

# Defense doesn't rest for Neshaminy

By KEVIN COONEY

LANGHORNE One glance at the Neshaminy depth chart during the preseason revealed 10 empty slots on the defensive side of the ball.

But while most coaches would see that as a cause of many sleepless nights, Mark Schmidt was able to calmly approach the situation with a clear head.

A lot of those guys that we were bringing in were a part of an undefeated [junior varsity] team last year, said Schmidt, Neshaminy's longtime football coach. Plus, we were able to play so many of these guys late in varsity games during last season. So they may not have had a lot of experience, they had some.

What was once considered a potential weakness has turned into the undisputed strength of the 6-1 Redskins as the Suburban One League's National Conference season hits the homestretch with a Saturday game at Council Rock North (1:30 p.m.).

The Neshaminy defense has allowed only 41 points this season tops among the 70 teams in District One and 12th out of 607 teams in the state. The Redskins' points-against average is 5.9 again, tops in District One and ninth in the state. They posted four straight shutouts before yielding 14 points last week to Council Rock South. They have only surrendered points in five of 28 quarters this season.

Not bad for a unit that had a lot of question marks in the eyes of many experts coming into the season.

I think we all believed that we would have a good defense right from the start of the season, said senior defensive back Matt Knorr. We felt good working together in all of the camps over the summer. And now, we have a really tight unit that works well with one another.

Perhaps most impressively, the Redskins have allowed no points in the second half during the first seven games of the season. After shaky first

halves against Souderton in the opener and at Hatboro-Horsham in Week 2, Neshaminy has been tough to crack.

I think that you look at the way our team reacts, and a lot of that credit has to go to our coaches who are getting them in the right spots, Schmidt said. Plus, these kids are responsive. They are very willing to sit there and listen to what we say and put that plan out there into action.

We've made the adjustments during the game that our coaches wanted us to, said senior middle linebacker Justin Donnarumma. That's a big part of the game. You have to look at what an offense is presenting to you and react in order to get the job done.

For most of this decade, it was the Neshaminy offense that seemed to carry the load and the Redskins into the District One Class AAAA playoffs.

But as the offense has struggled at some points during the season, it has been the defense that has come through and kept the Redskins in the win column.

I think we have a lot of guys who are good at the fundamentals and really like to hit, Schmidt said. We have a very physical defensive unit, and they get to the ball quickly. I think that's helped us draw more turnovers this season.

As the season hits the homestretch, Neshaminy has a lot in front of it. For starters, the Redskins control their own destiny in their race with Pennsbury for the National Conference title, with a head-to-head game against the Falcons still remaining on Halloween night. A league title would also likely mean a high seed in the District One tournament.

We can't worry about that, Knorr said. We have to play our best football down the stretch here because we face three pretty good teams (CR North, Bensalem and Pennsbury). At this point, you really can't look any further than one game at a time.

**Kevin Cooney can be reached at [kcooney@phillyburbs.com](mailto:kcooney@phillyburbs.com).**

October 17, 2008 7:12 AM

<http://www.phillyburbs.com/pb-dyn/news/108-10172008-1606906.html>