

Panthers surprise Redskins but not enough for upset

By Joe Ferry
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On paper, it figured to be a blow-out.

There was undefeated Neshaminy, trying to keep pace with Central Bucks West in the race for the Suburban One National Conference Patriot Division title, hoping for a berth in the state playoffs, playing in front of a large, enthusiastic home crowd Friday night.

And then there was William Tennent, coming off a loss to Bensalem the previous week, trying to ignore the woes of a season that had erased the optimism of early September.

It figured to be a breeze for Neshaminy, simply a tuneup in preparation for next week's showdown with Pennsbury. But someone forgot to tell the Panthers to roll over and die, just play out the season. And Tennent played one of its best games of the season, one that had many observers in the press box shaking their heads in amazement, before finally dropping a 14-0 decision.

Neshaminy 14 William Tennent 0

Afterward, it was Tennent head coach Mark Collins who was shaking his head in wonder.

"I'm damn proud of my kids," said a shivering Collins, who wore only a light sweater during the chilly evening. "We played hard. They have nothing to be ashamed of."

Indeed, it was the kind of game Collins hopes he will be able to point to down the road as the turning point of Tennent's program. The Panthers slugged it out with one of the best teams around and came up short.

After Neshaminy (8-0 league, 9-0 overall) scored on its first possession of the game, a 7-yard run by running back Rob Latronica, with Brian Moser adding the extra point, Tennent (2-5, 3-6-1) played on even terms until midway through the final quar-

ter. But by then, the Panthers were flat-out tired.

"The kids played their best, and that's all we can ask of them," Collins said. "We were beaten by a better team tonight. But they know that Tennent came to play."

And with a little luck, Tennent might have pulled off the upset of the season. The Panthers squandered one scoring opportunity late in the first half on a fumble inside the Redskins 5-yard line and missed another chance to score when a bad snap prevented Brian Welsh from getting a chance to try a 42-yard field goal early in the third quarter.

The misfortune wasn't just limited to offense. Twice, Neshaminy quarterback Dan McClave completed passes in crucial situations that were tipped by Tennent defenders. Another time, lineman Eric Brown appeared to strip the ball from Latronica and was on his way to the end zone when the officials ruled the play was over before the strip.

"We had our chances," Collins said.

"We just didn't convert them. I thought we moved the ball well on offense. But we didn't have any success putting points on the scoreboard."

The Panthers' best chance to score came early in the second quarter with the Redskins ahead, 7-0. Sophomore quarterback Bob Rosenberger (8 of 17 for 96 yards), who played a strong game in his third start of the season, engineered a 14-play drive that moved Tennent to the Neshaminy 20-yard line.

On third down, Rosenberger connected with tight end Jim King at the 5. King was one step from the end zone and a game-tying touchdown when he was hit and fumbled the ball into the end zone. The ball went out of bounds, and the officials ruled a touchback.

The Panthers had another chance to score early in the second half. This time, Tennent drove to the Neshaminy 17 in 6 plays, with senior running back Bernie Jones gaining 51 yards on 3 carries.

But Neshaminy defensive end Artie James threw Jones for losses of 3 and 8 yards, forcing the Panthers to try a field goal. Moser was set to kick from the 32, well within his range. But a bad snap prevented him from getting the kick off.

"I don't know what happened," Collins said. "I haven't talked to the center yet. But someone said the nose of the ball was stuck in the ground."

Neshaminy finally got some breathing room when James Franklin, the other half of the Redskins' successful quarterback tandem (Dan McClave, who played the first half) hit split end Joe Ramos with a 4-yard touchdown pass with 9:41 left to play.

"I don't know if we can ask more of our kids than they gave tonight," Collins said. "I wish I could give them a better record, because that's what they deserve."

William Tennent	0	0	0	0	—	0
Neshaminy	7	0	0	7	—	14

NE: Latronica 7 run (Moser kick)

NE: Ramos 4 pass from Franklin (Moser kick)