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Central Bucks East's Shane O'Hara looks for an opening against Neshaminy. East's stifling defense in the second half helped secure a 21-7 victory for the Patriots on Friday night.

Fumble return sets tone as East bests Neshaminy

By Rich Fisher

INQUIRER SUBURBAN STAFF

DOYLESTOWN — It may be too early to term Mark Hughes' fumble return for a touchdown a defining moment in Central Bucks East's football season, but there is no doubt it was the big play in the Patriots' important early-season victory over Neshaminy on Friday night.

When the junior cornerback picked up the loose ball and ran 16 yards to pay dirt, it gave C.B. East a seven-point lead with 42 seconds remaining in the first half and set the tone for the rest of the game.

East's defense took it from there, limiting Neshaminy to no first downs and minus 20 yards of offense in the second half. The result was a 21-7 victory in the Suburban One League National Conference opener for both teams at War Memorial Field.

In a game that set an early tone for how the conference race and playoff picture may shape up, Central Bucks East (2-0) avenged last year's 32-0 loss to Neshaminy (1-1) and extended its two-season winning streak to five. The Redskins' streak was snapped at five.

"I hope we have a few more big plays this season besides that one," Patriots coach Larry Greene said, referring to Hughes' touchdown. "But I think that play gave us a springboard into the second half. It gave us confidence. We really came out and started to play defense."

The game belonged to C.B. East's defense, right down to the winning touchdown.

The score was tied, 7-7, thanks to a 41-yard touchdown run by East's Bryan Tingle in the first quarter and a 2-yard run by Neshaminy's Jamar Brittingham in the second. After an Austin Jones interception in the end zone stopped a Patriots drive, Neshaminy took over at the 20-yard line with 1 minute, 11 seconds remaining in the half.

Brittingham gained 14 yards on first down and, rather than run out the clock, Redskins

coach Mark Schmidt called for a screen pass. Jeff McDonough's pass was slightly behind Brittingham, who was crushed by Bobby Bense the moment he caught the ball. The play froze for a moment before Hughes grabbed the ball, which was ruled a fumble, at the 16 and raced into the end zone to make it 14-7.

"We knew the screen was coming, and we were prepared for it," Hughes said. "Bobby made a great heads-up play, and I just picked it up and ran it in. When I saw it pop out, I didn't know if I should pick it up. Then I just went after it and, well ..."

Said Schmidt: "That was a look that Larry had prepared for. In the heat of battle, we made a decision, and it wasn't the right one. I'd like to take that call back.

"When you roller-coaster as far as your progress goes, you start guessing a little bit, trying to make something work. I'm not big on guessing too much. They just lined up and said, 'Here, beat us.' They played well, and we didn't."

Neshaminy's defense was respectable, holding East to 243 yards. Tingle managed 163 yards and two touchdowns, including the clincher with 5:01 remaining. The senior tailback already has rushed for 411 yards this season.

Conversely, Brittingham was pretty much shut out after the first half. The junior exploded for 287 yards against Father Judge last week and had 100 in the first half against C.B. East. However, he gained just 3 second-half yards against East's front eight, which featured linemen Bense, Todd Bagnall, Bob Graham and Pat Sheerin and linebackers Drew Borstein, Mike Szop, Bobby Hulmes and Toby Long.

"Whenever somebody racks up yards like that kid did last week, we want to see how good we are, and we want to challenge ourselves," Sheerin said. "You have to shut him down or you're not going to have a good game."

Greene said East made a slight adjustment to counter Neshaminy's end-over formation, which proved effective. The Patriots sacked McDonough three times for minus 21 yards after intermission; Greene credited assistants Bill Heller and John Calpin for working with the ends to gain outside pressure.

Neshaminy's best chance to score in the half came on a recovered fumble at the C.B. East 34. The Redskins lost 8 yards and punted, though. The East defensive surge atoned for last week's second-half collapse, when the Patriots allowed 28 points and had to hang on for the victory.

"We were terrible in the second half against Pennridge," Greene said. "Tonight was good, good, good defense in the second half. Solid, sound, tough and hard-nosed. We were getting aggressive, not afraid to make a mistake, and excited about making a play."

Sheerin said thoughts of Pennridge's second-half explosion helped the Patriots bear down against the Redskins. He also acknowledged that last year's loss played a factor.

"We've wanted Neshaminy forever," he said. "We've been thinking about revenge for an entire year now, after the way they beat us."

They will get another chance for revenge Friday night at William Tennent, which came from behind last year to defeat the Patriots.

"That game really sent us into a tailspin," Greene said. "What I've learned about the Power 10 is: Don't look ahead, don't look back. Look at who you're playing. Enjoy this win, but get on with it and respect everybody. In this league, if you're thinking about how well you played last week, you're going to get beat."

Neshaminy	0	7	0	0	-	7
Central Bucks East	7	7	0	7	-	21
CBE: Tingle 41 run (Wilbourne kick)						
N: Brittingham 2 run (Malen kick)						
CBE: Hughes 16 return with fumble (Wilbourne kick)						
CBE: Tingle 12 run (Wilbourne kick)						

Rich Fisher's e-mail address is rfisher@phillynews.com