

Neshaminy tops field with 15 returning starters

By Rob Parent

INQUIRER SUBURBAN STAFF

Ask Neshaminy coach Mark Schmidt for any number of reasons why his defending District 1 champion Redskins should be a top pre-season pick in a Southeastern Pennsylvania football rankings, and he could list 15 of them.

That's how many returning starters Neshaminy has from the team that finished second to Pittsburgh Central Catholic in the PIAA's Class AAAA state tournament.

Eight starters return on defense, seven on offense. All of whom has Schmidt excited: "Yeah, that's not too bad," he said.

As usual, Neshaminy's top competition in the Suburban One League's National Conference is **North Penn**, a young but loaded team just two years removed from winning the Class AAAA state title and largely the same team that gave Neshaminy a hard push in the playoffs last year.

But before the Redskins even begin to think about conference opponents, they have a season opener that promises to be a memorable one.

St. Joseph's Prep will be visiting today for a night game in front of what should be a crowd of several thousand at Neshaminy's "Heartbreak Ridge."

It will be a season-opening

battle between The Inquirer's two top-ranked teams. Coach Gil Brooks' Prep team, which entered last season with a 35-game winning streak, opened with a loss to that same Pittsburgh Central Catholic team that ended Neshaminy's season in disappointment.

"With a team of that magnitude," Schmidt said of the Prep, "we have to treat it like a Kick-off Classic."

The Hawks also finished on a down note last season with a loss to **Cardinal O'Hara** in the Catholic League Red Division championship game. Brooks' team is loaded with returning starters with long memories.

Quarterback Andrew Fogel and Penn State-bound defensive tackle Tim McRowen lead the way for Neshaminy, while running back John Shaw and quarterback Chris Whitney are looking for breakout seasons for the Prep.

As for North Penn, coach Dick Beck's third-ranked Knights are young and loaded, led by stoppers Josh Neubert and Alex Johnson, and Pete Stull as a "fullback that can fly."

As for No. 4, **Cardinal O'Hara** has fleet quarterback Anthony Walters and bruising back John Dempsey behind lineman Dan Gough to help defend its title.

Beyond that top-four tier, the

Ches-Mont League's **Coatesville** (with flying tailback C.J. Gray), **West Chester East** (led by lineman Ryan Flanagan and backfield guys Bob Brice and Fred Maldonado) and **Downingtown East** (with Miami recruit Pat Devlin) line up nicely.

But in front of those three teams look for No. 5 **Strath Haven**, led by a terrific backfield duo in Jared Bradley and Kevin Kaminski, to return to dominance in the Central League.

Central Bucks West and **Bensalem** have the last two spots.

Contact suburban staff writer Rob Parent at 610-313-8025 or rparent@phillynews.com.

Preseason	
Team	2004 Record
1. Neshaminy	13-2
2. St. Joseph's Prep	10-3
3. North Penn	10-3
4. Cardinal O'Hara	11-1
5. Strath Haven	8-2
6. Coatesville	11-1
7. West Chester East	9-3
8. Downingtown East	8-2
9. Central Bucks West	9-2
10. Bensalem	6-5

— Rob Parent