



## Salem seniors come full circle with victory

By Phil Stacey

Sports editor

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BEVERLY — Way back when, in the fall of 2005, the Salem freshmen football team defeated Beverly in their first-ever high school game.

They never defeated the Panthers again — until yesterday, in their final high school game as outgoing seniors.

By beating Beverly, 34-30, in the 110th game between the two schools yesterday morning at Hurd Stadium, Salem not only ended a five-year losing streak against the Black-and-Orange and halted a seven-game slide this season, but also gave its seniors a victory in the final game of their careers.

"Some of us (seniors) were talking about that beforehand, how we beat them as freshmen in our very first game," said Melikke Van Alstyne, whose 302 yards and four touchdowns were a big reason why the Witches were celebrating long into the night. "So to win again, after losing the last two years to them ... it's the best feeling."

The win was also the first vs. Beverly for Salem head coach Scott Connolly — but that was hardly his focus after yesterday's milestone win.

"I'm personally happy," said Connolly, "but I'm really happy for our seniors. It's one of the best classes I've ever had; they're just terrific kids. I know how hard they worked and how much it hurt when we were losing. To go out like this with a win is something they truly deserve."

It was common knowledge that few people outside the Salem football family believed the Witches had a chance yesterday. Recent history, both in the series and Salem's run of bad luck this season, said the smart money was on Beverly.

The smart money was wrong.

"We came in confident and believed in ourselves; that's all that mattered," said 17-year-old fullback Eugene Dela Cruz. "All that other stuff people were saying — all it did was light a fire under us."

"They heard all week about how they were going to lose," Connolly added. "To block all of that out and focus on the game itself shows you the unbelievable character these kids have."

Salem's six senior starters — Ben Henderson, Chris Dunston, Zach Gilbert, Louis Montalvo, Dela Cruz and Van Alstyne — as well as the valuable 12th grade backups, saw a season's worth of frustration fade away as huge smiles remained stuck on every player long after the final whistle had blown.

"To be able to do this for the seniors," sophomore quarterback Brad Skeffington said, "feels just great. I saw how much these guys wanted it ... I was willing to do anything for them to help them get it."

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Whether or not you're superstitious, virtually every coach looks for a good luck omen on Thanksgiving Day. Connolly found one early on, and it proved to set the tone for the day for his Witches.

"Even our bus driver got the job done today; we didn't hit one red light coming over (to Hurd Stadium)," said Connolly. "Two years ago, it took us 45 minutes to get here from Salem. Today, it only took 17 minutes. I took that as a good sign."

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Outgoing Beverly senior captains Joe SantaMaria and Ben Comeau agreed afterwards that the Panther football program is in good shape for the future.

"The program is in good hands. There's a really good core here," said SantaMaria, who was part of three consecutive winning seasons with the Panthers. "The younger guys have a lot of talent and know what's expected of them."

"To be able to say we were part of a group that made things better here is a great feeling," added Comeau.

Fellow captain Peter Kallas added that the defense should be Beverly's strength in 2009.

"I think it's going to be a really good team next year," he said. "Guys like (Theritchnide) Roc, (Mark) Hannable, (Dylan) Terry, (Mark) Theriault, (Steve) Dubois ... they're all back, plus some other really talented players. This is going to be a fun team to watch next season."

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Salem also has a lot of talent coming back in '09. Of their 14 starters yesterday, eight of them — juniors Joe King, Josh Sanchez, James Lobao and Tyler Mason, as well as sophomores David Kendrick, Antonio Reyes, Nate Staples and quarterback Brad Skeffington — all return.

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Unofficially, Kallas had a game-high 13 tackles for Beverly, followed by Roc (9) and Comeau (7). Junior Mike Clayton had both a fumble recovery and the game's only interception, while Terry had five tackles and a fumble recovery of his own and Theriault added a sack.

For Salem, Reyes led the way with 10 tackles and fellow sophomore Kendrick finished with seven. Staples, yet another 10th grader, had a fumble recovery and Lobao had a big sack. Also, senior T.J. Larivee fell on a Beverly onside kick attempt with 74 seconds to play.

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The Witches had 21 first downs to Beverly's 17, but also committed eight penalties for 59 yards while the hosts were whistled just once by referee Bob Marinelli's crew for five yards.

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## Photos



Salem's Tyler Mason takes down Beverly's Dylan Terry during Salem's 34-30 Thanksgiving Day upset at Hurd Stadium.  
Staff Photographer