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Moving The Chains high school football column: OPENING CEREMONIES: Reloaded Pingree School kicks off tomorrow

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Moving The Chains

Phil Stacey

A year ago, with a wealth of skill position players back but virtually a brand new offensive line, the Pingree School football team merely averaged 39.7 points per game, went undefeated in running their winning streak to 16 games over two seasons, and captured its second straight prep school bowl championship by blocking a field goal in the waning seconds and returning it for the game-winning score.

So with the roles reversed this fall — experienced linemen up front, but some new faces in the backfield — how will the Highlanders fare as they get set to face Portsmouth Abbey in their season opener tomorrow in Rhode Island?

Let's put it this way: if you're waiting for the wheels to fall off the Pingree wagon, don't hold your breath.

"Our guys are excited and anxious to get going," said head coach Chris Powers, who has built a juggernaut in just six years since the school added varsity football.

"The approach our coaching staff has taken is it's a new season and you have to wipe the slate clean. The kids are the ones putting pressure on themselves; they want to keep this winning streak going."

Powers said it's been interesting to watch during his team's preseason as the older, more experienced linemen have been helping the younger skill guys so that they form a cohesive unit together.

As a group, Pingree's trench guys not only open holes for ballcarriers and pass protect efficiently, but are also athletic, can run well and seem to work together seamlessly.

Three captains make up the core of this unit: guards Vinnie Aguiar and Dylan Taylor and right tackle Jeremiah Cronin. Aguiar and Taylor (a Topsfield native) would "probably be running backs on

other teams", said Powers, but are athletic and smart enough to play the line for the Highlanders. Cronin is a three-year starter who anchors the right side.

Junior Hank Martin, who started for last year's bowl champions, is back at center. "It's not a glorious job, but Hank is terrific. We've never had an issue with our snaps; everything he does is perfect," said Powers. Another junior, left tackle Jake Gilbert, is the line's newcomer.

Kenny Adinkra ran the ball extremely well a year ago and figures to be one of Pingree's offensive lynchpins. So, too, will talented junior runner Nick Antenucci, who started as a freshman, played strong safety a year ago and will move up to middle linebacker this season.

The team's new quarterback is Jerome Cappadonna, a junior who excels in the short passing game and is a slashing runner who hits the holes and can sprint to paydirt. He'll look to throw the ball to sophomore Johnny Spears (a transfer from Georgetown High), senior Louis Rodrigues and sophomore Alex Salalayko of Peabody.

Certainly, every game on their schedule is of particular importance. But the Highlanders definitely circled one game when their schedule came out: Friday, Oct. 21, a night game in New Hampshire versus perennial prep school power New Hampton.

The Huskies, who went 7-2 a year ago and haven't lost more than three games in the last seven years, have one player, quarterback/defensive back Jake Kiley, heading to Penn State while a linemen will play at Boston College and another player is ticketed to suit up for Duke University.

"We were in different divisions (of the Evergreen League) last season and didn't play each other, but after realignment we're both in the (West) Division," said Powers. "There was something in the Globe last year that said something like, 'Oh, Pingree, they had a good season, but they didn't play New Hampton.' Well, now we will and we're all excited to see how we'll fare."

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No one was happier for Marblehead High backup running back John Perry after the senior ran for 97 yards and a touchdown in the second half of last week's win over Ipswich than his head coach, Jim Rudloff.

It's tough, acknowledged the Magicians' head coach, to wrestle carries away from the team's workhorse tailback, fellow senior Will Quigley. But when his number was called last Friday night, Perry responded by ripping off big runs, hitting the hole hard and piling up yardage.

"John puts his heart and soul into every practice; it's good to see him get the chance to play — and play well," said Rudloff. "It's tough being behind Will, but you never hear John complain. He's the ultimate team player."

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Speaking of Ipswich, head coach Ted Flaherty's Tigers now hit the road for four consecutive games against opponents from the Greater Newburyport area beginning tonight at Triton (7 p.m.).

Following tonight's clash, they'll visit Pentucket next Saturday (1 p.m.), Amesbury on Thursday, Oct. 6 (7 p.m.) and Newburyport on Friday, Oct. 14 (7 p.m.) before returning home the following week to host Lynnfield in its first NEC/CAL Tier 4 league game Oct. 21.

Travelling to games for a month straight could be a harrowing thought for some teams, particularly one as young as Ipswich. But Flaherty feels quite the opposite.

"I like it, to be honest. I feel it's almost easier to focus when you're on the road," he said. "When you play at home, you tend to feel the mistakes more. On the road, you can tune out the crowd and everything else and just focus as a team on what you want to accomplish."

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Let's look at the history surrounding this weekend's games:

Beverly and host Lynn English meet tonight at Manning Field (7 p.m.) for the 88th time since their first encounter in 1915. The Panthers had won four straight games against the Bulldogs before the Lynners came into Hurd Stadium and won handily, 33-7, a year ago. Tonight, the visiting Panthers (1-1) look to build on their 48-33-6 all-time series lead against the 2-0 'Dogs.

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Another rivalry that will play out for the 88th time tonight occurs at Miller Field as Marblehead travels to Winthrop. This series, which began exactly 100 years ago, has had a remarkable 30 shutouts over the years; that's more than one-third of all the games played. The 2-0 Magicians, who enter trailing 45-37-5 all-time, will be favored tonight against a Winthrop team looking for its first win of the young season.

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Salem met Archbishop Williams on a 90-degree day in Braintree last September and the end result was a wild one, with the Witches prevailing, 34-32. Since that time, they've only won three of 10 games and have started this season 0-2 heading into tonight's home opener at Bertram Field. The Archies are also 0-2, having lost to Norwell (21-20) and Abington (51-32).

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The home team has held serve when Danvers and Pentucket have met: the Blue and White prevailed two years ago, 14-7, and Pentucket returned the favor a year ago in West Newbury, 31-16. Tonight's clash is back in Falcons territory at Dr. Deering Stadium as the Sachems come in at 0-2 while Danvers aims for its second win in three weeks.

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Swampscott hasn't lost to Revere in their six previous meetings — which include the program's 500th win in 2007 (a 26-6 triumph). But the Big Blue no doubt want to avoid any of the drama that came in last year's thrilling 43-42 comeback victory, in which they scored three times in the final

quarter to pull out an improbable triumph. The fact that Swampscott is unbeaten at 2-0 isn't surprise; that the host Patriots are is. Someone will have a blemish on their record when the final seconds tick off the scoreboard at Della Russo Stadium tonight.

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No Cape Ann League team has given Hamilton-Wenham more fits over the years than Newburyport, which hosts the Generals tonight. The Clippers have beaten H-W in 27 of 38 all-time meetings; they've also won 15 of the last 19 matchups dating back to 1992. With a victory tonight, the Generals will be 3-0 for the second straight season.

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Ipswich will be looking to do something tonight it hasn't done in 11 seasons: win at Triton. The Tigers, who lead the all-time series, 22-16, would love nothing better than evening their record at 1-1 following last week's season-opening loss at home to Marblehead. The host Vikings, meanwhile, should be fired up after upsetting Haverhill last week, 29-28, to snap a 12-game losing streak.

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Although they're no longer members of the Cape Ann League, Wilmington is very much still considered a rival by Masconomet. The 1-1 Chieftains hit the road to face the 1-0 Wildcats (now residing in the Middlesex League) in a non-league tilt tonight looking to beat them for the fifth time in the last six seasons and cut into their 10-6 series deficit.

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Moving to tomorrow's games, Bishop Fenwick is hoping a nearby road contest will get them on the winning track when it plays at Lynnfield (11 a.m.). The host Pioneers shaded Amesbury, 14-13, a week ago to even their record at 1-1 while the Crusaders, who lost this same game at home last year (42-21), are looking to avoid a second consecutive 0-3 start.

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A year ago, St. John's Prep fell in both the regular season and the Division 1 Super Bowl title game at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough to mighty Everett by a combined score of 58-14. The Crimson Tide come into Cronin Field tomorrow (1:30 p.m.) as heavy favorites as they look to win for the seventh time in eight meetings against the Prep.

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North Shore Tech/Essex Aggie heads down to Canton for its first-ever meeting with Blue Hills Regional tomorrow (11 a.m.). The Warriors, who play out of the Mayflower League, are off to a fast start with wins over East Boston (24-0) and Case (38-14) — which isn't good news for 0-2 NST/EA.

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Moving The Chains, a column about North Shore high school football, runs each Friday during the high school sports season. Contact sports editor Phil Stacey at pstacey@salemnews.com, by phone at 978-338-2650, and follow him on Twitter [@PhilStacey_SN](https://twitter.com/PhilStacey_SN).