

Neshaminy's Kelly plans to be in there kicking for a crown

By Ira Josephs

INQUIRER SUBURBAN STAFF

Kevin Kelly attended his older sister Meghan's Irish dance competitions in the late 1990s. But before Meghan performed, Kevin was kicking it up himself.

He wasn't, however, doing the jig, reel or hornpipe. He was practicing field goals or extra points at the nearest field. Somehow he didn't miss many kicks, or his sister's performances.

"We made sure we didn't do that," said Kelly, who was usually accompanied by his father, Terry.

All that practicing paid off for Kelly, a varsity kicker the last four years for Neshaminy, the 13-1 team that will aim for its second PIAA Class AAAA football championship in four years tomorrow when it faces Pittsburgh Central Catholic (15-0).

Kelly, an honor-roll student, is the only current member of the Redskins who played on the 2001 championship team, which clobbered Woodland Hills, 21-7, to cap a perfect 15-0 season.

Three years later, after enduring a 3-7 season in 2003, Neshaminy is back in Hershey, where Kelly will be looking for perfect kicks rather than Kisses.

"It was always a goal," Kelly said of the Redskins' return to the state final. "It's so hard to get there once, let alone twice. I knew we'd have a good team again. Everybody wanted it and worked so hard."

Count Kelly among the diligent workers. Although he doesn't play a field position, the 5-foot-8, 175-pounder is no stranger to the weight room or contact.

Kelly, who has already made an oral commitment to a full athletic scholarship at Penn State, squats 475 pounds and bench-presses 250. In practice, he lines up at wide receiver.

"He's absolutely one of the greatest kids I've had in the program," said Mark Schmidt, completing his 10th year as Neshaminy's head coach. "He's knocked the heck out of people."

Of course, first and foremost, the Redskins need Kelly's foot rather than his force. And on most occasions, he has come through. This season, he is a perfect 56 for 56 on extra points and 10 of 16 on field goals.

Uncharacteristically, three of the misses came in Saturday's 21-14 semifinal win over Easton. But Kelly's not getting down on himself, and the team's not getting down on him.

"If we're in a tight game, KK is always there," said senior running back and captain George Coleman. "He's always there encouraging everybody. You would think somebody would be cocky in his position. He acts like the rest of the team. That's the best thing about him."

Schmidt said he is confident that Kelly will rebound.



LINDA JOHNSON / Suburban Staff

Kicker Kevin Kelly is no stranger to state championships; he was on Neshaminy's 2001 title team. The honor-roll student's next stop will be Penn State.

"He won't let that bother him," Schmidt said. "He'll probably come back and have his best game ever."

Kelly said he began kicking at age 7 or 8, and he also played soccer through ninth grade and baseball through 11th. He attended a football camp Schmidt held for elementary school and middle school students the summer before he began ninth grade at Maple Point Middle School.

Neil French, Neshaminy's linebackers coach, informed Schmidt that Kelly was a legitimate kicker. When the school year began, Kelly was kicking for the varsity even though he still attended middle school.

Kelly, who kicks with his left foot, connected on 6 of 8 field goals as a freshman, including a 54-yarder that remains his best kick in a game. He hit 6 of 12 as a sophomore and 7 of 14 last season, when he also kicked 25 of 25 extra points. In practice, he has booted a 62-yard field goal.

Penn State and Neshaminy followers will note that Kelly is following the same path as the Bahr brothers — Chris and Matt — who played at Neshaminy, continued at Penn State, and enjoyed lengthy and successful NFL careers.

"I haven't had a chance to meet them," he said. "Coaches always bring them up. They were the first ones in Lower Bucks to kick soccer-style."

Kelly also hopes to continue the state championship trend.

"I'm looking forward to it a lot," he said. "Hopefully, we can pull out a win. I'm the only one with a ring. I feel kind of selfish."

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