

On Suburban Football

By Marc Naducci

Two kickers who may hold keys to titles

Conservatively, Strath Haven players Carl Schuman and Jason Wiaters are remembered about a famous swing of his leg at least once a day. The senior doesn't seem to mind being asked, no matter how many times he's asked. After all, how many players get to become the hero of a high school state-championship game?

The air was cold at Hershey Park Stadium in the PIAA Class AAA state game last week and Schuman ignored it. His 23-yard field goal with 1:32 remaining gave Strath Haven a 31-20 win over West Allegheny.

Now, one year later, Schuman is preparing for a return engagement. The two teams meet again tonight with the championship at stake. He knows he could be called upon again. He knows the Panthers' defense could come down on his ability to kick a football with thousands of fans screaming.

The key holds true for Neeshammy kicker Kevin Kelly, a freshman whose powerful leg has been as valuable to the Redskins as the sturdy legs of running back James Brittingham. Neeshammy meets Woodland Hills tomorrow night for the Class AA title.

Schoenman can recite the details of his game-winning kick by heart. Everything fell good when he kicked the ball. "I could hear the sound of the ball being tipped by an opposing line."

The kick started sunk a lot when I heard it. It was not through, he said. "It's the way you dream of ending a game."

On a career, some kickers may not want to face the pressure of knowing that the outcome of a game could depend on them. Schuman says he comes the challenge. He said he wouldn't mind being in a possible game-winning situation again.

It's the third straight season Strath Haven and West Allegheny are the last two teams standing in the Class AA. Strath Haven (14-0), which is riding a 44-game win streak, won the first two.

The X factor could be the X factor in this season. Schuman has converted 4 of 6 field-goal attempts and 10 of 16 PAT attempts. Strath Haven edged Manlius Central, 18-12, in the semifinals on Saturday night at Costeview. Schoenman converted both of his extra points. They turned out to be the difference in the game.

He said he doesn't feel pressure before he attempts a kick. He focuses on the ball, focusing on the task at hand.

"All I think about is making the kick," he said. "I remember how it was last year. I just have to block everything out of your mind."

"That might be easy for a senior with championship game experience, but what about a freshman?"

Unlike Strath Haven, Neeshammy is short on experience when it comes to placekicking, but not short of Kyle Kelly, a 5-foot-7, 150-pounder, may not be tall in stature, but his points as a kicker are growing.

He is 6 of 6 in field-goal attempts this season. He kicked a 42-yarder in a 37-20 win over Downingtown and a 54-yarder in a 26-21 triumph over Montgomery in a state quarterfinal. He also kicked a one-point game-winning kick for the Eastern Shore Conference game.

Total confidence
Neeshammy coach Mark Schmidt has many worries in taking on powerful Woodland Hills, but one of them isn't sending his freshman kicker out in a big spot.

"We have total confidence in him," Schmidt said. "The way he squirts can really hit the ball." Schmidt first got a look at Kelly during Neeshammy's preseason season. Apparently, the squirts was booming kicks well over the goalposts. At that point, Schmidt said he realized that he would have to use this rookie kicker for the next four years.

"He's a talented kid with a big leg," Schmidt said.

Whether it's the savvy senior or the impressive newcomer, both kickers could have a profound effect on their teams this season. One successful kick could deliver a lifetime of memories. Schoenman knows the feeling.

Redskins' first task is to take care of the ball

Jason Wiaters will be at the controls when Neeshammy seeks the AAAA state title tomorrow.

By Rick O'Brien
PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER STAFF

Neeshammy High's quarterback, Jason Wiaters has no problem running the ball to his arm and, while scrambling for yardage, meeting head-on with a charging linebacker or defensive back.

But don't ask the senior to play a game of two-hand touch football in the backyard.

Three years ago, when he was a sixth grader at Neeshammy Middle School, Wiaters broke his collarbone playing the "non-contact" sport.

"I got pushed into a tree," recalled Wiaters. "That's how I broke it."

Fortunately for Wiaters, Hershey Park Stadium — the site of tomorrow's PIAA Class AAAA state championship game — has no such pitfalls. His biggest concern will be the mammoth linebacker and muscle-bound linebackers rushing toward him in crated fashion.

With Wiaters at the controls, the Redskins will meet District 7's Woodland Hills at 5 p.m. for the state title. Both teams are 14-0. Five explosive players on offense, and have weathered a winter of adversity, schedule and four playoff games to make it to Hershey.

"It's a great feeling to be back on the field. To be excited about the opportunity we have."

The 6-foot, 130-pound Wiaters completed 7 of 11 passes for 63 yards while Neeshammy overcame a 12-0 deficit to beat District 3 champion Cumberland

Valley, 25-19, in the state semifinals last Saturday.

While the second-year starter did not throw any touchdown passes in the game, it was his 28-yard, third-quarter completion to senior wideout Keith Ennis that set up the Redskins' first score and clearly changed the momentum of the game.

On fourth and 10 from the Cumberland Valley 29-yard line, Wiaters threw a 28-yard pass to Ennis, who had managed just 96 yards of offense in the first half, on a down-and-out play.

Wiaters, however, lobbed the ball over the head of the Eagles cornerback and into the hands of the leaping Ennis, who was shot at catching it, Wiaters said.

"I just threw the ball to the spot where the defender couldn't reach it and Keith had a good shot at catching it," Wiaters said.

For the season, Wiaters has completed 172 passes (57.6 percent) for 3,346 yards and seven touchdowns. The resident of Langhorne, Bucks County, has thrown five interceptions.

"He's done a super job of running our offense," said Mark Schuchman, Wiaters' offensive coordinator. "One of the best things about Jason is that he takes care of the football. He doesn't rush. He's a real team player." The highlight of Wiaters' season came in a Suburban One game National Conference clash with rival Central Bucks West on Sept. 28.

The second-team all-Patriot Division selection engineered

an eight-play, 70-yard scoring drive in the final two minutes and the Redskins rallied to beat the visiting Bucks, 24-19.

The game was Wiaters' 6-yard touchdown pass to tight end Scott Mullin. The Redskins started unbeaten, improving to 5-0 and ending their first victory over West since 1989.

"In that sense, Jason hit four different guys," Schmidt said. "We still time-to-time on the clock was running...he executed those plays perfectly."

Wiaters shares Neeshammy's success with his father, Don. The elder Wiaters coaches the team's defensive linebackers.

Don Wiaters coached at Neeshammy High from 1992 to 1996 and then spent three seasons, from 1997 to 1999, at La Salle University. A former assistant to Bill Macoveo, who recently resigned as the Explorers' coach, he worked with the linebackers and also directed their strength and conditioning program.

"He's a great coach," Don Wiaters said of Manlow. "It was a great experience working with him."

Don Wiaters took the 2000 season off to watch his oldest son, Brandon, play his final year of football at Fairfield University. Brandon Wiaters, a linebacker in his career at Neeshammy, was a coach at Fairfield's Stags. He now teaches math at Hillsborough High in New Jersey.

"I went to all of Brandon's games," Wiaters said. "This year, when I heard that Neeshammy had an opening for a coach, I figured I might be involved instead of just watching from the stands."

"Like the rest of Neeshammy's



Neeshammy high quarterback Jason Wiaters completed 7 of 11 passes for 85 yards against Cumberland Valley in the state semifinals.

coaching staff, Wiaters was frustrated with the Redskins' first-half effort against Cumberland Valley. The Eagles put together scoring drives of 91 and 82 yards in jumping out to a 12-0 lead.

"It was a little stressful," Don Wiaters said. "But we made a few adjustments at halftime, like widening our defensive ends. It worked out well, because they couldn't run to the outside any longer."

Don Wiaters played running back and defensive back for

Morrisville High in the 1960s. Jason Wiaters respects his father's knowledge of the game. He also appreciates that his dad chooses not to criticize his every move at quarterback.

"He pretty much concentrates on the defensive side of the ball," Jason said. "He'll sometimes talk to me at halftime of games, but it's usually just to give me encouragement."

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Crowns on the line for two area schools

Strath Haven will go for its third straight PIAA title. Neeshammy hopes to bring home its first.

By Shannon Ryan
PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER STAFF

At a week of practices, intense preparation and dream-line ups the weekend for two area football teams hoping to win PIAA championships.

Strath Haven (14-0) will go for its third straight Class AAA title against West Allegheny (12-2) at Hershey Park Stadium tonight at 7 p.m. Neeshammy (14-0) will go for its first state title in Class AAAA when it plays Woodland Hills (14-0) tomorrow at 5 p.m. at the same location.

Strath Haven will meet a familiar foe. The Panthers have beaten West Allegheny for the title one last year.

Another win would put them in elite company. Only Central Bucks West and Perkiomen have won three consecutive crowns in the state. Strath Haven will also ride into Hershey on a 44-game win streak, the longest in the state.

"It's a familiar opponent and a familiar setting," Strath Haven coach Kevin Clancy said. "The Panthers are young, but talented and well-coached. They seem to find a new hero every year."

Against Berwick in the state quarterfinals, senior cornerback Josh Hannon came up with two key interceptions to help secure a 30-21 win.

Last week in the semifinals, junior free safety Keith Davis did a double figure as it rolled to a 71-30 win over Friends' Central.

Ashley Curry's 24 points powered Hill School to a 44-25 win over host Episcopal Academy in its girls' basketball tournament championship game yesterday.

The Blues took command early, jumping out to a 27-8 lead at halftime.

In the consolation game, Archbishop Ryan had three players in double figures as it rolled to a 71-30 win over Friends' Central.

Salem One, Lauren Douglas's 11 points paced host William Tennent to a 65-25 win over Bensalem.

Strath Haven also boasts string-outright quarterback Dan Connor, who has carried 187 times for 973 yards and 17 touchdowns. Connor has completed 66 of 122 passing attempts for 1,218 yards and 14 touchdowns.

"We're a young team," Clancy said. "But we have exceeded our expectations. We've performed our best." Strath Haven's defensive performance could be key against West Allegheny. Indiana quarterback Tyler Polko has thrown for 1,684 yards and 18 touchdowns this season. He also rushed for 527 yards and 18 touchdowns.

Neeshammy will have a challenge in containing Woodland Hills, the WPIAL champion. Senior running back James Brittingham has carried the Redskins' offensive load this season. Last week, in a 25-19 semifinal win against Cumberland Valley, the senior rushed for 155 yards and two touchdowns, helping Neeshammy spring to life.

His half-yard punt return on 29 touchdowns on the ground as well as 200 receiving yards and two touchdown catches.

Neeshammy's tight end, Division I recruit, averages 7.7 yards per carry.

The Redskins also list a capable quarterback in Jason Wiaters and a skilled receiver in Keith Ennis.

"We have to take some responsibility," Ennis said. "Our fans are proud of us now, and they'll be even more proud after we state championships."

Woodland Hills has a dangerous option quarterback in Steve Breanton. The 6-foot-2 senior is the team's leading rusher, picking up 1,443 yards on 330 carries this season.

Kareem Duetrielle, a senior running back, also may be hard

Hill School girls top host to win Episcopal tourney

Neeshammy. Harrison jumped out to a 41-13 lead at halftime and rolled to a 70-30 win at Springside behind Harry Berwick.

Stephanie Bibby's 13 points and 10 rebounds helped Chichester in a 74-49 win at Oxford.

San Valley's Emily Hoesch scored nine of her 11 points in the first half of her team's 62-32 win over visiting West Chester Henderson.

Tennamets Amber Falcigno and Heather McCall also

Games to Watch

PIAA Class AAA state semifinals
Strath Haven, 5 p.m.
West Allegheny, 7 p.m.

PIAA Class AAA state championship game
Woodland Hills (14-0) vs. Neeshammy (14-0), 5 p.m., Hershey Park Stadium

PIAA Class AAA state championship game
Strath Haven (14-0) vs. West Allegheny (12-2), 5 p.m., Hershey Park Stadium

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Notable female runners make college selections

Norristown's Courtney Clark chose N.C. A. & T. It's Georgetown for Villa Maria's Kim Malcolm.

By Shannon Ryan
and Ira Shapiro
PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER STAFF

Two of the top girls' high school runners in the suburbs have finalized their college decisions.

Norristown senior Courtney Clark has committed to North Carolina A. & T. Villa Maria Maria's Kim Malcolm has chosen Georgetown.

With track and field teammates surrounding her in the school lobby yesterday, Clark, a hurdler and sprinter, signed her national letter of intent.

She is the school's first track and field athlete to accept a full scholarship since Donna Fidler signed with Penn State in 1995.

"This is a monumental event," track coach Eric Haddock said.

Clark chose the Aggies over Penn State, Howard, Iowa State, and Tennessee.

"Family is very important to me, and I fit like a real family atmosphere there," Clark said of her visit to the Greensboro, N.C., campus on Nov. 10.

"They aren't on the national level yet, and the coach wants to bring me and some other girls in to help upgrade it."

Clark was the District 1 champion in the 100-meter hurdles last season, running 14.87 seconds.

She attained national rankings in summer competition, winning the USA Track and Field Association Junior Olympic national championship in

the 400-meter hurdles in 2000. She came in second in the event over the summer in a 1.8-mile, 0.31 seconds and was No. 8 in the World Youth championship in Hingham in 1:03.7.

Clark, who intends to major in computer engineering, wants to run in the hurdles, sprints and relays for the Aggies, who compete in the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference.

Malcolm signed with Georgetown on Nov. 14.

"I fell in love with it," said Malcolm, who also made visits to Cornell, Duke, and William and Mary. "I loved Washington, M.C., and Georgetown is a great school and they have a very competitive running program."

The Hoays, coached by Ron Hahn, are the defending Big East champions in both indoor and outdoor track. This cross-country season, they were the Big East title and placed third at nationals.

"I'm really, really happy and excited about my decision," Malcolm said.

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