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Phil Stacey column: Multi-talented offense, staunch defense works for Beverly

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BEVERLY — Those rumblings that have been getting louder and louder the last three weeks aren't only telling, but they're also true.

Yes, the Beverly High football team could actually be *better* than their Super Bowl winning squad of a year ago.

More diversified offensively, more experience defensively and a general all-around better understanding of the program's philosophy and play-calling have the Panthers ahead of the curve.

Oh, and one more thing — who are you going to focus on stopping when they have the ball?

On an overcast but extremely mild Saturday afternoon, the Panthers displayed their offensive depth to the large crowd that showed up for their home opener and sent them home happy after dispatching the Winthrop Vikings, 35-7, at storied Hurd Stadium.

"In an offense like ours, every single guy has to be doing their jobs or it doesn't work. It's a matter of making simple reads, executing, things like that," said captain Mark Giles after his Panthers (3-1) won their third straight contest. "When we're doing those things, it's hard to defense us. You take one thing away from us and we'll hit you with something else."

Actions speak louder than words, so Beverly's spread-the-wealth approach to its offense was on full display in this one. Fullback Nick Theriault led the way with 100 yards on 14 carries, running mostly between the tackles and hitting the gaps that the Winthrop defense gave him. The 17-year-old captain also added an 11-yard scoring run.

Junior Dom Abate had another big day out of the BHS backfield with 95 yards on just seven carries, including touchdown runs of 48 and 31 yards. Fellow junior Kenny Pierce also had a touchdown from 5 yards out and 52 yards on just nine carries. Even the backups got in on the fun, as sophomore Joe Kozlowski rushed twice for 49 yards, including an 11-yard score.

"It comes down to our system: finding where we have the best offensive opportunity and using it to our advantage," head coach Dan Bauer said. "That's how it's supposed to work."

"Plus, a lot of it is the blocking of the (running) backs; they've gotta be unselfish. Our whole offense is predicated on that. I think they take as much pride in their downfield blocking as they do carrying the ball."

Middle linebacker Nick Quarterone said that as a senior, it was a huge boost not only to win their home opener, but use a complete team effort in doing so.

"As a whole, we were flying out there," said Quarterone. "You've especially got to give it to those guys on the offensive line; they won it in the trenches for us."

"We know what it takes to run this offensive successfully," added Giles, who had a 13-yard catch from junior quarterback Dave Rollins and another stellar game at strong side linebacker. "(Offensive coordinator) Coach (Roger) Day is a genius at play calling; he always seems to know what will work best."

Beverly's defense, which like Day's offensive scheme is being used for just the second year this fall, also rose to the occasion. The Panthers simplified things in practice last week and focused on fundamentals like tackling and making the proper reads, allowing the players to just *play* and not think so much against Winthrop's double-tight offense.

It seemed to work wonders.

Senior defensive lineman Ty Suggs was a beast in recording two sacks and causing general mayhem all afternoon in the Winthrop backfield. Zach Hall also had a sack and caused a fumble that teammate Kevin Kennedy recovered; Abate added an interception and Luke McDonald recovered an onside kick to start the second half.

"Reading our keys, doing what we're (coached). That's what works for us," said the 17-year-old Theriault.