

SalemNews.com, Salem, MA

November 12, 2011

Marblehead stops Beverly, sets up championship tilt

By Matt Jenkins
Staff writer

MARBLEHEAD — The Marblehead football team has been somewhat of an afterthought all season long when talk turned to the chase for the Northeastern Conference/Cape Ann League Tier 2 title.

Now, the Magicians are front and center.

Marblehead scored two first quarter touchdowns and came up with a huge stop on a two-point conversion attempt in the fourth quarter to preserve a 13-12 victory over Beverly last night at Piper Field.

The once muddy waters have cleared — Marblehead and Swampscott will meet for the title Thanksgiving morning.

"It's great motivation (to be an afterthought) and our guys understand that we don't deserve it. Was 2009 (the title season) a blip year?" Marblehead (7-2) coach Jim Rudloff said. "The kids get the fact that we didn't earn anything that one year. That has to be built over time and this (senior) class understands that it might be them. They'd like to be that class, but it's nice to be under the radar."

Marblehead played like a team fighting for a championship early in the game.

On Beverly's fourth play from scrimmage, Will Quigley ripped the ball from Panthers running back Brendan Flaherty and raced it back 55 yards for the first score.

After Flaherty broke a 37-yard touchdown run on the next possession to tie the game, Quigley scored again, this time on a 28-yard run. Christian Flores' kick made it 13-6 Marblehead with 3:11 to play in the first quarter.

The high-scoring start was short-lived however, as the game went scoreless for the next 30 minutes.

Flaherty put Beverly in position to win or tie when he scooped a Marblehead fumble and returned it 18 yards for a score with 5:39 to play. The Panthers elected to go for two, but Flaherty (11 carries, 105 yards) was stuffed.

"You gotta go for the win," Beverly (6-4) coach Dan Bauer said. "You're not sure how the situation would go if we get the ball back, so it comes down to us going for the win. If it was a good play and worked, then we'd look great. If not, I'll take that. As head coach that's my responsibility for that call, but I wanted to give the kids the opportunity to win."

The Marblehead defense had a pretty good inkling about who was going to get the ball for Beverly.

"The was so big. We knew it was going to Flaherty; everyone knew it was going to Flaherty and the linebackers just came up and made an amazing play," said Quigley, who ran for 119 yards, had the fumble return and intercepted a pass. "We gave it 100 percent all four quarters because we wanted it so badly. Since third grade we always said we wanted to win a Super Bowl. We knew that we had to win this game to get to that point."