

SPORTS

Football

All-star game is comeback for Nelk

By Joe Ferry

Special to The Inquirer

Joe Nelk was just glad to be healthy and on the football field.

Forget the fact that the William Tennent senior was about 30 pounds over his playing weight. Forget the fact that he was occasionally gasping for breath because his conditioning was not superb. Forget the fact that his North team lost the Bucks County Lions Clubs' All-Star Football Game for the first time since 1974.

"It was one of the first games in a long time that I've played without injuries," said Nelk after the South's 13-12 victory over the North Saturday night at War Memorial Field in Doylestown. "That felt real good. As far as losing the game, I thought we played great as a team, but it felt good for me not to be hurting."

A series of injuries kept Nelk from realizing his potential as a high school player. First, it was a knee problem that limited him to one game as a junior. And then last year, neck and shoulder injuries forced Nelk to miss the middle six games of the season.

But college scouts were interested in him because of his size (6-foot, 4-inches, 240 pounds), his strength and his speed (4.7 seconds in the 40-yard dash). Even though Nelk has played only five games over the last two years, the University of Maryland was eager to offer him a scholarship.

In Saturday night's game, Nelk was matched up for most of the evening against Morrisville's Tim Christ, a 6-7, 267-pound behemoth who is headed for Rutgers University. It was ironic that they would line up across from each other because Nelk and Christ have taken many of their recruiting trips together. Nelk was even hoping that Christ would join him in College Park.

And while William Tennent head coach Mark Collins was not willing to award a decision in Nelk's favor, neither was he about to give Christ the nod. Call it a satisfying draw for Nelk. Nelk made life tough for South quarterback Scott Asman (Bensalem), who played the entire game. Nelk, with 14 tackles by an unofficial count, wound up second on the team behind Central Bucks' West's defensive back Matt Degott.

"The sky can be the limit for him," Collins said of Nelk. "I don't think Joe is even aware of his potential. Believe me, it is enormous."

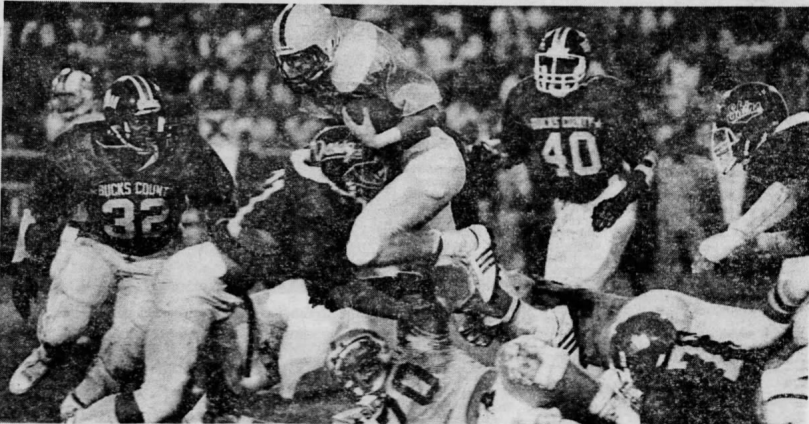
Heading into the second and final week of practice before the all-star game, Collins wasn't even sure how much Nelk would play. A flare-up of some of the physical troubles that hampered Nelk over the last two seasons limited his participation in workouts.

"But over the last four days of practice, I could see he was getting better."



Special to The Inquirer / JOHN SLAVIN

William Tennent's Tom Fistier, playing for the North, listens for advice during the Bucks County Lions Clubs' All-Star Football Game.



North quarterback Cory Nolan of CB West drives for yardage. Nolan scored in the second quarter, but the South won, 13-12.

Collins said. "I could tell he really wanted to play well in the game."

Nelk made his presence felt on South's first possession. He tossed Asman for a 93-yard loss on a third-down play and forced South to punt.

That first series set the tone of the night for Nelk, who teamed up with Pennridge's Joe Lobourack and CB East's Steve Shildt to give the North a potent pass rush.

Nelk accounted for four sacks and 42

yards worth of losses pinned on Asman.

Despite Nelk's superlative play, the South managed to get in the end zone on two occasions. The first was in the opening quarter, when Harry S. Truman's Derrick Williams, who carried the ball 20 times for 109 yards, crashed in from 4 yards out.

The South's second TD occurred in the third quarter, when Williams capped a 66-yard drive with his second

43-yard scoring run of the night.

The North's touchdown came in the first quarter on a 20-yard pass from William Tennent quarterback Kevin Capor to Quakertown wide receiver Rick Steich. CB West quarterback Cory Nolan accounted for the second score with a 2-yard sneak up the middle in the second quarter.

West's Mark Hartnett, who missed the extra point on the first TD, had a chance to pull the game out for North

in the fourth period. But his 41-yard field-goal attempt fell short.

"It was an outstanding game," said Collins. "Both teams were in mid-season form. The intensity was incredible."

And for Nelk, the feeling of playing without pain was the best part of it all.

North	6	6	0	0	—	12
South	7	0	6	0	—	13

N: Steich 20 pass from Capor (kick failed)
S: Williams 4 run (Williams kick)
Nolan 2 run (run failed)
SWilliams 4 run (run failed)