

FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Suburban One's concentration of power

You can bank on it: No team in Bucks County will vie for the state championship this season in Class AAAA football.

A little more specific, you say?

How's this: No team in the Suburban One National Football Conference — which includes the 10 best teams in Southeastern Pennsylvania — will be playing past Thanksgiving Day.

"It's difficult to make state playoffs a priority when you're confronted with something like this," said Central Bucks West's Mike Pettine, the dean of area high school football coaches.

"It was tough to make the playoffs to begin with. Now it's impossible."

What the friendly folks of Suburban One did was realign for 1991 in football. Their stated goal was to balance the league. Translation: Build a Mister Softee schedule for the Trumans, Pennridges and Lower Morelands of the suburbs.

Except Lower Moreland wanted a smoother ride than even realignment could provide, so it abandoned Suburban One altogether. Will Huntingdon Valley ever be the same without \$300,000 homes and Suburban One football? We'll see this fall.

Actually, the move was good for schools such as Truman, Cheltenham and Methacton. Especially good for Upper Moreland, which had the distinction of having been outscored, 322-18, in 1989. Now these schools are in a league all their own.

You can understand why some schools would prefer a less competitive football conference.

Problem was, in helping the Lilliputians, Suburban One elevated the behemoths. Now the big boys from West, Council Rock, Pennsbury and Neshaminy all live in a very tough neighborhood.

There are no more Colonial and Patriot Divisions, either. Used to be, Suburban One had three crossover games. Remember how people criticized Neshaminy for representing the East in the state playoffs in 1989 when C. B. West had its best team ever? Remember Neshaminy never played West that season?

Now they're forced to meet. No one is spared the grief of having to play the top teams.

Think about this conference's makeup: Abington, Bensalem, C. B. East, C. B. West, Council Rock, Neshaminy, Norristown, North Penn, Pennsbury and William Tennent.

How competitive is Suburban One National? Consider the testimony offered by last season's final Bucks County football leaders. The National Conference boasted:

• Eight of the top 10 scoring leaders, including the county's top scor-

By TIM PANACCIO



Suburban One League, new football alignment

National Conference

- Abington
- Bensalem
- C.B. East
- C.B. West
- Council Rock
- Neshaminy
- Norristown
- North Penn
- Pennsbury
- William Tennent

American Conference

Liberty Division

- Cheltenham
- Methacton
- Pennridge
- Plymouth-Whitemarsh
- Quakertown
- Souderton
- Truman

ddAmerican Conference

Freedom Division

- Hatboro
- Springfield (M)
- Upper Dublin
- Upper Merion
- Upper Moreland
- Wissahickon

er, Council Rock's Tom Coleman (80 points).

- Three of the top five passers, including Neshaminy's Cornelius White, who rushed for 4 touchdowns and threw for 17 more.
- Four of the top five kickers, including West's Ed Piranian (38 points).
- Four of the top five rushers, including Bensalem's Edmund Robinson (1,200 yards, 10 TDs).
- The top five receivers, including Truman's Calvin Hargrove, who caught 52 passes for 494 yards. Hey, even a little school such as Truman had a standout receiver last season.

The WPIAL of Pittsburgh doesn't have a 10-team conference nor with Suburban One National. The only football conference in the state tougher than this one is the Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference — and that's Division II college.

"I don't see anything in the eastern part of the state that could

possibly be tough," Pennsbury coach Al Matuza Jr. said. "I have knowledge of the whole state, and top to bottom, this league is clearly by itself."

That is why Suburban One National won't represent the east at the state playoffs. No one can survive this league without two losses. That's one loss too many to qualify for state playoffs.

That should come as welcome relief to Joe McNicholas at Ridley. The Green Raiders got themselves a free ride this year to the state playoffs — again.

There are no easy games in Suburban One National. No brothers, no relievers. The new alignment means National coaches must change their weekly practice habits.

Instead of daily contact drills, it's likely most schools won't have more than two days of heavy contact.

Why? Because their players are guaranteed to be banged up. When you have a no-breather schedule, your only hope to remain injury-free is light-contact or no-contact drills.

"It's going to make coaches' jobs harder," Pettine said. "How do you keep a team sharp in a contact sport without contact? I don't have an answer to that."

Matuza says the injury factor frightens him. And Pennsbury has 12 key performers who have people convinced the Falcons should rise to the top of the conference.

"Injuries in this new league could be devastating," Matuza said. "Every coach is going to want to protect his best players at practice. So they're going to have to hold contact to an absolute minimum."

Problem is, what's the minimum? One day, two days, three days?

There is one good feature about this conference.

"This league is great for the fans," Pettine said. "If you love high school football, this is a treat."

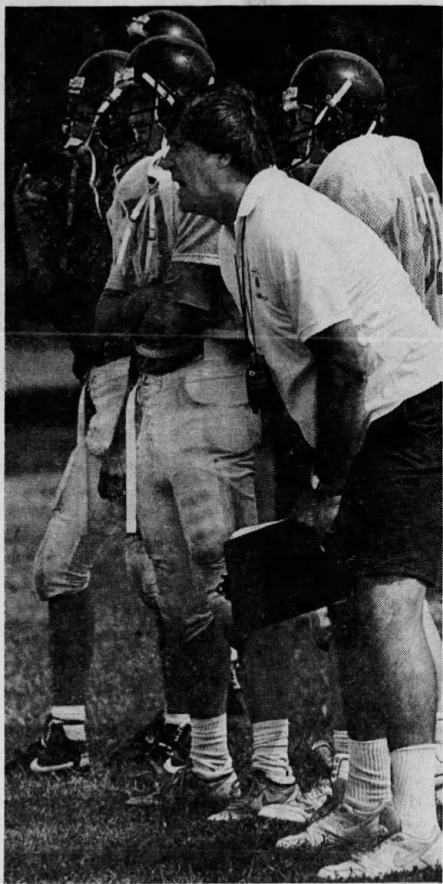
There is no treat awaiting C. B. West at season's end. West's final four games are against (in order) Council Rock, Abington, Pennsbury and its Thanksgiving Day rival, C. B. East.

"I'm not sure how we'll get through those last four," Pettine said.

By comparison, there is Ridley. Its final four games read: Upper Darby, Lower Merion, Springfield (Delco) and Interboro. Four titans of the sport, eh?

Silence from Pettine, but not Matuza.

"When you think how you get your kids working even earlier this year on the weights and the kind of schedule we play and then they



Special to The Inquirer / H. RUMPH JR.

Pennsbury coach Al Matuza Jr. watches a practice session. His team is in the powerful new Suburban One National.

know some other team that is not representative of the best in the district will likely represent them at the state, it's tough," Matuza said.

Relief is on the way, however. District 1 approved the implementation of a pick-and-choose playoff system (based on a yet-to-be-determined ranking and points system) effective in the fall of 1992.

It's not the WPIAL's brand of playoffs, but it's a start for District 1, which lives in the stone age when it comes to the philosophy of football playoffs.

Privately, some coaches and mem-

bers of the district playoff committee say you can thank Ridley for forcing District 1 to adopt playoffs.

"Someone who might be 10-0 might not be as strong as someone who is 9-2," said one committee member, referring to you-know-who.

For now, however, Suburban One National coaches have to live with the inevitable. Regardless of how good their clubs are, or whether they are deservingly of a state playoff bid, this year's schedule negates Suburban One National's chances of playing past Thanksgiving.