

Suburban One National Rich in Talent

First of three parts

By **MIKE KERN**
Daily News Sports Writer

When the Suburban One League expanded and split into two conferences in 1982, the common bonds, for the most part, remained in name only.

As envisioned when the new format was drawn up, the National Conference, consisting of the schools with larger enrollments, displayed some of the best football in the area. By the end of the season, three schools from old Sub One — co-champs Norristown and Abington plus William Tennent — held spots in the Daily News Suburban Top 10. Norristown's 32-14 drubbing of American Conference champ Upper Merion on Thanksgiving Day explains all you need to know about the relative strengths of the divisions.

By sheer numbers alone, the Sub One National has the capability to be a dominant power.

Once the former Lower Bucks County members — Bensalem, Council Rock, Pennsbury, Truman and Neshaminy — realize their full potentials, which several appear very close to doing, it's a likely proposition that each season four or five of the better teams in District I will be from the same conference.

Last year, Norristown, everyone's pre-season favorite, took a while to live up to those lofty expectations. Norristown proved worthy of its billing, though, and closed with "must" victories over Tennent, Abington and Upper Merion to finish 10-1 and grab the third position in the Daily News rankings.

Despite losing twin pillars Jerome and Jeff Reinhart, coach Roger Grove has enough material on hand to again be considered a strong threat to repeat.

"The fact that we've been successful is to our advantage, so long as the kids understand that it just doesn't



Stan Freedman: Cheltenham

happen, that you have to work for it," Grove said. "This year, these kids have to come back and establish their own identity. The league is very balanced, and I think it's lived up to its expectations.

"You look down the schedule and it's a little scary. It's going to take a heck of an effort for somebody to go through it unbeaten."

It seems the Eagles are blessed every year with one or two highly regarded Division I prospects. This season, the man in the spotlight is tailback Wayne Denson, who already has been called "the best running back in the country" by Temple coach Bruce Arians. At 6-2, 215 pounds, with a 4.45 time in the 40-yard dash and good hands, he is a formidable weapon.

Denson is joined by four other returning starters on offense. Three starters return from last year's sturdy defense. Players to watch include fullback Carmen Bello, linebackers Delbert Chavous and Dave Elsier and nose guard Chris Augustine. Quarter-



Wayne Denson: Norristown

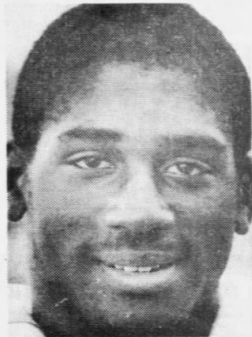
back Matt Wieber, who runs the 40 in 4.6 seconds, led the junior varsity to an undefeated season and is being counted on to take some of the pressure off Denson.

William Tennent (7-2) missed winning the conference by just seven points in '82. Bill Juzwiak welcomes back his entire starting backfield — QB Jeff Ferguson, FB Bob Baus and HBs Kevin Mylett and Frank Gallagher — but must find replacements for his depleted line.

"It's all a matter of how well we fill in the holes," Juzwiak said. "We could finish anywhere from fifth to first."

Last year Abington surprised a lot of people, rebounding from a 1-2 start to finish 8-3 and grab a share of the crown in recording its best season in almost a decade. The Ghosts lost productive running back Kyle Boelter, but have a strong nucleus back.

Pennsbury and Council Rock — which handed Norristown its only loss — also should make waves during the season. Both suffered grow-



Courtney Holmes: Wissahickon

ing pains last year, but with the right breaks each could prove to be sleepers. Another unknown quantity lurks in Neshaminy, a school formed this year as a merger of Maple Point and Langhorne.

While the American Conference from top to bottom can't boast the National's depth, several of the "smaller" schools should be more than able to hold their own. The focus here is on new faces and a possible changing of the guard.

Under coach Rich Como's guidance, the Upper Merion program has been among the finest for the past five years. But Como has departed for an assistant's post at Duke University, and Steve Schein, a former offensive coordinator at Spring-Ford, faces the task of filling some big shoes. The 10-1 Vikings were hit hard by graduation, but, on tradition alone, they still figure as one of the teams to beat. With a bulging stable of juniors on hand, Upper Merion's best days definitely are ahead, which is bad news for conference rivals.

Methacton endured a month-long strike last year but still finished at 5-3-1, including a tough 7-0 loss to Upper Merion. George Marinkov returns 11 starters — four on defense, always the Warriors' strong suit — and seven on offense. Tailback Jim Bruni and center Ed McManama were all-league performers, and three-year starter Chris Brennan is being counted on to glue the defense together after making the switch from cornerback to linebacker.

"This team is hungry," said Marinkov, whose teams won back-to-back Sub One titles in 1978-79 and tied for the championship with Upper Merion in '81. "After all that happened to them last year, they're just happy to be playing football without having to worry about outside distractions. They're proud of what they accomplished, and the aftereffect was positive, but now they're ready to give it their best shot right from the outset."

Wissahickon has enough quality on hand to pull off the unlikely feat of going from the cellar to the penthouse in a single season. The Trojans, formerly of the Bux-Mont League, went 1-9 in their Suburban One debut, but have 16 key lettermen returning. Courtney Holmes, a 6-3, 215-pound speedster, heads a backfield that could pass for a sprint team.

At Plymouth-Whitemarsh, coach Reece Whitley has 14 lettermen back from a 7-4 team, but will be hard pressed to fill the holes left by the loss of Chris Schaffer and Tony Trave, who combined to form the best aerial show around. Coach Stan Freedman returns to Cheltenham after an absence of nearly 10 years, but the man who created juggernauts here and at Haverford will not perform any miracles in '83 with only one starter back.

Tomorrow: Bux-Mont and Central.