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Beverly, English renew acquaintances in season opener

By Matthew Roy / For The Item

Beverly and Lynn English have put on some pretty good games in the teams' long history against each other. So it seems only right that the two teams will open the season on Friday night (7) at Manning Field.

The game also marks the debut for Peter Holey as head coach of the Bulldogs.

Holey starred in English colors before heading to the Heights and becoming defensive captain of a Boston College team that was 10-2 and ranked fifth in the country in 1984.

Now, Holey has returned to his alma mater to try to turn around a team that struggled through a 2-8 campaign a season ago.

"I'm nervous, that's for sure," Holey said. "It's been a learning experience for me. Also, it's been getting my philosophy up and running. But the kids are familiar with me and they have responded very well."

That philosophy includes a revamped uniform and a newly-christened spread offense, triggered by quarterback Jesse Fowler. The new system, under offensive coordinator Brian Vaughan, will allow the Bulldogs' talented skill position players to work in space on the flanks.

"We're able to get our athletes out in space," Holey said. "And the kids like it. We have a quarterback that can run, so it's the perfect offense for him. And with the amount of skill that we have at running back and wide receiver, I'm expecting to go out and score some points."

Of course, that task won't be easy as Beverly poses a tough task as always. The Panthers return plenty of experience from a team that was in the running for a postseason berth late in the season.

"Our kids have worked hard," Panthers coach Dan Bauer said. "And it's always exciting to begin a new season. And to play in a new stadium against a team with a new coach, it's nice. English is good and has a lot of talent and size."

The Panthers aren't without some talent either, as running back Rashad Sims leads Beverly's returning cast.

"Sims is a hard runner and breaks a lot of tackles. The kids really have to wrap him up," Holey said.

Of course, Holey's nerves will probably disappear come 7 p.m. on Friday. And kickoff can't come soon enough for the rookie coach.

"I wish we could play right now," Holey said. "I think that we're ready."

Gloucester at Winthrop

At Miller Field in Winthrop (7), the reigning Division 2A Super Bowl champion Fishermen begin defense of the crown against one of their archrivals.

Gloucester was hit hard by graduation, losing talented running backs Anthony Enderle and Andrew Fulford, but the Fishermen still have a fleet of ball carriers that can shoulder the load.

The Vikings will look to all-purpose star Chris Beranger to guide a young offense along. Beranger was one of the breakaway threats in the conference last year, recording a marathon touchdown run against the Fishermen last season.

Ipswich at Marblehead

At Piper Field (7), the Magicians look to put all the off-field distractions from this spring behind them against a Tiger squad from the Cape Ann League that is looking to bounce back from a down year in 2007.

Newton South at Fenwick

At Donaldson Field in Peabody (7), the Crusaders look to get in the win column after playing well in a 17-0 loss at Methuen last week. Fenwick beat Newton last season and will get quarterback Pat Holleran back in the fold after he missed last week's game with a knee injury.

Medford at Revere

At Della Russo Stadium (7), coach Lou Cicutelli's team made strides last season, culminating in a heartbreaking loss on Thanksgiving to Winthrop. Now the Patriots hope to reach the next level in the opener against their former rivals from the Greater Boston League.

Danvers at Salem

At Bertram Field (7), many observers give the Witches a chance to give Gloucester a run in the NEC North. Senior tailback Melikke Van Alstynne comes into the season as one of the favorites in the conference's MVP race and will go against a Danvers defense that took its lumps at times last season.

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