

Special-teams gaffes prove costly to Vikings

By Chris Morkides
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Steve Schein was prepared for Neshaminy's wishbone offense. He was prepared for the Redskins' rampaging running game and stingy defense.

But Upper Merion's football coach couldn't prepare for one thing going into Friday night's clash with one of the top teams in the area. He couldn't prepare for a litany of special-teams mistakes that turned a possible upset into a disheartening 17-6 loss.

"The defense played as well as it could play. The offense moved the ball at times, especially on the first drive," Schein said.

"But," said Schein, summing up the loss at Neshaminy, "the special teams were terrible. They let us down."

"Special" certainly wasn't the word Schein would have used to describe

Neshaminy 17 Upper Merion 6

what the Vikings did when they were attempting to kick the ball themselves or field opposing kicks. A botched extra point, a fumbled punt snap, the mental error of a fair catch inside the 10-yard-line, and a kickoff that the Vikings fell on at their own 1-yard line spelled defeat at Neshaminy.

"We can't make mistakes like that," Schein said. Especially against a team as talented as Neshaminy, ranked No. 4 in The Inquirer's most recent poll of Southeastern Pennsylvania Top 10 teams.

The Redskins' wishbone, led by

quarterback Bill Vergantino and running back Jim Dougherty, presents unique problems to opposing coaches. The defense also isn't bad, as evidenced by Upper Merion's 104 total yards and inability to score after the opening drive.

But much of the damage to the Vikings was self-inflicted. It started after Upper Merion took its only lead of the game, on a 20-yard Jerry Hearn run at 8 minutes, 47 seconds of the first quarter. A bad snap cost Upper Merion the extra point, however.

Minutes later, Upper Merion's Bill Daywalt made a fair catch inside his own 10. Things got worse when punter Ryan Foster fumbled a snap and Neshaminy's Dave Paino recovered on the Vikings' 3-yard line. Jim Dougherty went in from the 2 two plays later and Neshaminy had a 7-6 lead.

Neshaminy upped the lead to 14-6 in the third quarter on Dougherty's

13-yard halfback pass to Brett Canimore. It was one of the few times the wishbone offense, which netted only 175 total yards, paid off.

"Our defensive backfield coach was yelling, 'Watch the halfback pass, watch the halfback pass,'" Schein said.

"We practice that play every day," Neshaminy coach Dick Bedesem said. "It was the right play at the time."

Pat Jagers' 40-yard field goal on the last play of the third quarter completed the scoring. The Vikings fell on the ensuing kickoff at their own 1 and were unable to mount a serious threat the rest of the game.

Bedesem praised the Vikings, who fell to 0-2.

"They're a well-coached team," the former Villanova football coach said. "They took things away from us. They made us look bad at times."

The Redskins have looked bad too many times for Bedesem's liking. When asked to compare Friday's win with a 24-14 opening-game victory over Bishop Egan, Bedesem said, "They both stunk. I don't think this team has played anywhere near the potential it has."

But Neshaminy is 2-0. Upper Merion is 0-2 and searching for answers. Schein hopes he gets some Friday against Abington.

"The defense is playing well and we're going to get better," Schein said. "At some time we're going to have to put points on the board. And our special teams have to play better."

Upper Merion	6	0	0	0	—	6
Neshaminy	7	0	10	0	—	17

UM: Hearn 20 run (kick failed)
N: Dougherty 2 run (Jagers kick)
N: Canimore 13 pass from Dougherty (Jagers kick)
N: Jagers 40-yard field goal