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## High School Football Game of the Week: Panthers eyeing a statement win over unbeaten Lynn English

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No one will be any closer to laying their hands on a Northeastern Conference/Cape Ann League championship trophy by the time the Beverly and Lynn English football teams are done fighting it out at Manning Field tomorrow night.

But a lot of eyes will be focused on this game at Manning Field (7 p.m.), hoping the end result sheds some light on who are the true contenders in the top two tiers of the newly formed league.

Coaches are firm believers that comparing scores of common opponents is nothing short of misleading. But in a league that has experienced a more drastic face-lift than Joan Rivers, everyone is looking for an early-season shortcut to cracking the contender code.

Lynn English simultaneously delivered the first clue that the NEC/CAL Tier 2 was wide open while also staking a claim to be the top contender in Tier 1 with its 41-0 wipeout of Gloucester on opening night. The Bulldogs then survived a six-turnover game to win, 21-6, at Wakefield last week.

Beverly, meanwhile, started the season with a loss to Concord-Carlisle before whipping Tier 1 Lynn Classical on the road in convincing (34-13) fashion last Friday night.

Panthers coach Dan Bauer is always calculated when he speaks, never leaning too far in one direction or another. But even he hinted at the long-term ramifications of this contest.

"We always try to get better every game and each week," Bauer said. "We'll get a chance to see where we are (against English) in terms of cohesiveness."

That's not to say if English defeats Beverly, then the Panthers title hopes are up in smoke. It only takes a quick look back to Beverly's 0-5 start last year that ended in a Super Bowl championship to realize that Bauer and his staff will make any adjustments needed to be competitive each week.

That's how Lynn English coach Peter Holey is approaching this game.

He knows his team can't survive another six-turnover game — especially not against Beverly — but he also knows this matchup is a great barometer for where his team stands and will show his players how much effort it will take to wear the Tier 1 crown later on this fall.

"Absolutely. This is definitely a test," Holey said. "We're going to find out where we are and if we can make the necessary corrections from a week prior."

The other Tier 1 teams (Masconomet, Peabody, Lynn Classical, North Andover, Revere) will no doubt take note of how English battles tomorrow night, while this matchup gives Tier 2 teams Salem, Marblehead, Danvers and Swampscott a much better feel of how good both Beverly and Gloucester are.

Of course, none of that stuff will matter when the Bulldogs and Panthers clash on the field.

Beverly and English feature very different offensive styles, with the Panthers running the Wing-T and the Bulldogs operating out of the spread. But both teams can also be very efficient running their offenses and do so at a fast pace.

A big key for Beverly could be its defensive line being able to both contain English quarterback Jermaine Kelly while also putting pressure on him.

Defensive end Rob Cattell and tackle Mike Dooling are off to very good starts for Beverly, while middle linebacker Nick Quartarone and cornerback Dan Brown have been impressive so far.

"Lynn English has a lot of different ways to score," Bauer said. "Last week they had over 300 yards on the ground and the week before they were throwing the ball. They do both equally well and the quarterback is very good."

P.J. Dorsey was an all-star linebacker for the Bulldogs last year and is also a dangerous running back, while Malcolm Brown-Simpson is Kelly's favorite target.

Beverly, meanwhile, gives English an awful lot to think about on defense. The Panthers can hit opponents with four very capable running backs. Brendan Flaherty (19 carries, 170 yards, 1 TD), Dom Abate (15-164-3), Kenny Pierce (13-105-0) and Nick Theriault (13-32-1) are each dangerous with the ball in their hands, and the young Panthers' offensive line is coming together quickly.

"You just can't worry about certain guys; you have to worry about stopping the Wing-T," Holey said. "It's assignment football. You have to read and react, and we'll be all right if we're not caught peeking in the backfield. That's when teams get in trouble."

"We've been working hard with guys to read their keys. If they do that, then we've got a shot."