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Phil Stacey column: Actions speak louder than words as Masco upsets Beverly

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BEVERLY — They knew, but had to prove to everyone else — by their actions, not words — that they were better than their 2-3 record indicated.

So the Masconomet football team did so in the best way possible, making believers out of the 2,000 or so fans at Hurd Stadium on Saturday afternoon — and without a doubt countless other pigskin watchers across the North Shore and beyond.

"A game like this not only gives us momentum, but also lets us know how good we can be when we play a complete football game. It lets everyone else know, too," said senior captain Kurt Hunziker after the Chieftains dominated from start to finish in a 24-7 upset win.

"I can see it that way," continued Hunziker (13 tackles unofficially), when asked if a game like this could turn around Masco's fortunes. "To beat a strong team like Beverly that had won four games in a row on their home turf ... that shows the rest of the North Shore what we're capable of doing."

For the better part of a year and a half, the Chieftains — winners of four straight Cape Ann League Large crowns from 2006-09 — have played well enough defensively to win many games, but a sputtering offense has hindered them from doing so.

Not so on Saturday. Against what had been a red-hot Beverly (now 4-2) club, Masconomet ran one of football's most basic offensive plays, the trap, to tremendous success as sophomore tailback Mike Tivinis galloped for 140 yards on 25 carries. Junior captain Dylan Mann also got in on the act, running for three touchdowns (from 13, 7 and 1 yard out).

"Our offensive line got a ton of push (and) opened up huge holes for Mike and I," Mann said. "People didn't see us as the team we really are (before Saturday); this showed everyone we can win big games."

Head coach Jim Pugh concurred, calling it "a breakout game" and agreeing with an assistant coach who noted it was one of the Chieftains' best-played games in the last half-dozen years.

Quarterback Ben Panunzio was steady and played with immense confidence in completing 6-of-7 passes. His biggest came the play before Mann's second TD, which gave Masco a 17-0 lead at halftime when he called for a play action isolation pass to Tim Towler (in his first game this season

back from injury). A perfect spiral and catch put the ball at the Beverly 7-yard line, and Mann crashed over the goal line on the next play.

Just as importantly, Masco ate huge chunks of time off the clock and controlled the ball when Beverly desperately needed to get it back in the fourth quarter. On the final drive of the afternoon, the Chieftains converted four third downs and took over six minutes off the scoreboard.

Conversely, Masconomet flew to the ball defensively and held Beverly's vaunted running game to just 134 yards, never allowing the hosts a chance to position themselves for a comeback.

"I hope this is a reality check for our guys," said Beverly head coach Dan Bauer, whose team committed three turnovers (2 INTs, 1 fumble). "Football is simple; on defense, it's about getting off your blocks and making tackles. We didn't do either — and need to change that."

Captain Nick Theriault had Beverly's only touchdown, an 18-yard run with 8:32 to play to cut Masco's lead to 17-7. But then came the Chieftains' clutch drive, in which they went 60 yards in 14 plays and drove the stake home with Mann's third and final score of the day.

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