

Neshaminy's current powerhouse team is not its first

It is hard to imagine that a high school football program with an unbeaten streak of 51 games in its past and a penchant for producing pro-caliber athletes would actually still have goals unmet.

Yes, the current football juggernaut at Neshaminy is a school-record 12-0 and the latest hopeful to succeed Central Bucks West as the dominant power in the suburbs of Philadelphia. Win this Friday against Conestoga (11-1) and Neshaminy will have an even greater claim to the Bucks throne so long held by its Doylestown rival.

Succeeding C.B. West and psyching the student population and alumni alike on sold-out Friday nights at Harry Franks Stadium in Langhorne might satisfy many a program. But the Redskins of Neshaminy definitely want more, much more. Because no one will ever convince the Bucks County school that there are not significant kingdoms left to conquer. Not when Coach Mark Schmidt's team has in sight a state championship that was not there to be won for the best of the rest in the Redskins' storied history.

Thirty years ago, a similarly talent-rich Neshaminy team, coached by the late Jack Swartz and led by celebrated players such as Pete Cordelli, Dale Forchetti, Bruce McHaile, Chuck Lodge and Matt Bahr, younger brother of another Neshaminy great, Chris Bahr, went 11-0.

That 1971 team, peppered with so much talent that the backups included future NFL punter Bob Grupp, future Virginia running great Joe Sroba and Yale back Barton Smith (yes, a relation, right little brother?). Yet even though the '71 squad plowed through a tough schedule filled with the likes of Easton, Bethlehem's Freedom and Liberty High Schools and Pennsylvania, the year ended with 11 wins.

That Skins team could go no further because there simply

was no place to go — no playoffs, no tests against Pennsylvania schools near and far that held such talents as the running Joe brothers, Tony Dorsett and the like.

Nor could the earlier Neshaminy teams that went undefeated from 1962 through 1965 — the bulk of the unbeaten streak put together by the late John Peter Cuskie's Redskins teams. Neshaminy started its 47-0-4 run during the 1961 season.

Today's class of blue-chippers in Langhorne, such as 2,000-yard rusher Jamar Brittingham, know that the landscape is as inviting as the tests are different. Neshaminy's penchant for flirting with perfection on the field has not changed, but the possibilities have, thanks to the state-wide playoff system in which the Skins are thriving.

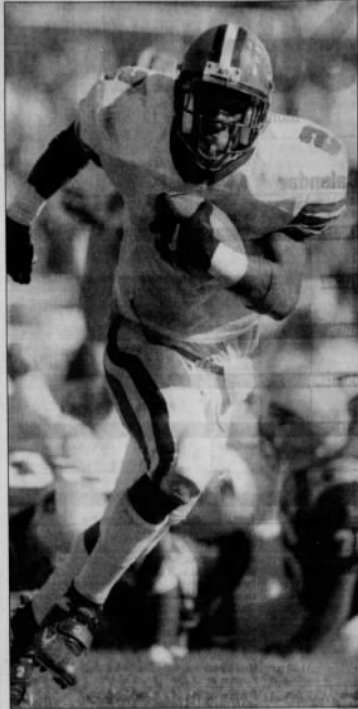
Neshaminy, well-tested by end-of-season wins against arch-rival Pennsylvania and then Council Rock, proved something to itself. Those two schools beat Neshaminy last year, both heartbreakers, especially the Rock's double-overtime win. But the heartbreak brought seasoning. That seasoning showed this weekend when Neshaminy gave the latest, most concrete evidence of all the possibilities with a 37-20 drubbing of Downingtown — winner of two district titles and one state title since 1994.

Neshaminy is headed for the state quarterfinals. All the Skins must do to advance past that plateau is a lot — defeat visiting Conestoga in the subregional (District 1-2-4) Class AAAA championship on Friday night in Langhorne. Conestoga advanced to the game thanks to a 34-31 double-OT win over Cheltenham. "That's a very talented team with a lot of people that can do some damage," Schmidt said. "They have some real nice schemes, play very sound, and gatted it out to get to where they are."

What is said of Conestoga certainly can be said of Neshami-



A key play in Neshaminy's season came when Ryan van den Brand (left) sacked C.B. East quarterback Josh Felicetti last month.



Jamar Brittingham had both touchdowns in Neshaminy's come-from-behind, 15-14 win over Central Bucks East in October.

ny, which was hit hard by injuries a year ago, but benefited in a way when upperclassmen stepped in, gained an upper hand on the game and reaped the rewards this season.

"We've weathered a lot of storms to get to this position — injuries, the need for come-backs, last-minute heroics," Schmidt said. "It's all added to the drama and put us in position to do a lot of fun things."

Schmidt and his players know that while all of the current Bucks County-area football fans are watching, so are a significant number of players and coaches from dynasties past. Yes, the possibilities of succeeding C.B. West are heady, even for a school that, when fed by four middle school programs, has more than enough of a foundation for its own rich football tradition. Still, Schmidt knows the real prize will be found in

Neshaminy's living up to its own history.

"We're just hoping to find out how it was back in the day," said Schmidt who, on any given game day, can look into the stands and see his predecessors as well as many of the past playing greats. "It's really a great thing, to see these guys, talk about how it was," he said. "As I got to know them over the years, I always wished how it

would be that way again."

A couple more wins, and both Schmidt and Neshaminy will write their own, unique chapter in the continuing legend. Not only can it be that way for Neshaminy, again, we now know it can actually be that much better — an amazing thought in itself for an exceedingly successful program.

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