

New Neshaminy coach aims to restore winning tradition

By Dick Dougherty
Sports Writer

FOOTBALL

Mark Schmidt doesn't appear to have a jumpy stomach. If he does, the 34-year-old new head football coach at Neshaminy is a master of camouflage.

Neshaminy football is high profile. History tells you that. The Redskins have captured or shared 28 football championships since 1946.

During one span — 1952 through 1965 — Neshaminy was 128-11-7. There was a 51-game winning streak in the 1960s.

Last year was difficult on Neshaminy. It began in Allentown when Dieruff rocked the Redskins, 61-24. The storm never subsided. The Redskins of coach Dick Bedesem ended the season 2-9. Bedesem, in his 40th season of coaching football, couldn't turn the tide.

Bedesem retired, and Neshaminy put its program in Schmidt's hands.

Schmidt, five seasons as an offensive line coach at Lock Haven University, knows what is ahead. His first assignment will be Allentown Dieruff on Sept. 1 at home.

He's not intimidated.

"Coaching is a lot like teaching," Schmidt said calmly. "You have to let people understand what you're trying to get across."

Neshaminy is in the Suburban One League's National Conference. Schmidt recruited all the schools he'll face.

"I know what's there and what's leaving," he said.

Schmidt, a 1982 graduate of Ur-

sinus College, was a former assistant under Roger Grove at Norristown.

"He gave me my first chance," Schmidt said.

The first year, Schmidt coached for free. Then he joined the staff as a paid assistant.

"I can't wait until I coach against him," Schmidt said. "He knows it. We've talked about that."

Schmidt knows weak sisters don't reside in the SOL National Conference.

"Every coach has that look in their eyes," he said. "I have the same feeling about these (Neshaminy) guys. There's some real fine talent here."

A big hurdle for Schmidt will be having to follow Bedesem.

"I absolutely think the world of Dick Bedesem for what he's done," Schmidt said. "He's an icon of high school coaching. He's a terrific person and a great man."

"With a couple of different things I have in mind, it will allow us to utilize some of his personnel.

"You just come here and the walls have voices. You can't help but be impressed when you pull your car into the parking lot and see the facilities. They do things first class."

Football is important to everyone within a school, Schmidt said.

"When the Ws outweigh Ls, that will make things a whole lot

better every day in school," he said.

Schmidt got his first taste of Neshaminy football when he was about 9 years old.

"My father took me to Heartbreak Ridge to see Neshaminy," he said. "It was a lasting impression."

A 1978 graduate of Lower Moreland, Schmidt was a center and linebacker for Andy Tryens. In his last two campaigns, the Lions won the Bicentennial Athletic League.

"I've played on this field," Schmidt said. As a junior, the Lions tangled with Neshaminy Maple Point. Lower Moreland routed the Point, 36-8.

Neshaminy's football history excites Schmidt.

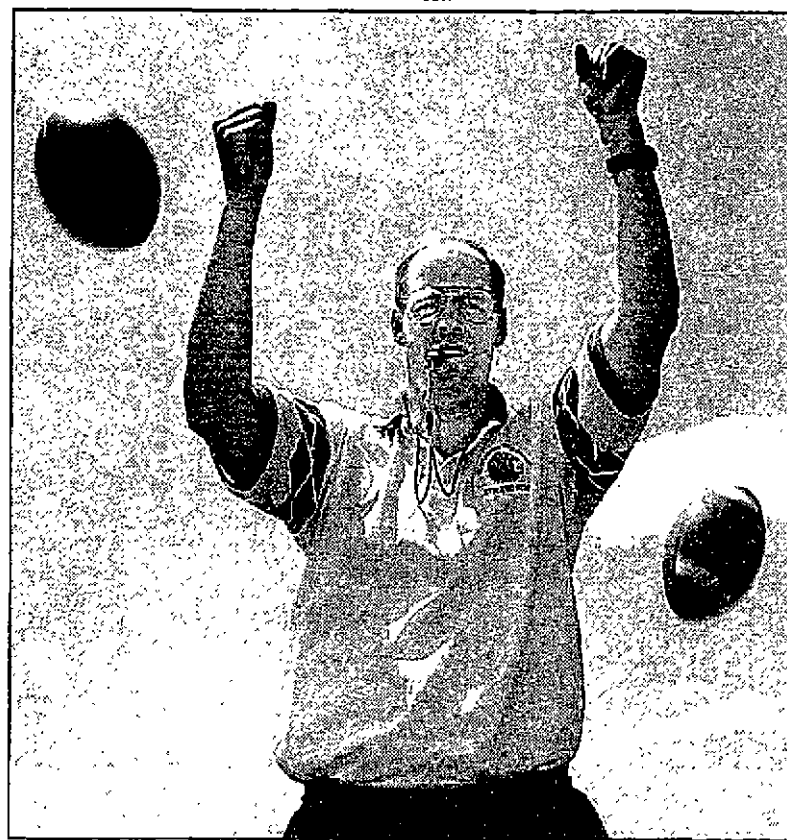
"How could it not?" he asked. "You can dwell on a lot of things. People talk of tradition of doing this and doing that. I think that's important because people have to know where they've come from and where they're going."

Schmidt is quick to sense things. He knows something potentially good is growing on Heartbreak Ridge again.

"(The kids) really want to step back, then step up and make this thing go again," Schmidt said. "I think that's real important."

"I'm kind of gauging myself on how much I want to talk about what we can do. You're capable of doing it. Now we have to get everyone caring."

"I have to work on that this year. There are some people here who remember how it was, but these guys have to begin to take their own steps."



Recently hired Neshaminy football coach Mark Schmidt has high hopes for the upcoming season. (Staff photo by Susie Chu)

Schmidt predicts an exciting offense.

"I have had the good fortune of being around a number of offenses where I believe there are some things that can be utilized once we get our guys situated," he said.

"I like to run the football. I'm an old line coach who last was at a run-and-shoot place. People think I like to throw a thousand times. I want to run the ball and maintain the line of scrimmage. I want to pass when I want to, not when I have to."

Schmidt's staff includes Tom Magdelinskas (tight ends and defensive ends), Don Wiater (linemen, weight room and conditioning) and Bernie Gaulik (receivers). The defensive coordinator is

Jay Weidenbaugh. And John Hyman (offensive line), Steve Wilmot (defensive line) and Jim McFarland (linebackers).

"We have four straight home games," Schmidt said. "It will allow our guys to settle in. We won't have to worry about getting places; we'll worry about doing the right things."

There are 16 or 17 players who started at least one game and about 25 to 30 players who played on the varsity last season.

"We have enough guys who know what it takes to win," the coach said. "I want the guys who really want to be here and want to get the job done. Sure, you'd like 75 or 100 kids. I don't think that will be a problem."