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BEVERLY 20, SWAMPSCOTT 16

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Panthers pounce at end

By Jonathan Raymond, Globe Correspondent | November 9, 2008

BEVERLY - Swampscott had plenty of chances to close out the game, and Beverly had plenty of opportunities to come back.

But it wasn't until there was less than a minute remaining in yesterday's game that one team finally broke through, as Beverly scored the winning touchdown with 18 seconds left to top Swampscott, 20-16.

Beverly had struggled to get into an offensive flow all afternoon, but on their final drive the Panthers marched 50 yards in a minute and a half for the final score, which came on a 13-yard quarterback keeper by Mark Hannable.

"I was just trying to give [the kicker] a shot at field goal range," said Hannable. "Rashad [Sims] gave me a great lead block and I saw the opening and got into the end zone."

The result left the playoff race in the Northeastern Small Conference wide open.

Swampscott and surprising Marblehead, which were undefeated in league play entering the weekend, were in a position to control their destinies leading up their Thanksgiving Day meeting.

But with the Big Blue's loss, Marblehead can win the league outright with victories in its final two games after beating Winthrop Friday, 33-23.

Beverly, meanwhile, kept its hopes for a title alive with the win, and will hope for a Swampscott win over Marblehead Thanksgiving Day.

Swampscott controlled much of the play, but took only a 13-7 lead into halftime despite running 39 first-half plays to Beverly's 14.

The Panthers mustered just 23 yards in the half, but their defense kept the game close throughout, and caused five turnovers.

Swampscott coach Stephen Dembowski said his team's inability to capitalize on red-zone opportunities, and the absence of key players Trevor Wheeler, who is injured, and Ilya Levin, who left the game after the first half with an injury, led to the loss.

Kyle Shonio also collided with Chris Cameron (14 for 27, 171 yards, two interceptions, a TD) with about a minute left, and Shonio left the field on a stretcher. Dembowski said the move was mostly precautionary, however.

"We made 100 mistakes," he said. "We let them hang around."

"We probably played our worst offensive game of the season, and the bottom line is we ran out of bodies. All of our premier playmakers were pretty banged up."

"You have to credit [Beverly] for making the stops in the red zone and getting the turnovers they caused."

After a scoreless third quarter, the Big Blue made it a two-score game with a 29-yard field goal by Matt

Barbuzzi with 10 minutes left.

On the first play following the kickoff, Beverly answered with sophomore George Louis's 55-yard touchdown run. Louis ran to the outside, got a block from Sims, and ran up the left sideline untouched.

The Panthers had two other fourth-quarter possessions to try and overtake Swampscott before finally breaking through.

Beverly coach Dan Bauer said he was proud of his team for persevering in a game in which the Panthers often looked like they were about to be put away.

"We never stopped playing and we never stopped believing in ourselves," Bauer said. "We got into crunch time here and we kept the game close. Our defense kept us in the game.

"There were a couple of opportunities where [Swampscott] could have scored, but we came up with some big plays and some turnovers." ■

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