

High Schools

C.B. West pays back Neshaminy, 22-19

The Bucks staged a fourth-quarter rally and overcame a 12-point deficit to stun the Skins.

By Rick O'Brien
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Moments after a thrilling 22-19 victory over Neshaminy, the Central Bucks West players gathered near the spot in the end zone where a fumble over a year ago many of them had tumbled in utter disappointment.

Last season, on its way to the PIAA Class AAAA state title, a 6-yard pass on the game's final play gave Neshaminy a 21-19 victory over the visiting Bucks.

It was payback time yesterday. West rallied from a 12-point deficit in the final seven minutes to earn a crucial victory over the stunned Redskins in front of Harry E. Franks Stadium.

"I remember how bad I felt after they beat us here last year," said Chris Miller, a senior linebacker for the Bucks. "To win this game, coming from behind like we did, is incredible. We never gave up."

The Suburban One League National Conference Patriot Division victory gave Central Bucks West (6-2, 2-0) its sixth consecutive win and kept the team very much in the hunt for a berth in the district playoffs.

Last year, coach Randy Cuthbert's group went 7-3 and narrowly missed a postseason invitation.

"The turnaround this season is a credit to the kids and the coaches," Cuthbert said. "We made some personnel changes (after an 0-2 start), and decided that we were going to get better every week."

Neshaminy (6-2, 2-1) held a 10-7 advantage after junior running back Rodney Davis posted his third score of the afternoon — a 12-yard run off right tackle — with 7 minutes, 5 seconds remaining in the game.

In what appeared to be a case of divine intervention, the Bucks stormed back and avoided a defeat that would have all but ended their playoff hopes.

Two plays after a 64-yard pass from quarterback Joe Mc-



Neshaminy quarterback Joe Crostara (left) flips the ball to teammate Rodney Davis (not shown) just as he is hit by Central Bucks West defender Andrew Ackley, West's Anthony Edwards (rear) also gives chase. On the play, Davis took the pitch and ran 57 yards for a touchdown. Davis scored all three TDs for the Redskins in yesterday's loss.

McMongle to split end Andrew Ackley had put the ball at the Neshaminy 16-yard line, a penalty for intentional grounding moved it back to the 33.

From there, McMongle avoided a heavy rush and hit Ackley, who was wearing cornerback Brian Burke, in the middle of the end zone.

McMongle, a sophomore who played for Unani Middle School last year, completed 6 of 7 passes for 164 yards in the final seven minutes.

"He's a guy that really makes our offense go," Cuthbert said. "He's still a little rough around the edges, but he's going to be a great quarterback."

After stopping the Redskins on three downs, West regained possession at its 41 with just under three minutes remaining.

On first and 10 on the Neshaminy 48, McMongle passed along the left sideline looked as if it was going to be picked off by Devon Swope, Neshaminy's free safety. But the left de-

fenders nearly sent the game into overtime. But two field-goal tries by left-footed sophomore Kevin Kelly — from 46 and, following a roughing-the-kicker infraction, with no time showing on the clock — 31 yards — failed.

"The game should not have come down to that," Neshaminy coach Mark Schmidt said. "We had a lot of chances before that to put it away."

Davis rushed 17 times for 139 yards and two TDs. On the last

LINDA JOHNSON/Inquirer Staff

Central Bucks West: 2 7 3 15 — 22

Neshaminy: 0 7 6 6 — 19

CBW: McMonagle 6-2-16 (McMonagle 100)

N: Davis 17-21-164 (Davis 100)

N: Davis 55-pass from Crostara (16-16-100)

CBW: Ackley 21-25-164 (Ackley 100)

CBW: Miller 10-16-164 (Miller 100)

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On the high schools By Todd Zolecki

Like a cat, the Bucks had nine lives

Central Bucks West cheated death on the way to yesterday's memorable victory. It did so not once, but over and over again.

Randy Cuthbert had an empty field to himself late yesterday afternoon, just moments after the Central Bucks West football team enjoyed one of its most memorable and important comebacks in school history.

Cuthbert deserved those minutes of calm. But he deserved the victory, a 22-19 thriller over Neshaminy, the defending PIAA Class AAAA state champion, a little more.

"I've believed in these guys all year," he said.

Cuthbert, the Bucks' head coach, knew his team needed to beat Neshaminy yesterday at Harry E. Franks Stadium. With a loss, the Bucks could have pretty much kissed goodbye to their chances of making the PIAA Class AAAA playoffs.

Losses to St. Joseph's Prep and Pennridge to start the season put the Bucks in that position. To make matters even more difficult, Cuthbert, who is in his second season as head coach, couldn't get the Bucks into the playoffs last season. One more defeat would have meant two straight years without a postseason.

"Those first two weeks were tough," Cuthbert said. "I felt like crawling under a rock."

A few West fans probably would have helped get him there, too, if Cuthbert only had asked. And a few of the Bucks' rivals would have loved to write the team's obituary to go along with it. But the Bucks' demise, which had been widely reported and celebrated

many after the two losses, appears to have been greatly exaggerated. The Bucks are alive and well, and with games left against rival Central Bucks East and North Penn, they are in position to return to the postseason.

How they got to that point is remarkable because the victory over Neshaminy mirrored what West had experienced all season. Namely, it walked to the edge, slipped, fell and somehow survived.

Look at how West cheated death. After Neshaminy's Devon Swope recovered a Bucks fumble early in the fourth quarter, running back Rodney Davis scored on a 12-yard run with 7 minutes, 5 seconds to play to give the Redskins a 19-7 lead.

Some West fans began to leave. They had good reason. The Bucks' offense did not look impressive with its plodding rushing attack in the first 3½ quarters.

Were the fans to believe that the Bucks could win suddenly through the air?

You bet.

On third and 29 from the Neshaminy 33, Bucks quarterback Joe McMongle rolled to the right to avoid pressure. He then threw a sidarm pass across his body to the other side of the field. There, two defenders waited. They had the position. They had the pick. But Andrew Ackley caught the ball. Somehow, he caught it.

And with 4:12 to play, the Bucks had cut the Neshaminy lead to 19-14.

The Bucks then stopped Neshaminy on its next possession and got the ball back. Then, on first and 10 from the Neshaminy 48, McMongle threw to perfect Tony DiBriano, with Swope in perfect position for the pick.

But the ball went through Swope's hands and into the hands of DiBriano. He caught it, juke'd a defender, and reached the 1-yard line. Chris McGinn scored two plays later, and with the two-point conversion, the Bucks took a 22-19 lead with 51 seconds to play.

"I saw him wide open," McMongle said of DiBriano. "I just didn't see the guy in front him."

Then the Bucks cheated death yet again. With three seconds on the clock, Neshaminy kicker Kevin Kelly lined up for a 45-yard field-goal attempt, well within his range.

"By the time he's a senior, every body in the country will be recruiting him," Cuthbert said of the sophomore.

So the Bucks held their breath. Then Kelly kicked. The ball knuckled low and to the right. He missed. The Bucks stormed the field.

They thought they had won.

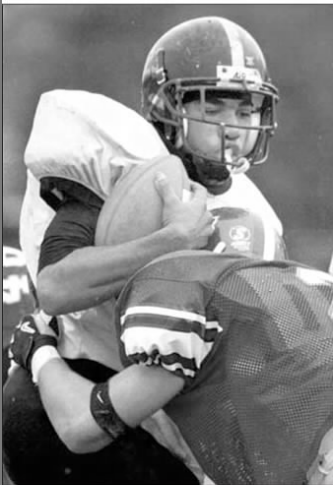
Of course, they hadn't. Not yet. A roughing-the-kicker penalty gave Kelly a second try, from 31 yards out. "I didn't want to hand a touchdown," Cuthbert said.

But Kelly missed again, after a Bucks player got to watch on the field. The Bucks had won again.

"That," Cuthbert said, "is a good way to summarize it."

And a great way to continue a run to the playoffs.

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C.B. West's Tyler Dinis (left) is stopped by Neshaminy's Brian Burke. The Bucks scored 15 points in the final quarter to avenge last year's loss to the Redskins.