



## Unified Beverly makes a stand

By Mike Grenier , Staff Writer

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BEVERLY - The snarl was back for the Beverly High football team on a sun-kissed day here Saturday.

It didn't matter that the Panthers didn't completely dominate struggling Peabody in a 13-6 win. It made no difference that the offense wasn't exactly crisp and that the passing game is still lacking (1 for 3 for a total of six yards). Beverly still has time to fine tune those things, although it had better hurry up since every game the rest of the way has postseason implications in the Northeastern Conference small school division.

What meant the most to the Beverly players was that the team snapped a three-game losing streak, improved to 2-3 and played with an aggressive, all-for-one attitude that was sorely lacking in a 7-0 loss to Revere the previous week.

"We played as individuals (against Revere), we didn't play as a team," said senior center/defensive tackle Brian Kureta. "I don't think we could've handled another loss (to Peabody). It would've killed us."

Beverly didn't let it happen. The offensive line and Greg Pierce provided just enough punch to keep the Peabody Tanners (1-4) in a hole. Pierce, who lined up at fullback and receiver on various occasions in Beverly's successful attempt to refrain from becoming predictable, broke off touchdown runs of 41 and 53 yards and finished with 191 yards on 14 carries. He wasn't overburdened or fatigued or banged up because he got some help from junior Rashad Sims, who chipped in 24 yards on 10 carries.

Sometimes Sims got the ball when everyone thought Pierce would get it, but that was the whole idea for Beverly. The Panthers wanted and needed to spread it around.

"Pierce rates with the best backs we've seen this season, and we've seen some good ones," said Peabody coach Dick Woodbury. "St. John's Prep and Cambridge had some good backs, but (Pierce) is up there. We had him penned in one time and he escaped (for the 53-yard touchdown)."

Meanwhile, the Beverly defense kept Peabody out of the end zone until the final minute, when Scott Diefenbach plunged in from the one-yard line to narrow it to 13-6. Peabody then recovered an onside kick, seemingly reviving its chances, but it was called for a penalty on the play. A second try at an onside kick was recovered by Beverly and sophomore quarterback Mark Theriault was able to run out the clock by taking a knee a couple of times.

The Panthers defense lived by the bend-but-don't-break pattern. Sophomore Mark D'Addario (14 carries, 73 yards), Nicholas Hiou (11 carries, 69 yards), Diefenbach (8 attempts, 40 yards) chewed up the middle of the field for Peabody, but the Tanners couldn't seal the deal when they drove inside the Beverly 30.

"We made some huge stops when we had to," said senior Liam Blodgett, a Beverly captain who had a big fumble recovery and a great all-around day up front. "We kind of looked at each other on defense and said, 'Hey, we need to do it right now,' and we did. Peabody wasn't a bad team. They have some good young talent."

The Beverly coaches felt Blodgett had the best game of any lineman on the team this season against Peabody, but he shook off the compliments. If he was animated, it was because the team's emotional spark was back. The Revere game had taught the Panthers a tough lesson: you just don't show up and win.

"We're out there barking against Revere and we had no (business) doing that," said Blodgett. "We didn't come off the ball at all; we had no fire or intensity. We played not to lose instead of trying to win. We overlooked Revere. We could be 4-1 right now and not 2-3.

"When we came back here Monday, we had a team meeting (without the coaches). We talked about being a unified one. It starts with the sophomores and the scout team and goes all the way to the captains and the starters. We talked about being aggressive and playing together. We call it a unified one. We have to have that the rest of the season."

Beverly travels to Danvers Friday night and the Panthers now understand they can't take it lightly even though the Falcons are 0-5. The next five games are against NEC divisional foes and the meaning of every contest is magnified.

"It was a must-win today - we would've been really down if we'd lost," said Pierce. "But now every game we play for the rest of the year is a must game."

The Panthers would like to project themselves in the NEC small division race. It's going to take toughness and even better execution than they showed against Peabody.

The snarl will have to be there, too. All the time.

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