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# Cousins play for opposite sides in Beverly-Salem rivalry

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Beverly High sophomore linebacker Nick Kozlowski lets his performance do the talking on the football field.

Otherwise, his silence is deafening.

"Yeah, Nick is a man of few words," Beverly head coach Dan Bauer says with obvious amusement. "We had him out there with our younger group taking every snap in 90-degree heat against Wakefield in the preseason - and he didn't say 'boo'."

Kozlowski's cousin, Salem High sophomore linebacker Tyler Mason, is more talkative, but he doesn't plan to say anything to him during the 109th Beverly-Salem Thanksgiving Day game at Salem's Bertram Field.

For Mason, who has great respect for his cousin, it's an unwritten rule.

"Until we beat Beverly, I can't talk (to Kozlowski)," explained Mason. "We've played against each other in Pop Warner and now in high school, and I haven't been on the (winning) side yet. If we can win on Thanksgiving, I'll tell him all about it."

There's an interesting parallel in the two cousins playing against each other in a glorious Thanksgiving Day rivalry that dates back to 1891. Both the 15-year-old Kozlowski, a 5-foot-9, 165-pounder, and the 15-year-old Mason, a 5-foot-10, 185-pounder, have arrived ahead of schedule as playmakers for their respective teams.

Mason, who was the defensive MVP of Salem's freshman team last season, clearly earned a starting job with the varsity in preseason and has capitalized on the opportunity by leading the team in tackles. Salem coach Scott Connolly estimates that Mason is averaging 10 tackles per

game.

"He's been a stud for us on defense," Connolly said of Mason. "I could tell he was going to have a shot at starting this season, because he actually got to play against Beverly last Thanksgiving. Every year I grab a freshman who's had a great season (at the sub-varsity level) and give him a chance to play against Beverly. Mason was that freshman last year, and he ended up making a couple of tackles for the kickoff team."

Kozlowski didn't impact the Beverly varsity as quickly as his cousin, but he's getting there. After making a strong impression on special teams and defense early in the season, Kozlowski got his first start at linebacker in the Panthers 28-7 win over Marblehead on Oct. 26 and finished with seven tackles.

Bauer says that Kozlowski has a "big future", but the young player is still trying to establish himself as someone who can contribute on a regular basis.

"I'm pretty much doing what I thought I would do (as a sophomore)," said Kozlowski. "I'm getting more confidence every time I play.

"I'm looking forward to the Salem game. It's bigger than any other game we play."

The Kozlowski and Mason families are close-knit and ardent fans of both players. If Salem plays on a Friday night (which is often the case), they're there to root for Mason and the Witches. If Beverly plays on a Saturday afternoon, they're back in the stands to cheer for Kozlowski and the Panthers.

The cousins keep tabs on each other's progress. The death of their grandfather, Ron Kozlowski, back in September has made the season more poignant for both of them.

Ron Kozlowski was 75 when he collapsed from a heart attack prior to the Salem-Fitch High game in Connecticut the second week of this season. Tyler Mason played that day and was shielded from the news until he returned to Salem that night.

"My grandfather was unbelievable," said Mason. "He loved following the (Beverly and Salem) teams. He would call me after every practice and every game. He cared a lot about what I was doing."

Nick Kozlowski said his grandfather's dream was to see an article about his football-playing grandsons playing on opposite sides in the Beverly-Salem rivalry. Ron Kozlowski thought it might not happen until they were seniors.

Already proud of the two boys, he would've been ecstatic to see their rapid progress this season.

"I didn't really believe it at first," Nick Kozlowski said of his grandfather's passing. "He was where he wanted to be (a football game), and that's where it happened. Do I miss him? Of course I do."

Mason can't predict how he'll handle his emotions on Thanksgiving Day. Playing against his cousin will be a joy, but he'll also be thinking of his grandfather and how much the day would've meant to him.

"He would've loved to see both of us play (on Thanksgiving)," said Mason. "I think about him

before every game. The best I can do is to play as hard as I can for him."

You can be sure Nick Kozlowski will do the same for Beverly.