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Beverly-Salem football notebook: Seniors' team character spoke volumes for Beverly

By Phil Stacey
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SALEM — The words and actions of Beverly High's seniors, said head coach Dan Bauer, spoke volumes in the aftermath of the final game of their high school careers yesterday morning.

The Panther seniors, following a satisfying 46-21 triumph over archrival Salem at Bertram Field, made a point of saying how the program was in excellent hands with strong classes of juniors and sophomores returning in 2012.

"I tell those younger guys, 'You won't believe how fast it all goes,'" said Panthers senior linebacker Nick Quarterone. "I remember being over here two years ago as a sophomore and those seniors were saying the same thing, and now it's my turn. It goes by so fast."

Senior fullback Nick Theriault had a pair of touchdown runs in yesterday's rout, but the other five scores were all punched in by underclassmen: juniors Brendan Flaherty (2), Dom Abate and Kenny Pierce, as well as sophomore Steve Negron.

"We have a great junior class that will be team leaders next season," said captain Mark Giles. "We tried to teach them how to lead and be men, and I think they've really listened to what we had to say."

"More than anything, it's most important that they bring everyone together to become a family. I have no doubt they'll do that next year."

Only six seniors were among the offensive and defensive starters for Beverly yesterday, but they all played vital roles. Cornerback Dan Brown had perhaps his best game of the season sealing off the edge, recovering a fumble and knocking down Salem ballcarriers with authority when they came his way.

Big Blake Sullivan, a converted receiver, showed why the coaching staff had faith to play him as the quick side guard offensively while also figuring in on many tackles from his spot as the weak side linebacker (grouped with fellow seniors Giles and Quarterone). Theriault broke up a pair of passes in the secondary in addition to scoring twice, and massive Tyler Suggs was his usual dominant self at defensive end.

Also, fellow seniors C.J. Flannery (2 extra points) and backup running back Alex Baer also contributed to the win.

"Our class, we wanted to go out the right way," said Giles.

"I couldn't have asked to be part of a team with a better group of guys," added Quarterone.

Now it's left to the underclassmen to carry on the Panther tradition, a bar that Bauer said "has definitely been raised higher by this senior class. Their greatest strength was their character."

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While Beverly returns eight starters on offense and five on the other side of the ball, Salem should also be much improved a year from now with the majority of its team (both skill players and linemen) back. A mere two starters, running back/cornerback Edwin Alcantara and fullback/defensive end Fernando Cabrera, started for the Witches yesterday.

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As has become tradition, the game was played with 12-minute quarters (one more than normally used in regular season games) ... Beverly junior defensive back Ryan Shipp had the game's lone interception ... The Panthers rushed for 217 yards on just 28 carries (an average of better than 8 yards a carry); the Witches had 180 yards on 32 carries ... Senior David Walsh had a nice second half running the ball for the home team, with 84 yards on seven carries ... Abate was Beverly's leading ballcarrier with a game-high 87 yards on just four totes ... Salem's Shakir "Shaky" White had a strong showing with a pair of catches for 53 yards, including a 37-yard reception on the game's very first play ... With his two touchdown grabs yesterday, Flaherty finished the year leading Beverly in receptions (17), receiving yards (539) and receiving TDs (5). He also led the team in scoring for the second straight season with 90 points ... The Panthers recovered three of Salem's six fumbles.

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With his players and coaching staff on their buses and ready to head back over the bridge to the Garden City 25 minutes after the game had ended, Beverly head coach Dan Bauer heard his counterpart, Scott Connolly, shouting his name as he emerged from the Salem High locker room. Connolly had the mammoth Beverly-Salem game trophy to hand over to Bauer, which the Witches had won in 2010.