

TALE OF THE TAPE: North Penn at Neshaminy, tonight, 7:30

It's District 1's big-school championship dance tonight, but unfortunately, some of the honored guests are grounded and forbidden to attend.

Eight former North Penn regulars will miss tonight's long-awaited rematch with Suburban One National rival Neshaminy in the Class AAAA district championship.

Three of those former players sit in a juvenile detention facility in Bucks County while the other five while away the hours at home, all because of a brawl at Central Bucks West on July 22.

Among the missing for the defending AAAA state champion Knights are senior quarterback Adam Hearn and cocaptains Eric Halberstadt and Zach Raffle.

Needless to say, Neshaminy will be favored to gain entrance into the state tournament in an effort to repeat its 2001 state title.

At stake

A District 1 title and advancement

in the AAAA state tournament. A bragging-rights bonus in the Suburban One League's National Conference isn't an afterthought, either, considering the Knights' 31-30 overtime conquest of Neshaminy on Oct. 22. That game, which would result in these teams sharing a three-way league championship with Pennridge, came after North Penn's administration lifted an activities suspension on the aforementioned eight indicted players that had lasted just one week. That seems like a long time ago now.

Records

North Penn: 10-2.

Neshaminy: 11-1.

Coaches

North Penn: Dick Beck.

Neshaminy: Mark Schmidt.

Last games

North Penn: A late field goal by

kicker Jon Strielsky boosted the Knights to a 24-21 victory over Pennridge. Hearn and Halberstadt, as usual, played big roles. But so did running backs Peter Stoll and Shane Gallagher, who have been dynamic of late and will be there tonight to offer Neshaminy problems.

Neshaminy: A second-half climb from a 17-point hole, orchestrated by sophomore quarterback Andrew Fogel, set the scene for a 23-20 Redskins conquest of top district seed Coatesville. Fogel threw two touchdown passes, while George Coleman chipped in with a terrific effort on the ground.

Knockout punch

Coleman is capable of taking a game over when the opposition least expects it. For Neshaminy to do well, Coleman will have to play a ball-control game in concert with Fogel.

For North Penn, sophomore

quarterback Jim Levens will likely take over for Hearn. Expect him to hand off repeatedly to Gallagher and Stoll.

Weaknesses

Neshaminy has had to post huge comebacks two weeks in a row to avoid knockout blows by C.B. West and Coatesville. You can't live on the edge forever. With all those North Penn regulars out of the lineup, however, look for the Redskins to take advantage of the youth-strewn Knights, try to capitalize on their mistakes and score early and often.

Analysis

Yes, the Knights will try to feed off the "us against the world" mentality that has carried them this far. But too many big bodies are missing and too many recent distractions have to be overcome.

— Rob Parent