

FOOTBALL

Redskins steal game from Ghosts

By Nick Flerro
Sports Writer

Last week, many observers thought, Abington stole a football game that its opponent should have won.

Friday at Neshaminy's Harry E. Franks Stadium, the situation was reversed as the Ghosts displayed superiority over Neshaminy in every facet of the game except the score in dropping a 35-27 heart-breaker to what has to be one of the state's finest teams.

The Ghosts amassed 345 yards of total offense, which did not even include an 86-yard kickoff return for a touchdown by Jason Hughes to open the second half, and ran off 21 first downs to Neshaminy.

They dominated play — both offensively and defensively — on the line of scrimmage. The offensive line consistently opened up tremendous holes for junior running back Shawn Wooden (25 rushes for 161 yards) and gave quarterback Tinker Harris enough time to complete seven of 16 passes for 106 yards. The defense, with the exception of three costly plays, frustrated the Redskins' offensive attack.

They even had a chance to take the lead after scoring a touchdown to come within 28-27 with 7:56 left in the game, but their two-point conversion failed.

It was just that the defensive self-destruction, plus two breakdowns on special teams, was enough to cost Abington the game against a strong Neshaminy team that is looking ahead to next week's showdown with Central Bucks West in Doylestown.

"Both teams played hard," said a depressed Doug Moister, Abington's head coach. "I was disappointed in the loss, but I wasn't disappointed in the effort."

Indeed, Abington showed more mettle than it did in rallying to win last week's game, 15-14, over new rival Bishop McDevitt.

Even Neshaminy coach John Chaump was impressed.

"You can't stop Abington's offense," he said. "They have a 'truck' offense and they're going to plow right through you. ... What (we) try to do is don't give them the big play and have them go three or four yards at a time and pile it up slow."

Neshaminy took the opening kickoff and threw six straight passes, the last of which went for a 35-yard touchdown to speedy Jonathan Hall, who beat Harris on a down-and-out play.

The matchup between Hall and Harris was perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Friday's thriller. Despite being burned on the first series, Abington called for Harris to cover Hall man-to-man for most



Abington quarterback Tinker Harris looks downfield while Neshaminy's Charles Spence applies pressure.
(Calkins Newspapers photo by Art Gentile)

of the game. Harris responded with an outstanding effort, made all the more remarkable considering his double-duty at quarterback.

But Harris was inexplicably left alone to cover Hall on a third-down play from the Abington 49 with 10 seconds left in the first half. Neshaminy quarterback James Franklin then took advantage of the situation by connecting with Hall, who was streaking along the left sideline, for a spectacular

touchdown with four seconds left.

The play, coupled with the extra point, gave Neshaminy a 14-7 lead just five minutes after Abington had appeared to turn the momentum its way with a five-play touchdown drive to tie it. The score was set up by a 44-yard pass from Harris to Jason Hughes. Four plays later, Steve Gaskins fumbled at the goal line and Wooden fell on it in the end zone for a touchdown.

But Hughes helped Abington tie it again when he returned the second-half kickoff for a touchdown — just as he did last week against McDevitt. Neshaminy avoided Hughes thereafter with short kick-offs.

Hughes, who also played safety on defense, was Abington's biggest standout performer. In addition to his kickoff return, he caught three passes for 71 yards.

Neshaminy came right back on its first play from scrimmage (after Ray Wheaton returned the ensuing kickoff 31 yards to the Neshaminy 45-yard line) and scored on a pitch that Rob Latronica took around the right end for 55 yards with 10:56 remaining.

Then, after stopping Abington at the Ghosts' 42, a high snap eluded punter Charlie Fitzgerald, who fielded the ball but was tackled at the Abington 15.

Two plays later, Latronica scored on a 2-yard run to put the Redskins up by two touchdowns.

Seemingly unaffected, the Ghosts responded with an 11-play, 74-yard touchdown drive, culminated by a 9-yard pass to Hughes on a quick slant-in.

Then their defense, which limited Neshaminy to 48 total yards after Latronica's third-quarter TD, forced Neshaminy to punt, setting up another long scoring drive to eat up the first four minutes of the fourth quarter.

Abington scored on an 18-yard run by Wooden with 7:56 to go, but botched the option play for the 2-point conversion that would have given it the lead.

The most crushing blow to Abington's chances was delivered by Jason Hillaert, who blocked a Fitzgerald punt to set the Redskins up at the Abington 28 with 5:26 to go. It helped set up the game's final score — a 2-yard run by Franklin with 2:37 remaining.

Abington may have been able to come back in that time, but the Ghosts weren't able to provide a wall for Hughes as he took a lateral from Wooden after another short kickoff and he was caught at the 3.

The Ghosts were able to drive to the Neshaminy 40 before time expired.

"This football team will come back next week," Moister promised. "This was a non-league game and now we'll be ready to start our league season."

After Friday's game, it would be safe to predict that quite a few teams in the Colonial Division will pay the price for the victory that was stolen from the Ghosts.

Said Chaump: "That team is going to win a lot of football games."