



Beverly searching for confidence before hitting NEC South schedule

Salem News

Moving The Chains

Matt Jenkins

There may be a sense of urgency in the **Beverly** High football program this week, but head coach **Dan Bauer** isn't showing any signs of it.

The Panthers played well early in the season and looked like a team that would compete for the Northeastern Conference South Division crown. But now, in the midst of a three-game losing streak - including telling losses to **Gloucester** (34-7) and **Revere** (7-0) - the Panthers appear to be reeling.

Beverly needs to put things back together, and it has only one more week of preparation before it gets into the NEC South portion of its schedule. Tomorrow's home game against **Peabody** at Hurd Stadium (2:30 p.m.) will be the final tune-up before the games count toward the postseason.

"We were obviously down from last Friday night's game (against Revere)," Bauer said. "We thought we'd play better. Since then, the kids have responded with a couple great practices. It's a matter of regaining focus and confidence."

If all of this was going down last week, the Panthers probably would have felt good about the Tanners coming to town.

Now? Not so much.

Peabody's confidence is at a season-high after its 6-3 victory over **Danvers**, the first for head coach **Dick Woodbury**.

"We definitely needed it to build confidence," Woodbury said about his club's victory over the Falcons, courtesy of a 1-yard touchdown run by **Scott Diefenbach** in the fourth quarter. "They know how to win now, and that's a big deal. We had to get that across. They also know they've still got a lot of work to do."

Tom Ciulla is back at quarterback for the Tanners after suffering a separated shoulder in his team's opening game, which means they can run an offense that is much closer to the one they expected during the preseason.

Woodbury knows playing well on defense will be the key tomorrow. Peabody has to get to the ballcarrier in groups, especially when **Greg Pierce** is the one running with it.

On the flip side, Bauer has also been pleased with the improved play of **Brian Kureta**, **Paul Drinkwater** and sophomore quarterbacks **Mark Hannable** and **Mark Theriault**. The sophomore duo has been alternating playing time for the past two weeks.

Everyone in Pantherland knows the biggest games of the 2007 season are still down the road. But the Orange and Black need to raise their confidence level during this week's matchup.

"We look at every game is a big game. We take that approach no matter what," Bauer said. "We're still trying to find some identity on both sides of the ball, but there have been improvements. Unfortunately, it hasn't shown up the last couple of weeks in the win column."

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Beverly isn't the only local team trying to rid itself of a losing streak. **Danvers** and **Ipswich** each enter this weekend at 0-4, while **Salem** and **Bishop Fenwick** have each dropped two straight after winning their first two contests.

The possibility of Danvers and Ipswich putting the breaks on their skids is unlikely, with the Falcons meeting Lynn Classical tonight at Manning Field in Lynn, and the Tigers hosting 3-1 North Reading tonight.

Salem needs to find more offensive options outside of junior running back **Melikke Van Alstyne** if it is going to top Winthrop at Bertram Field.

Fenwick seems to be the most likely candidate of ending its slump, even though it has to travel to Rhode Island. The Crusaders play Central Falls, a team they beat 35-0 last year. The biggest concern for coach **David Woods'** club has been a recent influx of injuries.

Fenwick, which played without key starters **Lucas Sobezenski**, **Cody Johnson** and **T.J. Fossa** in last week's loss to Hingham, needs to get healthy before heading into the Catholic Central League schedule later this month.

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It seems like the games just keep getting tougher for unbeaten **Masconomet**.

After the Chieftains (4-0) dismantled Bishop Fenwick, 35-14, in the third week of the season, they had to bounce back and play long-time Cape Ann League rival **Hamilton-Wenham** the following weekend. Then, after their 29-22 victory over the Generals, they immediately started looking at the next challenge.

They didn't have to look very far.

Masco faces its first *real* test tonight when **Wilmington** comes to Topsfield. In truth, it's not that beating Hamilton-Wenham and Bishop Fenwick didn't mean anything, but Wilmington (also 4-0) is the first opponent that could prevent the Chieftains from advancing to the postseason. This is a game that truly counts.

"It's a big one," Masco coach **Jim Pugh** said. "We've got our hands full. We only play five games that count (toward the postseason in the CAL Large), so every one is a big one."

For the third straight week, Masco's defense will be asked to contain a very talented back. Wilmington's **Ernie Mello** is as dangerous a back as you'll find.

He had a night that will go down in Wilmington school lore two weeks ago, carrying the ball 41 times for 393 yards and seven (that's not a misprint - *seven*) touchdowns in a 47-33 win over Lawrence.

Playing strong, team defense will be a key for the Chieftains tonight.

"Good high school backs will not be brought down by one kid," Pugh said. "You better have people going to the ball pretty quick. Fortunately, that's one of our strengths. We have to do a better job tackling, though. That will be a big part of the game."

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Manning Field in Lynn is hosting a doubleheader tonight. State powerhouse **Everett** plays against host **Lynn English** (5 p. m.) in the opener, with **Danvers** and **Lynn Classical** meeting in the nightcap (approximately 8 p.m.).

English and Everett played a two-game series in 2001 and 2002 with the Crimson Tide winning both - 26-6 in Lynn in 2001, and 35-5 in the 2002 tilt in Everett.

The Bulldogs are predictably playing with the "we have nothing to lose" approach; it's safe to say it would be the Upset of the Year if they prevailed tonight.

Moving the Chains is a column on North Shore high school football that runs each Friday during the fall season in The Salem News. Contact staff writer Matt Jenkins at mjenkins@ecnnews.com, or at 978-338-2648.

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