

Neshaminy packed up too soon

Coach John Chaump and his Neshaminy football players spent Tuesday and Wednesday afternoon last week packing their football gear for the winter.

Well, they weren't really packing it up for good. It was, they hoped, to be a temporary maneuver. Because of that, athletic director Ray Kelly had worked out a deal with a local business to obtain about 60 burlap bags. And into these bags went the hip pads, thigh pads, shin pads and bright red helmets that make up the Redskins' uniforms. And there the bags lay in the corner of the equipment room.

Tomorrow, to the unending delight of Chaump, his players and Neshaminy fans, those bags will be emptied and their contents redistributed to the players.

Practice is on again because Neshaminy is going to the PIAA state playoffs.

"We had to do something with the equipment," Chaump said of the burlap-bag idea. "We didn't want to leave it lying around. Hey, our season was over for all we knew. We were prepared for that."

But thanks to a 14-14 tie between Central Bucks West, which had a 53-game winning streak end, and Central Bucks East on Thursday, Neshaminy earned the right to play in Saturday's Class AAAA Eastern regional championship game at J.B. Crum Stadium in Allentown. Had West won the game, both teams

By GARY MILES



would have been 11-0 and West would have edged Neshaminy for the berth on the fifth of nine tie-breakers established by the PIAA before the season — the won-lost records of the team's best nine opponents.

Instead, Neshaminy, which went 11-0 (West is 10-0-1) after switching offensive alignments and overhauling its coaching staff, will represent Region 1 in the Class AAAA playoffs and play for a chance to meet the Western regional champion on Dec. 10 at Beaver Stadium in State College.

"We were all standing in the endzone area near the concession stand at the East-West game," Chaump said. "And when the game was over and we realized we'd be going to the playoffs, we all started shouting 'Unpack the potato sacks.' It was such a thrilling moment."

Chaump has reason to revel in his success this season. After a 9-2 season last year, he decided to switch from the wishbone offense to the multiple-I and several of his assistant coaches resigned because of the decision. The pressure was on, he said, to show

those departed coaches that it was the players, not the plays, that make teams win.

"We used that as motivation every day," Chaump said. "We were inspired by those guys to show people that we could be just as successful, if not more, with our system. Give the credit to the players, though. They are the ones who did the work on the field."

And what a group of players Chaump has had to work with. Platooning quarterbacks Dan McClave and James Franklin have been superb in keeping the offense controlled and effective. Franklin has thrown for 500 yards and four touchdowns, and McClave has thrown for 380 yards and one score.

Running backs Jon Hall, Rob Latronica and Jeremy Horton have supplied big gains in every game. Hall, a 1,000-yard rusher, averages 6 yards a carry and has scored 14 TDs. Latronica averages 6 yards a carry and has scored six touchdowns, and Horton has 410 yards and one score. Tight end Chris Weiser has 13 catches and wide receiver Reggie Jackson has 12, including two for touchdowns.

Center Terry Sauerbry, who is being recruited by Penn State and Notre Dame, has been the anchor of a rock-solid offensive line. And defenders Brian Moser, Artie James and Scott Altman lead a defense that has allowed an average of just four points a game.

"We expected to have a pretty good

team even before the season," Chaump said. "We had a lot of guys back and they had worked hard in the weight room over the off-season. Our playing on Saturday is a result of Central Bucks West not winning on Thursday. But we put ourselves in the position to take advantage of it."

Neshaminy put itself in that position by blasting through its schedule like a raging animal. It rolled over Archbishop Wood, Downingtown, Norristown, Pennridge, Bensalem, Harry S. Truman and William Tennent by a combined score of 207 to 27. It survived a scare at Abington (an 8-7 win), tripped its eventual savior, Central Bucks East (a 19-7 win), beat Council Rock at Council Rock (14-3) for the first time in 15 years and then clobbered arch-rival Pennsbury, 49-14, before 3,000 cheering, crying and singing hometown fans.

Even better, having last week off was just what the Redskins needed. Hall had time to heal a sore ankle and running back Chris Craig, a pre-season star, may be able come back from a broken ankle he suffered early in the season.

The Redskins, the holders of the longest unbeaten streak in the area (51 games) before West came along this season, weren't sure if they would make it to the playoff party this year. Now, they've finally got an invitation.

Chaump's job this week, he said, is to make sure they show up with their playing clothes on.