

## High Schools



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# Backs are in running for honors

*The ground game has been the way to go.*

It's easy to review the 2004 high school football season in Southeastern Pennsylvania and conclude it was the year of the running back.

From the mega-sized teams in the northern suburbs (Ryan Greiser of Pennridge, George Coleman of Neshaminy, and Brandon Pirrone of William Tennant) to the best in the west (Lansdale Catholic's R.C. Lagomarsino); from the workhorses in the southwestern regions (Sun Valley's Tony Canci and Coatesville's C.J. Gray) to the relatively underappreciated along the Delaware (Sean Wasson of Interboro), and on into the city and George Washington's favorite son, Jerry Butler, there were backs all over nearing or surpassing 2,000 rushing yards this season.

Fans could have a viable argument for any and all of them to be considered for The Inquirer's 2004 Offensive Player of the Year.

We'll soon be wrapping up the season with player-of-the-year selections for both offense and defense, along with coach of the year, and lists of our first- and second-team selections for the all-Southeastern Pennsylvania team.

On offense, player-of-the-year candidates could extend to quarterback, with Downingtown East's Pat Devlin and Conestoga's Josh Cohen, or to dominating linemen Marques Slocum of West Catholic and Will Barker of Haverford School.

On defense, it was a big year for big men. A top-shelf list would likely include West Catholic's Derrell Hand, Cen-

tral's Cornelius Bunch, Cardinal O'Hara's John Paul Conneen and Ridley's Jamar Savoy, among others.

To try to limit the number of short-changed players, we'd welcome coaches to either call or e-mail their feelings about their own nominees. And speaking of coaches, those who enjoyed a stellar campaign include members of the same family, Jim and Dan Algeo.

Jim Algeo's 37th team at Lansdale Catholic won the PIAA Class AA state championship, and Dan Algeo won his second Catholic League Red Division crown when Cardinal O'Hara upended St. Joseph's Prep.

Neshaminy coach Mark Schmidt is every bit as strong a contender for coaching honors as the Algeos.

Schmidt did a terrific job in leading what had been a three-win Neshaminy team a year ago to the Class AAAA state championship game, where it was beaten by Central Catholic of Pittsburgh, one of the best teams in the country. Other coaches who should be mentioned include Coatesville's Tom Nichols, Upper Merion rookie Ed Helenski and Pennridge's Jeff Hollenbach, who is retiring.

In always intriguing/baffling PIAA news, the state sports gatekeepers will launch into off-season discussions on two major issues. The first is starting practices a week earlier, something the Western Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic League (WPIAL) is already doing with football.



LINDA JOHNSON / Inquirer Suburban Staff

Neshaminy's George Coleman, left, has piled up mammoth rushing totals this season, as have, top, from left to right, Interboro's Sean Wasson, Pennridge's Ryan Greiser, and Lansdale Catholic's R.C. Lagomarsino. All rank as among the top offensive players in Southeastern Pennsylvania. And a case could be made for any of them — plus a few others — to be named The Inquirer's offensive player of the year.

## The Inquirer TOP 10

### Final Rankings, Regional

Team	Record
<i>Last week's rank in parentheses</i>	
1. Shawnee (1)	12-0
2. Cardinal O'Hara (2)	11-1
3. West Deptford (3)	12-0
4. Deptford (5)	11-1
5. Neshaminy (4)	13-2
6. St. Joe's Prep (6)	10-3
7. Cherokee (7)	9-2
8. North Penn (8)	10-3
9. G. Washington (9)	12-1
10. Lansdale Cath. (NR)	14-1

Also being considered: a possible split for the playoffs between public and private schools.

That issue is a byproduct of a lawsuit being litigated involving girls' basketball coach Molly Rottman of North Catholic (Pittsburgh). It could lead to the PIAA washing its hands of the policing of recruiting practices by schools with open enrollments, and thus lead to separate playoffs for public and private schools.

Rottman was penalized for a year by the PIAA for making contact with a top elementary school player in the Pittsburgh suburbs. Rottman filed suit, claiming a constitutional right to talk to anyone she wants, whether they happen to be good at playing basketball or not.

Maybe Rottman was just talking about the weather to the kid, huh?

As for other Catholic locales, the Philadelphia Catho-

## The Inquirer TOP 10

### Final Rankings, Southeastern Pennsylvania

Team	Record
1. Cardinal O'Hara	11-1
2. Neshaminy	13-2
3. St. Joseph's Prep	10-3
4. North Penn	10-3
5. George Washington	12-1
6. Lansdale Catholic	14-1
7. Coatesville	11-1
8. Conestoga	10-1
9. Central Bucks West	9-2
10. Pennridge	10-3

lic League is reviewing a football realignment. Although the league's principals have delayed a decision to go back to two divisions based on geography instead of enrollment, and also go back to one unifying title, a decision should be reached soon.

The guess here: They don't do it. Why? Because one Catholic League champion could be lobbying fodder for a formidable group of coaches who want to apply for PIAA membership because of shorter playoff scheduling.

Keep trying, guys. But if that lawsuit is successful, the PIAA might not want to deal with you, anyway. Maybe it should realign into three organizational categories — the Catholics, Privates and Public League; the WPIAL; and the real PIAA schools.

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