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Beverly hoping to build off last year's success

By Jonathan Weiner / For The Item

Beverly football coach Dan Bauer also doubles as one of the assistant principals at the high school, so he's well aware that once a school year ends, it's time to let it go.

The Panthers had their best record in quite some time in 2006, winning their first three games and ending up 9-1 (ending the campaign on a six-game winning streak). Yet Bauer knows that with all that occurred last season is nothing but faded memories.

"Each year is unique as its own," said Bauer, who enters his fifth season as head coach. "Once Thanksgiving is gone, the (football) year's gone. We have new players with a new identity for this (year's) team."

The Panthers lost Pat Bailey to graduation, as he was not only the team's career rushing leader, but gave the team tremendous strength on the defensive side of the ball and on special teams as well.

"Pat was a great player for us, no question," said the coach of Bailey, who will play at Tufts.

"But we have a couple of kids that played behind him last year, and are very capable of stepping into that role."

One of those players will be senior Greg Pierce, who backed up Bailey for two seasons, and who will now get his shot at starting at back.

Pierce was also strong in the secondary last fall, and was a key reason why Beverly allowed just over 13 points per game.

Pierce is one of several returning starters for the Panthers that have plenty of experience suiting up for the Black and Orange.

Fellow senior Chris Bushey started at outside linebacker last season, and will also line up at receiver.

Teammate Pate Abate gives the team strength at tight end, as well as at defensive tackle.

One intangible that Beverly has been solid in over the years is the line on both sides of the ball, and this year's team is no exception.

Levi Anderson (G/DE) will enter his third season as a starter, and co-captain Liam Blodgett (G/DT) also provides experience and leadership.

In addition, Brian Kureta (T/DE) and Dave Patnaude (FB/CB) are solid linemen as well.

The Panthers have always had a tradition of strong-legged field goal kickers, and this season is no exception, as they have one of the best in senior Llazar Cuko. He will also do the punting.

Senior Sean Deady was a solid weapon at receiver in '06, and will also do his best to break up passes as a defensive back, while junior Rashad Sims (RB/OLB) is the lone returning non-senior.

Two new players that Bauer has been impressed with, and who believes will have an impact on Beverly's hopes in '07 are senior Sam Rinaldo (DE/OLB) and sophomore Curtis Manuel (WR/DB).

Pierce and Blodgett are the co-captains, and according to Bauer, "They complement each other well.

One's vocal, while the other's laid back. They know of our expectations of the team, and that's a bonus."

One position that's up in the air is quarterback, with last year's starter, Nick Tanzella, having graduated.

Bauer will decide between a pair of underclassmen, whose names he declined to mention.

"They're both young guys, and at that position, it comes down to maturity," said the coach. "Experience is the key for confidence and composure, and you have to have the right kid in there."

Bauer has ben greatly impressed with what he's seen of his club, as Beverly hosts English Saturday afternoon in the opener. "It's a good mix of younger and older players, and everyone has a good work ethic.

"It's (Northeastern Conference) a tough league, but we like to take things day by day, game by game."

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