

Sports

Panthers run wild

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BEVERLY, MASS. - As the rains diminished and the wind picked up, the full moon tried desperately to peer through the breaking clouds and down upon the damp field as if to get its own glimpse of last Friday's important football game.

After all, Marblehead football coach Doug Chernovetz was likely hoping the full moon would shed some magic on his Magicians as they needed an almost flawless effort to keep their hopes of a title alive against their Northeastern rivals from Beverly.

Marblehead entered the game with a 4-3 record in third place behind both Swampscott and Beverly. The Panthers were in their own battle with Swampscott for sole possession of first place and were looking to remain unbeaten in league play and dispatch the Magicians further in their rearview mirror heading into the final games of the season.

Beverly, for the fourth straight time in head coach Dan Bauer's tenure, made sure its hopes and dreams weren't shattered.

The Panthers upended Marblehead, 28-7, on the road, and kept its Northeastern Conference Small title hopes alive. A win over Swampscott this weekend would likely seal those hopes.

Bauer couldn't be reached for comment, but the head coach probably had plenty of good things to talk about in practice this week.

The opening drive for Marblehead showed promise as the Magicians drove the ball inside the Beverly 30-yard line. But the offense fumbled the ball away to a team that thrives on capitalizing on opponents' mistakes.

Much to Chernovetz's chagrin, the Panthers took full advantage of the turnover and marched downfield for an opening score. Beverly's drive didn't take long as Rashad Sims broke free for a 61-yard touchdown run.

Beverly took a 14-0 lead with a Greg Pierce touchdown run later in the second quarter. The Panthers' second score proved to be another gift from the Magicians, who were misaligned on the line of scrimmage.

"You can't afford to make mistakes against a good team that is well coached," Chernovetz said.

Marblehead scored first after the break when Evan Comeau scored on a 5-yard run and Ian McKinley added the PAT, bringing the score to 14-7. But that was as close as the Magicians would get.

Pierce and Sims scored touchdowns on runs of six and four yards, respectively, in the fourth quarter to run away with the game. L Lazar Cuko was perfect on his point after attempts, going 4-for-4.

Mistakes, which have plagued a young team like the Magicians all season, cost the team dearly. Marblehead now has the daunting task of must-wins in their final three games, beginning with a trip to Winthrop Friday night to take on last year's Super Bowl winners.

"We would need to win all our games and get losses from other teams," Chernovetz said of the outside chance that Marblehead could regroup and capture the division title. "Mistakes have been an ongoing problem. We're a

young, inexperienced team, but at some point we can't continue to blame inexperience – we've got to step up.”

On the other side of the coin, the Panthers will need all the discipline and good coaching they've had all season as they face Swampscott on Saturday. The Big Blue have won their last four games are 2-0 in the division and 7-1 overall, suffering their only loss against undefeated Gloucester.

Beverly goes into the game against Swampscott enjoying a four game winning streak. The Panthers are 3-0 in divisional play, 5-3 overall. The only blemishes on their season thus far are three consecutive losses in September, including a shutout at the hands of Revere.

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