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Sports Report

Donahue's grunt work helped Neshaminy win

By Joe Santoliquito
INQUIRER SUBURBAN STAFF

HERSHEY, Pa. — Geoff Donahue was a walking, talking mound of mud. The Neshaminy junior fullback and defensive end was shaking from a combination of chill and excitement, and he didn't care.

What warmed Donahue was his playing a key role in helping Neshaminy win its first FIAA Class AAAA state championship with a 21-7 domination of Woodland Hills on Saturday night in front of 9,883 fans at Hershey-Park Stadium.

The victory completed the best year in Neshaminy football history, ending the Redskins' season at 15-0.

They did it by beating a seemingly unstoppable Woodland team that had outscored its opponents, 472-115, this season.

Led by Jamar Brittingham's two touchdowns and 157 yards rushing on 30 carries, Neshaminy chewed up 387 yards of offense. Just as important, the Neshaminy defense held Woodland to one TD. The Wolverines had outscored their opponents, 115-13, in the playoffs to reach the state championship game.

There was no denying the importance of Brittingham, but if not for the defensive play of Donahue, Jay Collins, Fat Carroll and Austin Jones, the Redskins might not have captured the state crown.

It was Donahue who may have made the play of the game early in the third quarter. With Woodland leading, 7-6, and driving on Neshaminy's 10-yard line, the Wolverines were in a position to take control of the game. On a fourth-and-1 play, Donahue broke through the line and grabbed Woodland running back Kareem Dutrieuille. He held him up for defensive lineman Steve Brett to finish him off with 7 minutes, 29 seconds left in the quarter.

From there, Neshaminy took off on a 10-play, 90-yard drive that ended with Brittingham's first touchdown, a 4-yard run that gave the Redskins a 14-7 lead, after quarterback Jason Wiater hit Scott Mullin with a two-point conversion.

"We knew we had to make sure everyone hit hard on defense," said Donahue, who also made two big catches and several crucial blocks on offense that freed up Brittingham. "Our defense didn't get any respect coming into this game. We knew their quarterback and running back were fast, but we also knew we had to keep them contained and stay focused on keeping them in the middle of the field."

There were a lot of doubts about whether the Neshaminy defense could stop Woodland, especially on the ground. The Redskins had been pushed around a bit in previous playoff victories over Conestoga (28-12) and Cumberland Valley (41-31).

The Redskins made a few adjustments, such as moving middle linebacker Jay Collins to nose guard to keep the middle of the field congested. Carroll, who led the Redskins with 14 tackles, did a good job taking away the outside running lanes, and Donahue was a terror inside, picking up two tackles for losses of minus-6 yards.

"Since week one of this year, our defense has been doubted," said Collins, who scored the Redskins' first touchdown on a 3-yard run. "We kept hearing everyone thought, but we liked being the underdog. It's something we've overcome all year."

The Redskins put a quick scare into Woodland on their opening possession, moving to the Woodland 15. The drive stalled, however, when Neshaminy kicker Kevin Kelly missed a 32-yard field goal.


After Collins scored for a 6-0 Redskins lead, Woodland, on its next drive, scored its only touchdown. The Wolverines drove 60 yards on seven plays, with quarterback Steve Breston's 1-yard run giving Woodland a 7-6 lead.

For the fifth time this season, Neshaminy charged back after trailing at halftime, outgaining Woodland 220 yards to 105 in the second half. Brittingham's 45-yard TD run assured the victory. The Redskins' defense snuffed any chance of Woodland climbing back into the contest with interceptions by Justin Edwards and Erik Pederson in the fourth quarter.

Caked in mud from head to toe, Donahue could not wipe the smile off his face. It was his grunt work of blocking and tackling that made it all possible, and he didn't seem to mind.

"I know it's not something that will get me noticed, but if it gets us here and I can be a part of this, I don't care," Donahue said. "This is the best thing in the world."

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CHUCK GARDNER / Associated Press

Neshaminy quarterback Jason Wiater (center) celebrates with teammates after their 21-7 victory over Woodland Hills to claim the school's first Class AAAA state football title.