

Prep wins, but looming strike clouds future

By **STEVE WOOD**

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NOT EVEN THE long arm of tropical depression Ernesto could tarnish the aura of a brand-new football season.

What is brewing behind closed doors, however, could be enough to disrupt part of St. Joseph's Prep's season.

Talks between the union for Catholic high school teachers and the Archdiocese are said to have stalled, with a strike vote looming on Tuesday.

This, of course, meant nothing to The Prep yesterday, which endured muddy conditions to win its opener at Neshaminy, 16-6.

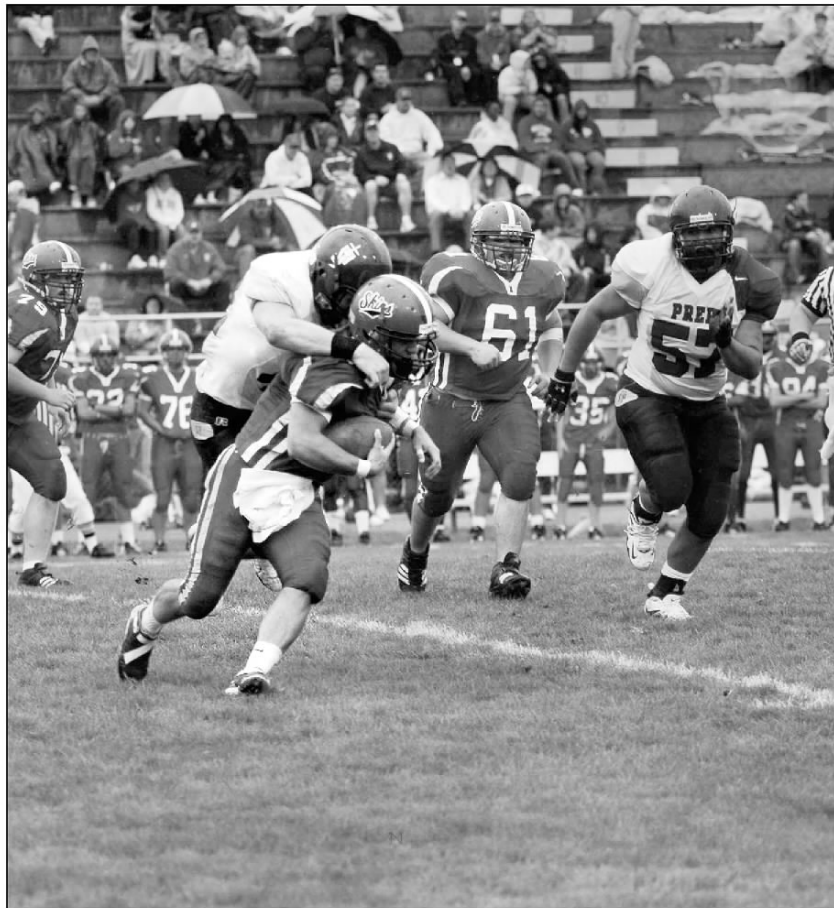
"The biggest problem is footing," Prep coach Gil Brooks said. He was referring to the heavy focus on the running game, but he might as well have meant the uncertainty of Prep's next couple of games.

If a strike occurs, Prep and La Salle, the two fully private teams in the 16-team Catholic League, could lay prey to the Archdiocese, which has the last word on league matters.

The Prep is scheduled to play Don Bosco Prep, of Ramsey, N.J., before flying to Ohio to face Hilliard Davidson as part of a nine-game, 2-day Ohio vs. USA challenge event.

According to sources, the league is crying foul and citing an unfair advantage over the possibility that the two private schools will not be affected by a strike.

"Frankly, I don't think it's any



KRYSTLE MARCELLUS/For the Daily News

Neil Doogan, St. Joseph's Prep, tackles Neshaminy quarterback Andrew Flogel.

advantage," Brooks said. "It would be an advantage if they had to come back the very next week and play us. We've been through this before. Nobody said anything about this before."

In 2003, when a strike erased 2 weeks' worth of games and shortened the Blue Division's postseason from three games to two, both Prep's and La Salle's schedules were untouched.

Brooks said it had better be like that again, since Prep is outside the Archdiocese. He and others have money banking on it.

"We got a contract to play Don Bosco, but we also signed a contract with a marketing firm ... and this game is on ESPN," Brooks said. "Plus, we have Old Spice, Nike and Gatorade as major corporate sponsors who put up a ton of dough. Next week, I already have 75 airline tickets and room reservations."

Plans to fly to Ohio aside, the Hawks' offense was grounded yesterday, with stud quarterback Chris Whitney attempting only five passes, one of which found receiver Brian Brinkmann for a 60-yard score. Jamir Livingston amassed 127 yards on 23 carries.

"We're coming off a good camp and a good first week of practice," Whitney said. "It felt really good to get back and get the very first game of the season out of the way."

The question remains as to when they will play next. Brooks had a question of his own: "Suppose St. Joe's Prep was having a strike; would the whole Catholic League shut down for us?" ★