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Can't Stop The Run

Panthers pounce on previously unbeaten Peabody, roll to shutout win

By Matt Jenkins
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PEABODY — Yesterday afternoon, Scott Wlasuk became the latest high school football coach to walk away from a game against Beverly carrying more questions than answers.

The Panthers put a screeching halt on Peabody's undefeated start to the season by rolling out exactly 300 yards of rushing offense and cruising to a 34-0 win at Coley Lee Field in a rare Friday afternoon game.

So far through five weeks, no one in these parts has been able to find a way to slow down the Panthers' four-headed rushing attack of Brendan Flaherty, Kenny Pierce, Dom Abate and senior captain Nick Theriault.

"I was going to ask you that," Wlasuk joked when presented with that question in a postgame interview. "If you find an answer, please send me an email."

If an email like that ever surfaces, you can be sure all Northeastern Conference/Cape Ann League teams — but especially the Tier 2 teams that must face Beverly in league play — will be begging for a forward.

The Panther machine is running so smoothly that it seems like their coaches can take their pick for which back they'd like to feature in a given week. This time out Pierce got the most carries with 15 for 92 yards, but it was Flaherty who did the most damage.

The junior speedster, who may be Beverly's most complete back, ran for 105 yards on only six carries and scored on runs of 60 and 15 yards, respectively.

Abate added 52 yards on the ground, while Theriault chipped in with 24. Neither Flaherty, Abate or Theriault had a carry in the second half as Beverly (4-1) increased its three-touchdown halftime lead into a 34-0 advantage before the third quarter was done.

"I think in that type of offense, you gotta hope you can make a big stop (on first down) and put them in a 2nd-and-long," said Wlasuk, his team now 3-1. "But when they're pick up four, five, six

yards on first down, it gives them three more plays to get three or four yards (for another first down). That's what a lot of that offense is predicated on."

The victory was the biggest margin of victory in the 60-game series since the Panthers crushed Peabody, 48-8, in 1960.

Against the Tanners, Beverly ran 22 first down plays and accumulated 112 yards on those, good for an average of more than five yards each time.

That production had a two-fold benefit for the Panthers. For one thing, they were moving the ball almost at will against Peabody, picking up solid yardage on first down, keeping the chains moving on second or third down, and occasionally popping the big play.

On top of that, the Panthers kept the ball in their possession, thus preventing Peabody and its big-time running back, senior Nat Gaye, from ever gaining momentum.

Gaye, who went for more than 200 yards against Gloucester last week, ran for 30 yards on seven carries in the first quarter, but Beverly was up by two scores by the time Peabody touched the ball in the second quarter. That — coupled with the fact that senior Brady Doyle went down with an ankle injury early in the game — pushed the Tanners toward opening the playbook a little in the second.

Peabody quarterback Jason Hiou threw seven passes in the second quarter, completing only two for 12 yards during that time.

"Gaye is a class back and you just hope you don't give up the big one against him. We just wanted to keep everyone in front of him and hope he (didn't) break one," Beverly coach Dan Bauer said.

"It was a good thing we were able to put together some drives and move the ball and eat some time to keep Gaye off the field. He really scared us defensively."

Gaye ended up with 65 yards on 16 carries.

Junior quarterback Dave Rollins scored first for Beverly from a yard out before Flaherty scored his two rushing touchdowns on back-to-back possessions in the third quarter.

The Panthers finished their first drive of the second half when Rollins hit Abate for a 20-yard fade into the left corner of the end zone. Peabody was then put away for good on its next possession when Flaherty intercepted Hiou and took it back 84 yards for the game's final touchdown with 2:01 to go in the third quarter.

"The first thing I told the kids to do was to look at the scoreboard and use that as motivation to come out and really prepare hard this week (for Revere on the road next Friday)," Wlasuk said.

"We've got a lot of things to fix, but we can't dwell on it. There are no easy games and we can't have any letdowns: the scoreboard should be motivation enough. I know our team is better than that."

Beverly 34, Peabody 0

at Coley Lee Field, Peabody

Beverly (4-1)714130 — 34

Peabody (3-1)0000 — 0

B-Dave Rollins 1 run (Rollins kick)

B-Brendan Flaherty 60 run (kick failed)

B-Flaherty 15 run (Dom Abate rush)

B-Abate 20 pass from Rollins (kick failed)

B-Flaherty 84 interception return (Rollins kick)

INDIVIDUAL STATS

RUSHING: Beverly — Brendan Flaherty 6-105, Kenny Pierce 15-92, Dom Abate 7-52, Luke McDonald 5-25, Nick Theriault 6-24, Dan Brown 2-6, Dave Rollins 3-4, Alex Baer 1-2, Joey Kozlowski 2-(-2), Jack Morency 1-(-8); Peabody — Nat Gaye 16-65, Jason Hiou 7-20, D.J. Henrick 3-15, Sean Wlasuk, 1-15, Devon Manthorne 2-10, Jason Budde 2-0, Brady Doyle 1-(-3).

PASSING: Beverly — Rollins 1-1-20-1-0; Peabody — Hiou 3-12-15-0-1, Sean Wlasuk 0-1-0-0-0.

RECEIVING: Beverly — Abate 1-20; Peabody — Henrick 2-12, Gaye 1-3.