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Beverly's late rally shocks Swampscott

By Matthew Roy / For The Item

SWAMPSCOTT - They were the team that most people gave the nod to in the Northeastern Conference's South division when the year started. But Beverly saw its title hopes disappear last week in an avalanche of Marblehead points.

The Panthers, instead, decided to play the role of spoiler for Swampscott's hopes of running through the conference unblemished. Sophomore Nick Theriault rushed for 169 yards and the Panther defense picked off Matt Barbuzzi twice, including the game-clincher with 3:26 left, as Beverly stunned the Big Blue, 27-21, at Blocksidge Field.

"The kids just played awesome," Beverly coach Dan Bauer said. "This win is all about them. They performed excellent, prepared well and did it all."

The Big Blue (7-3, 3-1 NEC South) were really their own worst enemy in this game. Swampscott committed seven penalties, had the two interceptions and was also stopped on the goal line early in the game.

"We made far too many mistakes," Swampscott coach Steve Dembowski said. "We turned the ball over, didn't tackle well and penalties killed us. You can't do that against a good team like Beverly."

An indication something weird was in the air came on the second play of the game when Justin Marrs took advantage of a blown coverage in the Swampscott secondary to catch an 81-yard bomb from Mark Hannable to give the Panthers the lead 29 seconds in.

The Big Blue steadied themselves and turned the momentum back in their favor midway through the first when Peter Yasi blocked a Joe Wioncek punt, giving Swampscott the ball at the Beverly 16.

Three plays later, Kyle Shonio blasted in from a yard out to square the game at 7-7.

After forcing a Beverly punt on the next possession, the Big Blue looked ready to go in front as a 25-yard pass from Barbuzzi to Yasi put the ball at the six. Shonio took the ball inside the one on the next play.

That, however, would be as close as the Big Blue got. Shonio and Barbuzzi were stuffed for no gain on the next two plays. A false start penalty on fourth down moved the ball back to the six. Barbuzzi then faked a field goal and had his pass for A.J. Baker broken up in the endzone.

"The defensive line, the linebackers. They wanted it real bad there and they answered the call," Bauer said.



Beverly's Curtis Manual tries to bring down Swampscott's Peter Yasi Sunday at Blocksidge Field. (ITEM PHOTO / REBA SALDANHA)

Early in the second, the Big Blue would go in front when Barbuzzi scrambled and threw a strike to Randall Kelleher in the end zone for an 11-yard touchdown and a 14-7 lead.

Beverly, though, didn't stay quiet as Brendan Flaherty returned the kick to the Swampscott 49. Two penalties later, the ball was at the 29. From there, the Panthers needed seven plays to find the end zone as Hannable kept on fourth-and-goal from the five to make it 14-13 at the half (Ryan Flaherty's kick was wide right).

The defenses ruled the third quarter as neither team could strike. Late in that quarter, Swampscott began to move the ball from its 21.

Barbuzzi's short passes and Shonio's legs got the ball all the way to the three early in the fourth. On fourth-and-goal, Barbuzzi found Yasi for the touchdown to make it 21-13 with 8:09 left.

Just when it looked like Swampscott had regained control, the Panthers wrested the momentum back with another Flaherty kick return, this one to the Big Blue 26. Two plays later, Theriault scored to make it 21-19 after a missed conversion rush.

Swampscott would roll the dice on its next possession as Shonio threw to Kelleher on a fake punt at the Panther 42, but he was tackled a yard short of the line. One play later, Hannable threw a deep ball to Manuel, who out-jumped two defenders to make the catch and score the go-ahead touchdown.

"They just made a great play there," Dembowski said.