



## Beverly still hasn't delivered its best shot

By Mike Grenier , Staff Writer

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BEVERLY - Beverly High's work-in-progress football team is 2-0 in the Northeastern Conference small school division after downing upstart Saugus, 19-14, at Hurd Stadium Saturday.

But it's an uncomfortable 2-0 record, which isn't necessarily such a bad thing for the Panthers.

Beverly did get immense satisfaction from seeing senior Greg Pierce, a truly gifted and intelligent runner, tear up the Saugus defense for 221 yards on a season-high 29 carries, pushing his season total to 1,122 yards.

"He's one of the best backs around - we couldn't take him down," Saugus (4-2) coach Mike Broderick said of Pierce. "Our goal was to contain him, and we couldn't do it. He made us pay."

Still, the Panthers (4-3 overall) felt that they shouldn't have had to sweat out the fourth quarter, when Saugus narrowed it to 19-14 on quarterback Bret Reid's one-yard plunge. Beverly was stout on defense, limiting the Sachems to 118 yards on the ground, but it left too many points on the field.

"If we'd won 44-0, we'd come back to practice next week saying, 'What do we need to work on?'" shrugged Liam Blodgett, one of the linemen who provided excellent blocking for Pierce. "But after a game like this, we *know* we have to get better.

"The 2-0 part is really important to us. I mean, it's a fact that we're 2-0, and that's where we want to be (in the conference race). But we have to get better in the red zone. We had some opportunities down there (inside the Saugus 20), and we didn't do anything with them."

Pierce accounted for all three touchdowns for Beverly, including a superb 40-yard run where he shed tacklers as naturally as a golden retriever sheds his own fur, yet the Panthers also had three deep drives that stalled. In baseball, that would be called warning track power that results in a routine out. In this case, Saugus got the easy out and was able to hang around until late in the game.

"We need to be more efficient when we get close to the end zone," said Beverly coach Dan Bauer. "We ate up some time with our offense and kept the ball out of Saugus' hands that way, but we didn't capitalize enough on our opportunities. The defense sealed the deal for us at the end."

Bauer isn't all doom and gloom, of course. He has to like a lot of the things his team is doing. While Pierce is a dominant attacker, junior Rashad Sims (6 carries, 42 yards) is proving to be a solid complementary back. Sophomore quarterback Mark Theriault went the distance against Saugus and played with more confidence, hitting on 3 of 5 passes for 46 yards. Senior wide receiver Sean Deady, who missed the Peabody game two weeks ago with an injury, looked sure-handed, finishing with three receptions in the opening half. And the offensive line was a huge plus as the Panthers finished with 266 yards on the ground.

"It's good to be 2-0 in our second season," said Bauer, referring to the head-to-head games in the NEC small division. "You can see things coming together a little bit, but it's going to be a dogfight the rest of the way. It's not going to get any easier."

Beverly hits the road Friday night to play a 4-3 Marblehead team that is coming off a win over Danvers. After that the Panthers travel to Swampscott, which is probably the consensus favorite in the NEC small, and then they come home to play ever dangerous Winthrop. All three are divisional games, and none is a guaranteed 'W.' None is a guaranteed loss either, so there is plenty of hope in the Beverly camp.

"It feels good to be 2-0," said Beverly center Brian Kureta. "The coaches will find something to yell at us about, and that's (all right) because we need to keep getting better. The red zone offense is what they'll talk about next week. That will be the focal point."

His teammate, Blodgett, says Beverly is a team on the rise but one that isn't close to hitting its peak. "We still have something to strive for," he said.

They're also very much in the race, which is all they can ask for with the season winding down.

*Mike Grenier is a staff writer at the Salem News. He can be reached by phone at 978-338-2676 or by e-mail at [mgrenier@ecnnews.com](mailto:mgrenier@ecnnews.com).*

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