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Abate, Beverly running backs shred Classical

By Matt Jenkins
Staff writer

LYNN — It will be a long time before anyone knows if this year's Beverly football team is as good as last year's, but one thing is for certain — the Panthers are off to a much better start.

Dom Abate and Brendan Flaherty each went over 100 yards rushing and the Panthers ran away from Lynn Classical, 34-13, last night at Manning Field.

Beverly, the defending Division 3A Super Bowl champs, evened its record at 1-1 to make sure there would be no repeat of last fall's 0-5 start.

The Panthers hit the Rams from a variety of angles on offense and Abate emerged as a new weapon. Once considered a complimentary piece to a backfield that already featured Flaherty and senior Nick Theriault, Abate clearly has risen to the top of that class to at least share the No. 1 billing with his fellow backs.

Mix in junior running back Kenny Pierce and Beverly has a full stable of capable runners.

"I think they've got good players and I can see the difference from last year — the system is in. That offense is in and the running backs are good and they run hard," Lynn Classical coach Tim Phelps said. "I don't know if we could be the team to stop them, but you definitely gotta get to the football."

Abate scored on runs of 5, 9 and 25 yards, while Flaherty and Theriault also found the end zone.

According to Beverly coach Dan Bauer, it was a much better effort from the Panthers compared to their opener against Concord-Carlisle, a 26-7 loss.

"We challenged the whole team after last week," Bauer said. "That was not where we wanted to start. I'm proud of the way we played as a team tonight."

Abate finished with 139 yards on only 12 carries, while Flaherty piled up 106 yards on 11 touches. Pierce added 54 yards on the ground and Theriault pitched in 31.

Together they looked like a very dangerous bunch.

"That's how it's supposed to be. Those guys are supposed to compliment each other," Bauer said. "Those guys have to be unselfish. You're going to have your turn blocking and you'll get your chance to run with it. Our blocks were much better by our backs and the line was starting to come together."

Ultimately, the Panthers won the game in the trenches.

Offensive linemen Mike Dooling, Blake Sullivan, Brian Perry, Marc Babcock and Kevin Kennedy opened huge holes for the Panther backs.

It was a mismatch going the other way as well as Kennedy, Dooling, Zach Hall and Rob Cattell — who recorded three sacks from his end position — prevented Classical from establishing anything that resembled a running game between the tackles.

Classical had to go the air to put points on the board. Senior signal caller John Finnigan connected with sophomore Brad Scuzzarella on a 33-yard touchdown pass in the second quarter, then hit Rudy Collymore on a 67-yard touchdown pass in the fourth quarter.

"We got beat on both sides of the ball up front," Phelps said. "The defensive backs had to make a lot of tackles and that's never good against a running team."