



Snap the Streak: Can Magicians end Beverly's dominance?

By Matt Jenkins , Staff Writer

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There isn't a football coach in the Northeastern Conference that Marblehead's Doug Chernovetz respects more than Beverly's Dan Bauer.

Bauer introduced Chernovetz to NEC football when he hired him as an offensive coordinator/defensive backs coach for the Panthers in 2003. Bauer was later sad to see him leave the program two years later.

"He let me have a shot," said Chernovetz, now the head coach at Marblehead. "Dan, coming from (coaching at) Tufts, taught me a tremendous amount about coaching. I respect him as a man, as a coach, and I appreciate what he allowed me to do. I learned a lot from Coach Bauer."

Despite the mutual respect, it won't be all hugs and kisses when Marblehead (4-3) hosts Beverly (4-3) tomorrow night at 7 p. m. in a game that already has huge implications in the Northeastern Conference South title chase.

Although it's still early in the NEC South schedule, only three teams enter the weekend without a blemish on their league record. That number will be trimmed to either one or two after this weekend.

As a result, Beverly or Marblehead - whichever team emerges victorious tomorrow - will be in good position to make a run for the South title. Swampscott, the only other undefeated team in league play, plays at Saugus Saturday.

Beverly has dominated its series with Marblehead recently, having won the last 10 meetings. But the realigned NEC brings new hope each week.

"You get down to the end (of the schedule), you've put all the work into it, and you know there's an opportunity each week. I think that's a good thing," Bauer said. "We've always had our traditional rivalry (with Salem) on Thanksgiving, and now more (intense) rivalries will develop because a title is at stake. I'm curious to see how that goes."

The Panthers would be in a great spot with a win tomorrow night; they'd be 3-0 in league play with only games at Swampscott (Nov. 3) and home vs. Winthrop (Nov. 10) remaining. Neither the Big Blue nor the Vikings can be considered pushovers, but the league setup means increased importance with each win collected.

Marblehead hasn't had a winning season since 1992, so the fact that the Magicians are still playing meaningful games in late October could be added incentive for a young team.

Chernovetz's biggest concern, however, is the inconsistency his club has showed. Through seven games, Marblehead has alternated wins and losses each week.

"We're inconsistent right now, and I think we're a better team than that. Youth has (a lot) to do with it," Chernovetz said.

"When we play well, we can compete. We win one and then lose one.

"But I don't know how, especially as a senior, you can't get fired up to play Beverly."

The difficulty for Marblehead is that it doesn't play many seniors, however.

In fact, the only one among the Magicians' statistical leaders is Mike Sahagian, who has run for 355 yards and two touchdowns. Other than that, Marblehead's lineup is sprinkled with underclassmen as the Magicians start five sophomores and one freshman.

Both Marblehead and Beverly alternate quarterbacks, but otherwise their offenses aren't very similar.

Beverly's offensive focus is Greg Pierce, who has rushed for 1,122 yards and 11 touchdowns), and junior Rashad Sims has slid into the complementary back role with a few good weeks.

Beverly having more weapons only makes it more difficult to slow down Pierce.

"I was thinking about playing them last year and how (former BHS star Pat) Bailey hurt us. Pierce has a lot of Bailey in him," Chernovetz said. "He's got great hips, very good speed, and in one regard I don't want to say he's better, but he will lower his shoulder and try to run over a defender. We have to do well tackling and we have to contain him. I think he's Bailey-esque, if you will."

Beverly will be prepared for a more balanced Marblehead offense tomorrow night.

Junior Ian McKinley and sophomore Hayes Richardson have been battling each other for the Magicians' quarterback spot. They have a great weapon in sophomore receiver Taariq Allen, who has 12 catches for 211 yards and three touchdowns.

Chernovetz has loved the versatility brothers Evan and Dan Comeau have brought to the defensive side of the ball, while freshman Ben Koopman has done an admirable job playing on the offensive line.

"Marblehead's a team that can throw it some and run it. They like to mix it up," Bauer said. "Defensively, they get after it. They won a game with a blocked punt, so their special teams are good, too."

Tale of the tape

Who: Beverly vs. Marblehead

When: Tomorrow night, 7 p.m.

Where: Piper Field, Marblehead

What's at stake: Although early in the league schedule, Beverly and Marblehead are each still in the hunt for the Northeastern Conference South division title. The Panthers are 2-0 in the league and Marblehead is 1-0. The winner of this game will become either the only undefeated team left or one of two unbeaten teams in the South.

Recent series history: Beverly has won the last 10 meetings between these programs. Marblehead defeated Beverly 19-13 in 1996. The Magicians, now 4-3, haven't had a winning season since 1992, when they went 6-3-1.

Unsung heroes: **Greg Pierce** gets all the headlines for Beverly, but he wouldn't be able to do so without the help of his line. **Brian Kureta**, **Liam Blodgett**, **Levi Anderson**, **Paul Drinkwater**, and **Ken Mahoney** have been outstanding all season for the Panthers. For Marblehead, meanwhile, brothers (sophomore) **Evan Comeau** and (junior) **Dan Comeau** have been extremely valuable because of their willingness to plug holes wherever they are needed.

