

A divided district is together for game

Three touchdowns short of meeting his great expectations Friday night, but retaining a glint of optimism in his eyes, Jeremi Ronaldo said he was looking forward to spending another week in limbo.

Blessed with the advantage of playing high school football, Ronaldo is one of the few Pennsbury students in a district paralyzed by a teachers' strike who is finding his down time educational.

"It's killing people educationally," Ronaldo said of the two-week-old labor shutdown. "There are some people I know who are going out of their minds because they don't have anything to do all day. So they're really frustrated by the strike."

No wonder Pennsbury let loose Friday night, greeting Neshaminy with an overflow crowd of several thousand and a football team as hyped up as any bunch of teenagers with nothing better to do. Unfortunately for the Falcons, that only resulted in a 35-14 loss to the overpowering Redskins.

But it doesn't mean going back to an empty slate of activities for all of Pennsbury's students. For these Falcons aren't quite finished. Despite losing the chance to share the Suburban One National title with Neshaminy, Pennsbury still has qualified for the PIAA Class AAAA playoffs.

That means that Ronaldo, the slick senior running back with the soccer star name, can continue practicing Zen football while frustrated classmates wait for the school district's two warring factions to shake hands across the bargaining table.

"Some guys look at [the strike] as a distraction," Ronaldo said, "but I looked at it as a time to reflect and to prep myself for every practice day. So it was an opportunity. I sat around the house and looked at film from the game last year.

"Everybody on our team was staying positive and building each other up."

It was striking how that show of self-support by the Pennsbury players carried over into their crowd and their community. Though thousands of cars were parked in the small lots

and large graveled fields that surround the stadium on this perfect football night, most drivers subsequently found their vehicles peacefully adorned with a printed protest by the Pennsbury Education Association.

Its member teachers, these orange-and-black fliers (not leftover Halloween stationary but the Pennsbury team colors) informed everyone, are the backbone of an accomplished school district.

It claimed Pennsbury High sends 92 percent of its graduates to college and listed scores of National Merit awardees and AP scholars among its junior and senior classes. It was a compelling advertisement for a teachers union fighting its own uphill battle — after all, how many heavily burdened taxpayers these days feel teachers are underpaid?

You can see in this strike that Pennsbury's educators are a loyal lot, though.

"It's pretty tough when our coaches aren't there," said Pennsbury quarterback Zach Crowell, referring to the four members of the Falcons' coaching staff — including head coach Galen Snyder — honoring their union's wishes to stay out. "We know what we're doing in practice. But in games without the coach maybe you don't have someone there to make adjustments for you that you need."

No amount of Pennsbury coaching adjustments or home schooling was going to be enough Friday night to keep the Redskins from making their appointed league championship rounds. But Pennsbury's players could still look ahead to the playoffs and take heart in seeing family, friends, teachers, administrators and other fans — many of them unified by wearing those team colors — happily blowing off steam.

"It was great here," said Neshaminy receiver Doug Rosnick. "The atmosphere of this place was awesome. This rivalry is still going."



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