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Film study bodes well for Beverly

By Phil Stacey
Sports editor

SALEM - They were so enthusiastic talking about the films they watched that you have thought the members of the Beverly High football team were referring to such modern teenage staples as "Knocked Up", "Wedding Crashers" or the instant classic, "Superbad".

Instead, the films that many of the Panthers raved about in the aftermath of yesterday's 28-14 holiday triumph over host Salem were the game tapes they studied ... and studied ... and studied in preparation for yesterday's 109th clash with the Witches.

"We ate the film up getting ready for this week. I mean, we really emphasized it," said Panther left guard and captain **Liam Blodgett**.

"I think it made a huge difference for us, especially on their pre-snap reads. It gave us a huge advantage. It's the small things that win games like this, and that really paid off."

Blodgett's neighbor on the offensive line, center **Brian Kureta**, echoed similar sentiments about his team's viewing sessions leading up to Thanksgiving.

"We watched hours and hours of film on them. We couldn't have been any more prepared," beamed Kureta.

Whatever the Panthers saw worked wonders in terms of what they displayed over 48 minutes at Bertram Field yesterday. Playing their most complete game of 2007, the Black and Orange ran for 277 yards and threw for another 102.

Just as importantly, they owned the line of scrimmage and the point of attack all day long, whether they were moving the football or trying to stop it.

"It was our best game in all three areas: offense, defense and special teams. That's a hell of a thing to be able to do on Thanksgiving," Beverly head coach **Dan Bauer** said.

While the offensive line was busy opening holes for running backs **Greg Pierce** (206 yards, 2 TDs) and junior **Rashad Sims** (59 yards on 11 carries), the defensive line was busy plugging those very holes and making life difficult for Salem's 1,000-yard rusher, junior **Melikke Van Alstyne** (43 yards on 20 carries).

"To be totally honest, they had a phenomenal day," said 17-year-old Salem captain **Garrett**

Cauley. "I have a lot of respect for that Beverly team."

Beverly's offensive line — **Paul Drinkwater** at left tackle, Blodgett at left guard, Kureta at center, **Levi Anderson** at right guard, **Ken Mahoney** at right tackle and **Pat Abate** at tight end - also got plenty of words of wisdom during the week. Former BHS coaches **Bill Hamor** and **Roger Rosinski** both talked to them about the importance of doing their jobs on Thanksgiving, as did acting principal **Sean Gallagher**, who formerly played and coached at Salem.

"Coach Rosinski came and talked to us (linemen) on Sunday," said Blodgett, who also recovered a fumble on defense. "He told us, 'Ultimately, boys, it's going to come down to the trenches. You win the trenches, you'll probably win the game.'"

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A lot of credit must be given to **Matt Paine** of Salem, who was a virtual demon on the field the entire afternoon. Perhaps the ball was scented, as Paine seemed to a nose for it all day, unofficially being credited with a game-high 13 tackles.

Normally a cornerback, Paine was asked to "spy" on Pierce in the first half; essentially, following him wherever Beverly's star back would go.

"It's tough to lose this last one," admitted the 17-year-old Paine. "We all gave 110 percent; we couldn't give much more."

Van Alstyne also had a stellar game defensively from his spot in the Salem secondary, coming up to make 10 tackles. Captain **Chris Al-Nabulsi** and fellow seniors **Kevin Holding** and **Justin Louf** were all credited with five stops.

Two players made seven tackles for the Panthers: senior **Chris Bushey** and junior **Joe Santamaria**.

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Beverly's Drinkwater, on what it means to beat Salem in the final game of his career: "This is just the biggest thing you can do in your Beverly High career. This is the only game that matters. It feels so good to go to someone else's house and take control."

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The Panthers have now won five straight holiday meetings over Salem for the first time since 1955, when they finished a run of six straight victories against the Witches. They now lead the 109-year-old series, 53-49-7.

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The Bowdoin-bound Pierce spoke for all of his fellow 20 Panther seniors when wrapping up the 2007 season.

"It feels so good for us seniors to end this way," he said. "We were put in a tough predicament after last year's senior class had so much success, and there were really high expectations for us. But we grew together as a team and got better and better, to the point we played our best, most complete game of the season today."

Pierce said he was particularly happy for the senior linemen, who got to block for a 1,000-yard rusher for three straight years. In addition to Pierce's record-breaking 1,648-yard season this fall, ex-Panther **Pat Bailey** bested 1,000 yards in both 2005 and 2006.

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Other Salem players who need to be recognized: center **Brett Gauthier**, who did a nice job on his back-blocking; **Chris Dunston** on the defensive line; Al-Nabulsi, who played both outside and middle linebacker; and sophomore **James Labao**, who recovered a fourth quarter fumble.

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Yesterday's 50/50 winner went home happy, that's for sure. **Steve Dibble** of Salem, whose son **Ben Dibble** is a sophomore for the Witches, was hawking tickets, calling it "the biggest pot of the decade" on the Salem side of the field.

Guess he was right; the winner took home a cool \$1,841.