



## Game of the Week: Are they 'Ram' tough? Beverly hopes streak continues against Classical

By Matt Jenkins , Staff Writer  
Salem News

Beverly High football coach Dan Bauer didn't actually hear any preseason rumblings about the subject. But he wouldn't be surprised if some people expect his Panthers to fall short of the level of play they established last season.

The senior class that graduated this past June was a major factor in the Panthers going 9-1 a year ago, their best finish in eight years. That same group was the catalyst for Beverly winning its final four games in 2005.

Beverly obviously increased expectations with its recent play. The Panthers may feature many new names and faces this fall, but they did nothing in their 28-13 season-opening win over Lynn English last weekend to tarnish the respect they have regained within Northeastern Conference circles.

Now, Beverly hopes to continue that trend tomorrow night at Manning Field against Lynn Classical (7 p.m.).

Still, some people might feel the Panthers are vulnerable this fall.

"When you have players like we had last year, I guess you could say that (we are vulnerable)," Bauer said. "But we're so focused on what we're trying to do and working on getting better that it's not something we spend time thinking about."

The focus for Beverly right now is a Lynn Classical (1-0) team that it has beaten the last three seasons. It's widely expected, however, that the Rams of this year will be a much tougher challenge than the Classical teams Beverly has defeated every season since 2004.

"They have a lot of speed. They can get to the perimeter in a hurry," Bauer said of the Rams. "Defensively, they have good closing speed and a good secondary. They have new players on the line, but they certainly played good as a unit against St. Mary's (in a 40-6 opening day win).

"I think they're always a big challenge because they're well-coached, disciplined and you have to play your best game against them."

Beverly may not have handled its first opponent in the same manner that Classical did, but they are aware that all the Panthers' talent didn't receive diplomas in June.

After his 250-yard, three-touchdown performance last Saturday against Lynn English, you can be sure senior running back Greg Pierce will get more attention than Britney Spears after the Video Music Awards.

It's not like Pierce was the only standout in the Panthers' win, however.

Junior Rashad Sims looked solid as another option out of the backfield, breaking a long touchdown run. The offensive line simply can't be overlooked, either. Returning players Liam Blodgett and Levi Anderson were outstanding as guards and Brian Kureta had a solid game at center. Tackles Ken Mahoney and Paul Drinkwater also played well in their first varsity starts.

Tight end Pat Abate and fullback David Patnaude also did an admirable job opening holes for Pierce.

"You never know what to expect in the opener," Bauer said. "A lot of thoughts go through your mind about the new combinations of players and the new group of seniors. But it also adds to the excitement to the opener. It's the culmination of the offseason, and now we're into a game week, which makes it fun too."

The main concerns for Beverly on defense will be Classical senior tailback Quivari Jackson, who ran for 111 yards and one score against St. Mary's; and Tony Johnson, who caught four passes, including two touchdowns. Signal caller Alex Watler also proved to be a very dangerous offensive weapon for the Rams.

Aside from finding a way to neutralize Classical's speed, there are also plenty of things for Beverly to improve on.

"There were some mental mistakes that we made that we need to solidify, particularly in the red zone," Bauer said. "We have to develop some consistency all throughout on defense. At some points we could have done things technique-wise to tighten things up."

"It's always a work in progress; it's never a final product. Each week you work on things to improve. Fortunately, we've got a good group of kids willing to work every day."

Tomorrow night, Bauer and the Panthers will find out if their early-season work is paying off.

"I think the No. 1 thing is containing the run, because I don't know if you can stop it. It's critical because they have an attack that can grind you down," Bauer said. "Special teams will also be important because it could come down to field position. If they have a short field, it's going to be a long evening."

"The second week of the season, you find out a lot about your team. That's where good teams excel: in that second week. You never stay the same (week to week); you're either better or worse."

If You Go

**Who:** Beverly vs. Lynn Classical

**When:** Tomorrow night (7 p.m.) at Manning Field, Lynn

**What's at stake:** The Panthers carry a four-game, series win streak into the game. Beverly has won 14 of its last 15 games dating back to 2005.

**Key Matchup:** The Beverly defense against the Lynn Classical running game. In typical Classical form, the Rams are loaded with speed and talent in the backfield. There isn't one particular back that the Panthers can

key on, so it will take a complete defensive effort to slow the Rams' offensive machine down.

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