



Beverly stuns Swampscott, jumps back into NEC race

By Mike Grenier
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BEVERLY — There have been many remarkable football games in the history of Hurd Stadium. The Beverly-Swampscott game here Saturday has to rank among the most dramatic in the modern era — perhaps any era.

Fighting an uphill battle against a prolific Swampscott team that appeared destined for a second straight Super Bowl appearance, Beverly clawed its way back from a nine-point fourth quarter deficit and won, 20-16, on quarterback Mark Hannable's 13-yard sprint to the end zone with 18.8 seconds remaining.

Despite the Panthers' heroics down the stretch, the home fans had to hold their collective breath in the final seconds. That's because Swampscott quarterback Chris Cameron (15 for 32, 181 yards) is an offensive time bomb from any spot on the field. But in his final, desperate attempt, Cameron was intercepted by Beverly's Curtis Manuel to end the game.

Manuel's pick, Swampscott's fifth turnover of the game, was symbolic in the sense that Beverly (7-2) played the defense of its life, holding the Big Blue to by far their lowest offensive output of the season (28 points had been their previous low).

"This," said disappointed Swampscott (7-2) coach Steve Dembowski, "was a classic upset."

Beverly's win dramatically alters the race in the Northeastern Conference Small. Surprising Marblehead is in charge with a 3-0 divisional record. Beverly is 3-1 and Swampscott is 2-1. The Panthers have one league game remaining at Winthrop this Friday, while Marblehead and Swampscott each have two NEC Small contests left, including one against each other Thanksgiving morning.

The postgame scene on the field was euphoric. The Panthers legitimately earned the celebration by storming back from a 16-7 hole in the final 10 minutes.

"This is a great win for our team," said Hannable. "We had to beat a great team. Somehow, some way, we pulled it out."

After not making a big offensive play all day, Beverly was revitalized when sophomore George Louis (3 carries, 54 yards) got a key block from tailback Rashad Sims, went outside and turned it on for a 55-yard touchdown run that narrowed it to 16-14 with 9:49 left.

Beverly eventually got the ball at midfield with only 1:32 left, but it didn't look promising when Hannable's first down pass was incomplete. However, Swampscott was penalized for holding and that essentially opened the door for a huge 22-yard completion to Sims at the Swampscott 15.

Trailing 16-14 with less than a minute left, Beverly wasn't even thinking touchdown as Hannable took a snap and burrowed two yards to the 13. Much to his surprise, he scored on the next play.

"The play was designed to get us in field goal position (for George, who is an excellent kicker)," said Hannable. "I was just trying to get us a little closer, but Rashad gave me such a great lead block that I was able to score."

Said Beverly coach Dan Bauer, "We just wanted to kill the clock, get it to fourth down and give George a chance to win it with the field goal. But our kids really executed well on the touchdown.

"Sims has been our main ballcarrier this season, but he threw the big block there. That's just unselfish football."

Swampscott was in shock not just because Beverly had taken the lead, but because one of its top two-way players, Kyle Shonio, had been taken off the field by ambulance with 1:09 left following a serious collision on defense. Dembowski reported afterwards that Shonio was talking and moving his limbs, but it was very quiet at Hurd Stadium for about 15 minutes.

"We ran out of bodies," said Dembowski, whose team played without top receiver Trevor Wheeler, who is done for the season with a torn ACL suffered in the Winthrop game two weeks ago. "Chris (Cameron) got hurt on the same play that Shonio got hurt.

"We're banged up, but Beverly hit us hard and caused some turnovers. We're going to have to get healthy really quick."

Dembowski was upset at his team's lack of productivity. Swampscott made seven trips to the red zone and scored just two touchdowns, a 14-yard run by Ilya Levin in the first quarter and a 10-yard scamper by Cameron in the second, to go along with Matt Barbuzzi's 29-yard field goal to give the Big Blue a 16-7 edge early in the fourth quarter. Cameron also threw an interception in the opening half that set up a 14-yard scoring run by Beverly's Sims that made it 7-7.

"We made 100 mistakes," said Dembowski. "We let (Beverly) hang around and they won it at the end. Give them credit for being (opportunistic). But this is the worst our offense has played all year. The turnovers were disgusting. We were terrible. We made bad decisions and that all starts with me."

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Photos



Beverly quarterback Mark Hannable throws the ball out of bounds just before Swampscott's Carl Zeller tackles him during second quarter action at Hurd Stadium Saturday afternoon. Hannable scored the game-winning touchdown on a 13-yard sprint with 18.8 seconds to play, giving the Panthers a 20-16 upset victory. Staff Photo