sitcom, starring Ted Knight and his "Cosmic Cow" cartoon character, could have perfectly described the situation for the Beverly Panthers Saturday afternoon.

Seemingly in charge of their contest with visiting Lynn Classical from the first period on, the Panthers found themselves having to sweat out in the final minutes before finally emerging with a 31-22 victory in front of a healthy crowd on this cold, windy afternoon.

"It got a little close there at the end," admitted Beverly tailback Pat Bailey, who turned in what has become a typical Bailey performance: 158 yards rushing and three scores, including a 77-yard kickoff return. "Closer than we would have liked."

Perhaps this is a sign that the Panthers are finally back to being one of the upper echelons teams in the Northeastern Conference, one that considers a November win against a very good Classical team something to feel good about - but also realizing that there's a lot of work to be done before their final two games.

Understand, this came after Beverly ran its record to 7-1, in the process accumulating their most victories in a single season in nearly a decade. It came on a day when they shot out to a 21-0 lead after one quarter, led 28-7 a little over 13 minutes in and held a commanding 31-14 advantage at the half.

It happened on a day when Bailey eclipsed 1,000 yards rushing for the second straight season, giving him 1,062 yards in just 61/2 games. He was also unofficially in on nine tackles from his defensive back spot and picked off a Classical pass with 11 seconds to play, ending their final threat.

But the Beverly players know there is much work to be done before Friday night's clash in Gloucester against the 7-1 Fishermen.

"Anytime you jump out to a (21-0) lead like that, you have to prevent from getting complacent," said senior captain J. Michael Nardella, who scored the game's first touchdown on a 2-yard plunge from his fullback spot. "We have to keep playing hard for four full quarters."

The Rams' passing game had the Panther defenders back on their heels for much of the second half. Long known as a team that packs it in tight offensively and beats teams with a power running game, quarterback Michael Quintana and his receivers showed the Lynn school can be just as dangerous by going to the air.

Quintana completed 18 of 24 passes for 255 yards and bought himself time on numerous occasions by scrambling away from Panther tacklers. When he released the ball, his receivers not only got themselves open, but found a way to generate yards after the catch upfield.

"They just kept coming and coming at us," said junior outside linebacker Chris Bushey, 17, who may have had his best defensive game with a fumble recovery, a forced fumble and seven tackles. "They're so good offensively that they can make things happen quickly."

Fortunately for the hosts, they were able to make some big plays defensively of their own.

A David Mock fumble recovery on his own 10-yard line gave Beverly the ball back just as it looked like Classical might tie the game at 7-all in the first quarter. Three plays after Mock's fumble recovery, Bailey found a seam on the left side and outran the Ram defense for a 68-yard TD run.

On the ensuing kickoff, L Lazar Cuko's squib kick was flubbed by Classical (thanks to a big hit by Mock) and Bushey fell on the pigskin at the Ram 19. On third down Bailey scored again, this time from 19 yards out, for a 21-0 lead after one period.

"Getting those two fumbles early on was huge, absolutely huge," said Bailey.

Beverly's biggest defensive stand came when Classical went for it - and failed - on fourth and two from its own 11 early in the fourth quarter and trailing by nine points. Although the Panthers couldn't put the game away by scoring themselves, they chewed valuable time off the clock and left the visitors with the ball on their own 1-yard line with less than six minutes to play.

Quintana gallantly tried to lead his team downfield and reached the Beverly 14 before his desperation end zone pass was picked off by Bailey, ending the threat - and the game.

"We have to cut down on giving up the big play," said Nardella, the Panthers' defensive leader at inside linebacker. "Doing that against Gloucester is going to mean big trouble for us. There's definitely room for improvement.

"Having seven wins, that's nice and all, but we want to do better. Getting to eight or nine wins - we'll need to make better decisions to make that happen."

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