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## **Moving The Chains high school football column: Going the extra mile: Recounting local overtime epics**

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Moving The Chains

Phil Stacey

Ipswich's epic 4-overtime victory at Amesbury last week got us thinking.

Was this the longest overtime game in North Shore football history? And what about the overtime format itself — how long has it been in use, which local teams have played in these extra sessions, and what were the results?

So to the history books we went.

And what we found were some fascinating nuggets.

For starters, Ipswich's dramatic 37-34 triumph up at Landry Stadium eight nights ago not only gave the Tigers their first win of the season, but tied for the second-longest high school football game in North Shore gridiron history. Lynn Tech holds the distinction of playing in the longest such contest, besting Northeast Regional, 46-40, in a wild 5-OT tilt in October 2005.

Triton Regional in Byfield has also played in a 4-OT game, defeating Austin Prep, 32-26, last season. Closer to The Salem News readership area, Salem secured an epic 3-OT victory over Marblehead (29-27) on Oct. 27, 2006.

According to Salem News records, there have been 42 overtime games played involving North Shore schools in the 21st century. This includes all of the Northeastern Conference and Cape Ann League, as well as St. John's Prep, Bishop Fenwick, North Shore Tech, Manchester Essex, St. Mary's Lynn, Lynn Tech, Georgetown and Pingree.

The only season in which there wasn't at least one overtime game played was in 2002 — two years before the NEC officially adopted it. There were seven OT games in both 2005 and 2006, and have already been three extra session games played this fall through five weeks (Amesbury twice and St. John's Prep once).

The new four-tiered NEC/CAL 24-team football league uses a standard overtime format as outlined in the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association's handbook: each team gets at least one possession in extra time, starting on their opponents' 10-yard line (unless a penalty overrides the situation), with four downs to score. If they score a touchdown, they have to go for two points. Additional OT frames will be used if the teams are still tied until a winner is determined.

According to long-time former CAL and NEC secretary/treasurer Dick Baker, the CAL officially began using the overtime process in either 1998 or '99. The last league game to end in a tie came on opening day in 1997 when Ipswich deadlocked host Wilmington, 20-20.

Two decades before that, however, CAL teams had the option of playing an extra frame if both coaches agreed upon it. Witness Masconomet's 17-14 OT win over North Reading in 1974; Lynnfield's 7-6 victory over Hamilton-Wenham that same season; or Triton's 6-0 besting of H-W in extra time in 1977.

What's even more interesting is that the year before they tied Wilmington, the Tigers went on the road and beat Triton in overtime, 13-7, for legendary head coach Jack Welch's 201st career win.

Deciding tie games in the Northeastern Conference took a bit longer; Baker says it was implemented in 2004. That year, Salem became the first NEC team to win a conference OT game when the Witches toppled Saugus, 22-14.

Which segues nicely into the team which has played more overtime games than any other locally. Yes, it's Salem High, which has played in six all-time. The first came way back in 1974 in the Eastern Mass. Division 2 Super Bowl (a heartbreaking 21-20 loss to Andover) and most recently, a 28-26 loss to Peabody last season. The Witches are 3-3 in OT games.

Masconomet and Hamilton-Wenham are next with five overtime appearances each; both teams are 2-3 in those games. Bishop Fenwick has won three of its four extended contests.

Danvers has never played an overtime football game. Beverly has only participated in one: Thanksgiving Day 2005 when it went on the road to defeat Salem, 12-6, at Bertram Field.

It's interesting to note that overtime is not mandatory in Massachusetts high school football; according to the MIAA, leagues and teams have the option of *not* playing extra time. There are also variations to the four downs from the 10-yard-line method; for instance, when St. John's Prep played a non-league game at Central Catholic last month in Lawrence, the teams each began OT on the other squad's 25-yard-line with four chances to score, per Merrimack Valley Conference rules.

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Ten up-and-coming stars from the sophomore and freshmen classes that we're predicting stardom for, based on what we've seen from them already (listed in alphabetical order):

Nick Andreas, Ipswich Fr. QB: Poised, confident and talented — with a cannon for an arm. Still learning the Tigers' Wing-T system; once he masters it he'll be a monster threat.

Nick Bona, Bishop Fenwick Soph. QB/DB: Thrust into the QB role this year because of his pure athleticism (he could easily run or catch the ball from another skill position), this two-way threat has speed, guile and a high football IQ.

Derek Chamberlain, Ipswich Soph. FB/ILB: Bullish out of the Tiger backfield, Chamberlain's greatest contributions will be on the defensive side of the ball, where he has the instincts and pure strength to be a tackling machine.

Brian Daly, Marblehead Soph. WR: Runs smart routes and knows what to do after making a catch; two of his four scores have gone for touchdowns this fall, and he's averaging almost 29 yards per catch.

Jeremy Gillis, Marblehead Soph. WR: The yin to Daly's yang, Gillis is a big target who leads the Magicians so far in catches (10), receiving yardage (217) and, like Daly, has two scores.

Rufus Rushins, Bishop Fenwick Fr. RB: Huge (6-foot-1, 225 pounds) with terrific speed and tackle-breaking ability. He's still raw and needs to learn the varsity game, but once he learns to hit the holes consistently and use his breakaway speed, there may be no stopping him. Already he leads the Crusaders in carries (71), yards (450) and TDs (4).

Johnny Spears, Pingree WR/WB/KR: Already a stud basketball recruit, Spears is quickly making a name for himself on a very talented Highlanders team. His punt return for a score ignited a comeback from a 22-0 deficit to defeat Proctor two weeks ago. Of all the talented skill guys who have come through Pingree in recent years, this burner may be the fastest of all.

Jon Thomas, St. John's Prep Soph. RB/CB: Those who have seen Thomas play feel he could be a Division 1 college player. With terrific acceleration and field vision, he hits the holes well, shows plenty of giddy-up and is already emerging as a team leader. A starter on defense as a freshman, he scored twice in the Prep's first win of the season two weeks ago.

Mike Tivinis, Masconomet Soph. RB: Splitting time equally with junior tailback Dylan Mann, Tivinis has made the most of his opportunity, leading the Chieftains in carries (43), yards (238) and TDs (4) despite standing just 5-foot-5.

Alex Valles, Danvers Soph. RB/DB: Speed and football smarts are just two of the qualities that this 10th grader displays on the gridiron for the Falcons. Averaging nearly six yards per carry, he's also proven valuable catching the pigskin out of the backfield, with five catches for 118 yards and two TDs to date.

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Best wishes to a terrific friend of high school football: "The Voice of the Vikings," Jim Lederman. No one bleeds Winthrop's navy blue-and-gold like Lederman, who is calling games from the press box for his 42nd straight season. The former Winthrop High standout has seen everything over five decades and still brings as much passion and enthusiasm to calling games as he ever has, praising both Winthrop and opposing players.

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Moving the Chains, a column on high school football, appears every Friday in The Salem News during the fall season. Contact sports editor Phil Stacey at 978-338-2650, PStacey@salemnews.com and follow him on Twitter @PhilStacey\_SN.