

North Penn's speed versus Neshaminy's power in District One championship

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WARMINSTER Its being billed as the classic matchup the big, strong power-running team vs. the smaller speed team.

Power against finesse, for the biggest stakes possible the District One Class AAAA championship.

But while that's how observers are looking at Friday nights showdown (7 p.m. on the turf at William Tennent High School) between unbeaten and top-seeded North Penn (13-0) and third-seeded Neshaminy (12-1), that's not necessarily how the principals view it.

They're not that small, said Neshaminy head coach Mark Schmidt, chuckling at the buildup that portrays the Redskins as the big, bad guys trying to squash the quick, but tiny Knights. Their guys might be 250 (pounds) and we might be 260.

But it's not like the'yre little guys.

Big or small, fast or slow, Schmidt has seen what most coaches opposing North Penn have observed.

They're terrific, said Schmidt, whose Neshaminy teams were district champions in 2001 and 2004 and reached the district semis a year ago. They're as advertised.

You know if you're going to have a good run in districts you're going to end up playing them.

But if Schmidt is shaking his head over meeting the Knights, North Penn head coach Dick Beck isn't doing handsprings over the prospect of playing Neshaminy, the team that took the Knights out of district play via a 35-0 score last year.

They're big, they're strong and they're tough, Beck said of the Skins. They have guys who can run the ball and a much-improved quarterback on offense and a defense that doesn't give up many points.

As for the size vs. speed talk, it's not altogether untrue.

Neshaminy has an oversized offensive line and two backs, Bryan Dean (1,051 rushing yards) and Quilan Arnold (1,087) who know what to do with the openings it creates.

The Redskins quarterback, Brian Titus, is not the resourceful playmaker Neshaminy teams have had in the recent past. But he has improved by the week, and had, perhaps, his best game last weekend when the Skins rallied from two scores down to top Garnet Valley.

He's doing a good job making decisions and running the offense, Schmidt said of his signal-caller. He did a lot of nice things last week, and he made good choices on not only where to put the ball but where not to put it.

We're hoping he keeps that up.

Beck said Titus is improving, and that the Knights must also be aware of receiver Rick Brebner (33 catches, 395 yds.) and Rutgers-bound tight end Paul Carrezola.

But the Knights head man is most concerned about both his opponents size and third-down situations.

We're not big, defensively, Beck said. We have to play leverage, get off blocks and have our linebackers flow to the ball.

What we failed to do against them last year was get off the field on third down. If we don't do that this time, were in for a long night.

When I see North Penn's defense, I think, fast, Schmidt said. Their defense is very fast, they don't like to stay blocked and they run to the ball very well.

And their strength is their secondary. There are no soft spots.

When North Penn is on offense, expect to see a lot of running back Tyler Smith (148 carries, 1,453 yds., 17 TDs) and playmaker Ronnie Akins (809 rush yds., 806 receiving yds.) as the Knights try to offset their size disadvantage.

We have to score and score often, Beck said. We're going to try and get it to our guys who make plays and see what they can do.

North Penn has a lot of guys who can hurt you, Schmidt said, and they're offensive line is much improved. When you get talented guys playing with confidence, you can really get on a roll.

The roll has been a season-long excursion for the Knights. The Redskins were stunned in Week One, 14-13, by Souderton, but have rolled since then, fashioning four shutouts while allowing just eight points per game.

Our club has really grown, Schmidt said. That loss to Souderton might have been the best thing to happen to us. Our guys have been moving in the right direction since that game.

They want to keep improving and they want to keep playing.

To do so the Redskins will have to win what folks are calling a classic match-up.

We're going to have to play our best game to beat these guys, Schmidt said. People are expecting a great game, and I hope we don't let anyone down.

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