



Football Game of the Week:Swampscott hopes to plug holes, slow Bailey

By Matt Jenkins

Salem News

Swampscott High football coach Steve Dembowski uses a rotation of eight players on the defensive line. If the group combines for exactly zero tackles in their showdown with Northeastern Conference rival Beverly, the veteran Big Blue coach will feel just fine.

Even though Swampscott (1-1) faces the difficult assignment of slowing down Beverly High and its spectacular senior tailback, Pat Bailey, at Hurd Stadium tomorrow afternoon (3 p.m.), Dembowski would prefer it if his front four avoided the spotlight.

"When those guys do a good job, they don't get tackles," Dembowski said. "They really need to keep the linebackers free to make tackles. People don't recognize the quality of play they're giving us."

Through two games, Dembowski has no complaints with the way defensive line starters Dorsey Dobias, Brian Palangi, Sam Johnson and John Hicks are playing. Reserves Sergey Kuperman, Mike DePippo, Frank Barile and Paul Vousboukis haven't been too shabby, either.

That type of play has to continue if Swampscott wants to slow Bailey - who already has a North Shore-best 361 rushing yards and seven touchdowns - while at the same time avoid slipping behind in the NEC title hunt.

The Big Blue already dropped in the standings with their 34-27 loss to Lynn Classical last Saturday. Stopping Bailey and the Panthers (2-0) could be critical for them to remain in the conference chase.

"That (loss to Classical) makes this huge," Dembowski admitted. "If we win (tomorrow's) game, then we're still in title contention. If we lose, then we're hoping on a wing and a prayer the rest of the way. From that standpoint, it's a big game."

Beverly leads the all-time series 21-19-1, but the Big Blue have won the last six meetings and 10 of the last 12. The Panthers haven't defeated Swampscott at Hurd since a 32-8 victory in 1998, and head coach Dan Bauer has not defeated Swampscott in his four-year tenure at Beverly.

Swampscott is a difficult team to prepare for because of the spread offense it executes.

Quarterback John Cassidy and receiver Brendan Garner, the Swampscott captains, have developed a great chemistry. Garner already has 12 catches for 202 yards and three touchdowns, including a game-winner in the final minute during Swampscott's 14-7 opening-day victory over Bishop Fenwick.

Duplicating that type of offense to prepare for this week's game has not been easy for Bauer.

"I think the thing about the spread is that you have to have your better athletes on the field to give yourself a chance to defend," Bauer said.

"You have to have good athletes at receiver and quarterback and be able to run the ball. People get enamored with the pass, but you have to stop the run game to have a chance. Sometimes people look past that."

Stopping Beverly's run game, on the other hand, has been extremely challenging for its last six opponents. Dating back to last season, the Panthers have won six straight contests, their longest streak since 1994. During that time, the 5-foot-71/2, 160-pound Bailey has rushed for 1,130 yards and 17 touchdowns.

"If you let him get in the open field, he can score every time," Dembowski said about Bailey. "But he's even more effective this year because they're not just using him. (Quarterback Nick) Tanzella is throwing well and (captain J. Michael) Nardella is playing well at fullback. All their backs are giving them production. Bailey is the No. 1 guy to stop, but they've proven in two games that they're not relying on just him. That makes him even more dangerous."

Tanzella, a senior in his second year as a starter, has thrown two touchdown passes, Nardella has been solid at fullback and linebacker, and junior Greg Pierce has been a nice change of pace back for Bailey, having run for 132 yards and two touchdowns so far.

Beverly has not won more than six football games in a row since winning eight straight between the 1992 and 1993 seasons.

"This is a good challenge for us. Swampscott is a very good team," Bauer said. "You're never sure (how good you are) in preseason. You know what you have coming back, but you don't know how it stacks up against the league."

At a glance

Who: Swampscott (1-1) vs. Beverly (2-0)

When: Tomorrow, 3 p.m.

Where: Hurd Stadium, Beverly

What's at stake: Beverly has a six-game win streak and has aspirations of winning its first Northeastern Conference championship since 1988. Swampscott, meanwhile, is trying to bounce back from last week's 34-27 loss to Lynn Classical. The Big Blue know that another league loss could all but eliminate them from title contention.

Key matchup: Swampscott defensive linemen - starters **Dorsey Dobias, Brian Palangi, Sam Johnson** and **John Hicks** as well as reserves **Sergey Kuperman, Mike DePippo, Frank Barile** and **Paul Vouboukis** - against Beverly tailback **Pat Bailey**. The senior captain has scored five rushing touchdowns for the Panthers this season and is well on his way to another 1,000-yard season. Swampscott's front four needs to plug the holes and let its linebackers come up to make the tackles.

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