

Neshaminy Throws Downingtown for a Loss

By MIKE KERN
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Supposedly, a wishbone offense is not conducive to playing catch-up football. And likewise, a wishbone quarterback rarely beats you with his arm, especially when the other team is expecting him to throw the ball.

Well, so much for common misconceptions, because Neshaminy High rallied not once, but twice — with the second comeback being primarily accomplished via the passing of Bill Vergantino — to come away with a frenetic 26-21 non-league victory over visiting Downingtown.

Vergantino, who rushed for 139 yards on 13 carries and two touchdowns, instead burned the Whippets through the air during Neshaminy's decisive drive. The 6-foot, 170-pound junior completed four straight passes to move the Redskins, who trailed by three points when they took possession on their 47 with 1:54 remaining, into position for Tom Knox's five-yard TD run at 0:32.

"We're a good throwing team, but I guess because of our offense, people don't think we can put it up," said Vergantino, who threw a pair of earlier interceptions. "Our first two games, the protection wasn't there. Then tonight, the line was giving me plenty of time, but I was having trouble hitting the open receivers. They were there all night. It just

took me a while to find them.

"The option is always going to be our bread-and-butter, but the fact that we can throw is a real advantage for us."

Downingtown, which was coming off what had to be a disheartening 3-0 opening loss to Central Bucks West, jumped out to a 15-0 first-quarter lead. But after Pat Jagers booted a 42-yard field goal, his third of the young season, Vergantino thrust the Redskins (3-0) back into the game for real with a 65-yard scoring run.

It stayed that way until the 8:51 mark of the final period, when Vergantino covered the last 15 yards to cap an eight-play, 69-yard (all on the ground) drive. But Downingtown, which must certainly rank as one of the best 0-2 scholastic teams in recent memory, answered in swift fashion on the ensuing series with a beautifully disguised gimmick play. Tom Wolf tossed an overhand lateral to speedster Ralph Miller, who had lined up in the slot. It looked as if the Whippets were setting up a screen, but Miller stepped back and threw downfield to a wide-open Eric Nelson, who waltzed into the end zone to complete the 56-yard play and make it 21-18.

"With our offense, we feel like every play can go the distance," said Vergantino. "We really do. What's been holding us back all year is, we've been making that one little mistake that's kept us from breaking more plays.

"Once we got it cranked up, it seemed like we could pretty much move the ball at will. Even when we got behind early, we knew we had the capabilities to score quickly, so we weren't too concerned."

"The kids work it hard, and they have a lot of confidence in what we do best," said Neshaminy coach Dick Bedesem. "Obviously, on that last drive, we couldn't sit back and run our normal stuff because of the clock. But then again, nobody else could have, either.

"A lot of youngsters would have panicked in that situation, but [Vergantino] kept his cool. I told the kids when we got the ball at the end that we had the character to come back once, let's do it one more time."

And that's exactly what happened. Following a two-yard run by fullback John Rizzo, Vergantino hit Jim Dougherty for 12 yards, Knox for 13 and Tony Brunell for another 18. After a swing pass to Dougherty moved the ball three yards closer to the goal line, Neshaminy offensive coordinator Ed Neumann crossed Downingtown up by sending Knox (7-72) off right tackle, and the halfback scored easily.

"Yeah, I was a little surprised [by the call]," said Vergantino. "I figured we'd either pass or go back to the option, because that's what had been working best."

With a combined 598 yards total offense, you wouldn't expect many defensive kudos. But

Neshaminy did hold the explosive Miller, who was similarly shackled against West, to only 52 yards on 17 attempts. Downingtown, seemingly intent on establishing the pass after dying with a one-dimensional attack a week ago, managed only four first downs in the second half.

The good news for Whippet coach Mike Dominick is that Tom Wolf did respond to the added responsibility by hitting on 7 of 15 for 127 yards. The bad news is that fullback-linebacker-punter extraordinaire Greg DiRocco went out late in the opening quarter with what might be a serious ankle injury.

"We knew they'd be out for bear after losing," said Bedesem. "But I stressed to the kids that we can only worry about our club, and try to do the things we must do to be successful." Even if that means being patient at the outset.

"I can't explain why, but it seems like I come out stale the first possession, until I get a little juice in my legs," said Vergantino. "Teams will give you different things. The first two games the middle was open. This time it was the outside. It's hard to take everything away."

However, on those rare occasions when all overland routes are somehow clogged, the Redskins at least can simply wing it.